



Since 2007 Beth Terry of Oakland, Calif., has been eliminating plastic from her life. This is all she collected the first year of her quest.

She wants to say 2 words: No plastics

Beth Terry has been making homemade mustard.

Not because it tastes better — although maybe it does.

She didn't want to buy it anymore because she could find her favorite kind only in plastic jars.

For nearly two years, she has been trying to rid her life of plastic.

OK, not the computer monitor and the telephone, although she's trying to be a more conscious consumer in those areas as well. But certainly *disposable* plastic.

She switched from liquid soap — another
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GreenSpace By Sandy Bauers

Calif. woman has 2 words — no plastics

GREENSPACE from D1
plastic container! — to bar.

She has reluctantly given up pita bread, which comes only in plastic, and reuses envelopes with plastic windows that arrive in her mail.

A whole lot has changed since June 2007, when Terry decided there was enough plastic in the world, and she didn't want to add any more.

The 44-year-old accountant from Oakland, Calif., felt sick and was home that day, idly browsing the Internet.

She came across an article detailing a Texas-sized flotilla of plastic trash in an area of the Pacific Ocean known as the gyre, now dubbed the Eastern Garbage Patch.

Here, where currents converge, more than a million items per square kilometer bob at the surface.

There's more plastic than plankton. As it breaks down, it absorbs pollutants. And then fish eat it.

Terry was aghast. "Out there in the middle of nowhere were all these things I use on a daily basis," she said.

Worse yet, what if some of them actually *were* hers?

The more she looked into plastic, the less she liked it. Plastic is made from fossil fuels.

She worried about chemicals leaching into her food from containers.

Even if she recycled, could she be sure of the recycling company?

Plastic remains fiendishly ubiquitous, permeating our lives. In the first hour of most mornings, I encounter it more than a dozen times — in my toothbrush, water glass, shower curtain, shampoo bottle, yogurt container.

In 2007, the nation, along with some contributions from Mexico and Canada, produced nearly 116 billion pounds of plastic. About 33 percent was packaging.

That same year, about 62 billion pounds entered the municipal waste stream, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. That works out to just over 200 pounds for every man, woman and child in the United States. It amounted to 12 percent of the waste stream, up from 1 percent in 1960.

Terry's first two steps, the ones she calls the most significant, were to switch to refillable water bottles and reusable grocery bags.

Alas, no more "cute little plastic containers" for frozen foods, either.

Then she began whittling away at the rest. When she goes to a restaurant, she takes along a container

for leftovers. She carries around a glass straw and reusable eating utensils.

The hardest part was giving up cheese. She could get it sliced at the deli counter, but she wanted local, organic cheese that was always wrapped in plastic.

Drawing a line in the sand, she said, has forced her "to be mindful of everything, of all the materials in your life."

She took her quest to the blogosphere, posting chatty updates, photos, and a chart of her declining usage at www.fakeplasticfish.com.

She expected some unvarnished criticism. Like maybe that she was nuts. Or overly obsessive. But it never happened, she says. She thinks it's because she's not telling anyone what to do; she's just showing a possibility.

Truth to tell, Terry has had to

make some compromises. As when she wanted energy-saving LED nightlights, except they came in plastic. (She got the lights.)

And for restaurant ingredients that may or may not come in plastic, she has a "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

She has concluded it's impossible to entirely rid her life of plastic. But she says she's going to keep at it.

Not long ago, in the 31st week of the second year of her campaign, she had but three items to fess up to: the plastic stickers with tag hangers from some cotton pants she'd just bought.

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