

Green Team Questions of the Week

From the Parents Nursery School Green Team, 2012-2016

This document comprises all the Green Team Questions of the Week over the course of several years at PNS (and Ohlone). Where possible, I've tried to update them to reflect the current state of affairs. Please feel free to share these questions and answers with the larger community!

- rani (pj20@cornell.edu)

To help make things a little clearer, to help us build community, and to help us all help the planet, we'll be bringing you a single question (and answer) on a roughly weekly basis. We'll cover different topics, but if you have a burning question, please feel free to ask!

As always, if you'd like to participate in a green team, have a question, or just want to chat about all things eco-friendly, just email me.

The PNS Green Team

Q: Which bin should I put this in?

A: First, decide what kind of material the thing is - plastic? paper? glass? metal? food? Then, take a moment to look at the tops of the bins - they should be labeled with a sticker that tells you what goes where. In general, all sorts of plastic (toys! bags! glitter! water bottles!), cardboard, glass, metal/aluminum foil, and clean paper go in the blue recycling bin. Food (leftovers, pasta-art), paper towels, paper napkins, milk cartons, yard waste (leaves) and paper plates/cups go in the green compost bin. In the trash bins we should only have shiny foil (like potato chip bags and tops of yogurt cups), styrofoam, and miscellaneous things (pom-poms). If you have a tea bag, fruit/veggies, or coffee grinds, you can put them in the green bin on the kitchen counter or take them to the back compost pile where it says "Snack compost here" Back there is a separate metal bin where you can put the guinea waste and chicken waste. Diapers should always go straight to the dumpster. If you're confused, please ask someone, check the posted lists outside the kitchen, or send an email.

Please consider alternatives to (or ways to reuse) the things we trash - it costs the school money and fills up a landfill. Thanks for doing your part!

Here's a guide that may help:

cardboard - BLUE BIN

coffee grounds - Snack Compost

eggshells - Snack Compost
foil – BLUE BIN
food (prepared) - GREEN BIN
fruit - Snack Compost
glass - BLUE BIN
glitter - BLUE BIN
juice boxes/pouches - TRASH
kleenex - GREEN BIN
leaves - GREEN BIN
leftovers - GREEN BIN
milk - down the drain
milk cartons - GREEN BIN
miscellaneous - TRASH (or find a way to reuse it!)
napkins - GREEN BIN
paper cups - GREEN BIN
paper plates - GREEN BIN
paper towels - GREEN BIN
parchment/wax paper – GREEN BIN
pasta art - GREEN BIN
peels and rinds (vegetable, fruit) – Snack compost
plastic snack/Ziploc bags - BLUE BIN
plastic containers/tupperware - BLUE BIN
plastic utensils – BLUE BIN
plastic utensils that say "compostable" - GREEN BIN
plastic wrap - BLUE BIN
pom-poms - TRASH
seeds (watermelon, fruit, other) – Snack compost
shiny foil wrappers (not aluminum foil) - TRASH
straws – BLUE BIN
styrofoam - TRASH
tanbark - back on the soil
teabags - Snack Compost
tinfoil - BLUE BIN
toy (plastic) - BLUE BIN
toy (wooden) – GREEN BIN
Toy (soft) – TRASH (or freecycle.org!)
veggies - Snack Compost
water bottles - BLUE BIN
yogurt container – BLUE BIN
yogurt foil cover - TRASH

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Q: What is that shelf opposite the children's bathroom in the front classroom?

A: The second shelf down on the bookshelf near the bathrooms in Teacher Amy/Heidi's

class is our very own Green Shelf!

Here you can 'check out' eco-friendly reading material for your kids or family - just take a book and return it. There are also Lorax-themed coloring books and brochures from the City of Palo Alto - yours to keep.

If you have or know of a book that would be good to include, please email me.

Thank you from the Green Team!

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Ten Questions (was in the PNS Newsletter, December 2012)

Q: Which bin should I put this in?

A: There are now little guides above the bins outside the kitchen and the front door bins. Take a moment to find the thing you're wanting to throw away - food will say Green bin, plastic bag will say Blue bin, etc. When in doubt, ask. If you're still not sure, put it in the garbage.

Q: What can I use to clean up?

