



# BACK-TO-SCHOOL SUPPLIES: A ZERO WASTE GUIDE

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Fall is an exciting and busy time as parents, teachers, and children prepare for a new school year. Back-to-school is a great time to gather school items that promote environmental sustainability and save you money each year. Working together to incorporate zero waste can be simple and fun too. Start your school year off right with these zero waste back-to-school tips!



## REUSING SUPPLIES

### Home

Shop at home first and reuse or refurbish items from previous years. Identify which clothing and school supplies are still in good condition for reuse. Consider avoiding purchasing new versions of these items until your child has worn down ones they already own.

- Some commonly reused school supplies may include binders, backpacks, notebooks, scissors, pencil pouches, and rulers.
- Used items can be easily [refurbished](#) through simple steps such as tearing out used paper in notebooks, taping over small tears in folders or binders, or sewing work on backpacks or clothing.
- Blogs and websites like Pinterest have many DIY craft ideas for refurbishing and decorating old school supplies.

### Friends, family, neighbors

Ask friends, family, or neighbors if they have any extra or lightly used school supplies and clothing that they do not need. This will help your child acquire their necessary supplies while helping other families clear out clutter. Consider scheduling an annual clothing or supplies swap where families bring items that they do not plan on reusing. Finish the event by donating any unswapped items.

### Thrift stores

Thrift stores can be a great source for new clothes, often selling name brands at a small fraction of retail prices. Many thrift stores also have an office supply section where lightly used school supplies can be found. If in the Chicagoland area, visit [The Waste Shed](#) or the [Creative Reuse Warehouse](#) to shop for used school supplies.

## BUYING NEW SUPPLIES

### Reduce non-recyclables

**Less plastic:** When you must purchase new products, choose products that are durable and can be recycled once they have been worn down, such as:

- Metal rulers
- Metal pencil sharpeners
- Metal safety scissors
- Non-plastic folders
- Binders made with paper- or plant-based materials
- Spiral notebooks without plastic covers or folders



**Bulk products:** Purchase items in bulk to reduce the amount of packaging required for each item. Buying in bulk is not only more environmentally sustainable, it can also save money.

### Use durable, long-lasting products

Purchase durable products that you expect to last several years, and handle these items with care. Items that could be reused over multiple years include backpacks, pencil pouches, rulers, pencil sharpeners, scissors, paper clips, mechanical pencils, locker accessories, and calculators. When initially purchasing these products, consider buying classic or simple designs that children are less likely to outgrow.



### Support eco-friendly production

Gather items that are produced in a sustainable way such as school supplies that are:

- Sourced from recycled material (look for the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content)
- Made with non-toxic and non-hazardous material such as [PVC-free products](#)
- Packaged in material that is recyclable or reusable
- Labeled with sustainability seals or certifications such as the [Forest Stewardship Council](#) seal on paper and pencils

Most standard retailers will highlight their eco-friendly products on the product tag or their website. Another option might be to purchase a pre-bundled sustainable school supply kits, which are offered by some online retailers such as [Green ABCs](#), [Wisdom Supply](#), or [Guided](#).

## ZERO WASTE LUNCH SUPPLIES

Save money and make less garbage by packing a zero waste lunch from home. Instead of buying disposable products that get used only once, pack a zero waste lunch with washable food and drink containers, utensils, and cloth napkins. Buying food in bulk and portioning it into your own containers also typically costs less than buying food in single-serve packaging. Visit [www.wastefreelunches.org](http://www.wastefreelunches.org) to learn more.



## BE SUSTAINABLE AS A TEACHER

If you are a teacher, it can be easy and cheaper to promote sustainability through your school supplies decisions.

**Supplies list:** Discuss with co-workers and administrators the idea of creating a school supplies list that promotes reuse, durability, and sustainability. A sustainable list might include items that are easy to reuse or recycle, as well as a note on sustainability.

**Classroom supplies:** When gathering supplies for your own classroom, keep in mind the places you might find used or recyclable supplies. Consider visiting organizations such as [SCARCE](http://www.scarce.org), which allows teachers and administrators to access donated school supplies. If in the Chicagoland area, visit [The Waste Shed](http://www.thewasteshed.org) or the [Creative Reuse Warehouse](http://www.creativereusewarehouse.org) to shop for used school supplies.



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SHARE YOUR SUCCESS STORIES, CONTACT US AT: [ZEROWASTE@SEVENGENERATIONS-AHEAD.ORG](mailto:ZEROWASTE@SEVENGENERATIONS-AHEAD.ORG)