A: When wiping off tables, favor a sponge or a wet rag to clean up (the kids love doing this). Use paper towels for particularly gooey messes and when there's too much glitter. This will help save us money as well as trees.

Q: Why is there bath towel near the sink?

A: We can help conserve on paper towels by offering the kids a bath towel to dry their hands (only if you've also supervised them soaping up). They may choose a paper towel, which is fine of course, but please encourage them to help the earth by taking just one.

Q: What should I do with my lunch trash?

A: Whenever possible, take your lunch trash home. This helps free up valuable space in our compost/trash/recycling bins. There are lots of options for reusable containers that will help generate less trash, please look around at lunchtime or ask your fellow parents!

Q: What can I use instead of sugar?

A: Sugar is delicious, but it takes a lot of energy to refine and get shipped all the way to us. Look for fair-trade sugar (usually more ecologically grown). Organic means it was grown without pesticides, and raw means it wasn't refined or bleached. You can use varieties of sugar that are less processed like sucanat, rapadura, turbinado, molasses, or try good old maple syrup (Canada or Vermont, and from trees), agave (Mexico, from cacti), or honey (local, from bees).

Q: How can I help save on supplies?

A: You can help PNS save money and materials by pouring glitter into smaller shakers, using each classroom's scrap paper bin for projects, and remembering to use both sides of paper before throwing it out. We are all role models!

Q: What's the garden for?

A: The garden is a place we can enjoy and learn about the world around us - plant things, find ladybugs, smell basil for pizza, gather some kale for chips, learn colors from flowers, and more. We also see how things come full circle - the food we eat goes into the compost bins, where bugs turn them into compost, which is then used to make our garden beds, where we grow more food and flowers all by ourselves.

Q: How can I recycle X?

You can recycle a lot of things that don't go in the recycling bin. First start by seeing if it can be reused - many other PNS families might be able to reuse it, so you can post it on the unofficial list. Someone might also be able to repair it - often fixing a shoe is a lot cheaper than buying a new one. Finally, recycle it by posting it to Craigslist, Freecycle, or another local list. Even torn clothes can often go to Goodwill. The City of Palo Alto has a great website Recyclopedia:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pwd/zerowaste/whatgoeswhere/recyclopedia.asp>

Q: How do I cut down on paper at home?

Opt out of junk mail by calling the senders to say you want to get off their lists and not share your info with third parties. You can also sign up for DMAchoice.org, Directmail.com, GreenDime.com or a similar service to be removed from marketers' lists.

If you'd like to stop receiving the Yellow Pages, go to <https://www.yellowpagesoptout.com/>, click on "opt-out" and follow the instructions. Instead of receiving a phone book each year, they'll leave you a door hanger reminding you that you have opted out.

Q: What else can I do to help my family go green?

Start with the easy stuff - try to use less of what you already use (water, gasoline, electricity, packaging). Read about simple things you and your kids can do from books on the Green Shelf (located opposite the bathrooms). Get out in nature so that everyone appreciates this wonderful planet we have!

Q: How can I help save trees?

Use less paper! Opt for a reusable towel instead of paper towels, or use just one. Use cloth napkins instead of paper ones, and handkerchiefs instead of tissues (except at school!). Write on the backs of used paper instead of reaching for a new sheet. Every little bit helps.

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Q: What's the deal with plastic? Is it safe?

A: Plastic, along with mysterious terms like BPA and numbers, have been in the news lately. Plastic is a generic term for a man-made group of chemicals that have been processed to make things we use everyday - bottles, refrigerators, computers, medical equipment. While plastic is now essential for the kind of modern life we lead, we can take steps to protect ourselves from its potential dangers, particularly for children.

Numbers for plastic indicate the material they are made from, and can usually be found on the bottom inside a triangular recycling sign.

BPA, or bisphenol A, is one chemical that is linked to several childhood and chronic diseases, and which is known to leach from plastic, especially ones that have the number 1 and 7. Styrofoam plastic is not recyclable and is #6.

Lead is another possible and dangerous contaminant, especially in used toys and internationally made ones. Chemicals called phthalates are found in #3 plastic. These leaching issues hold true especially for plastic that holds food, wet/liquids, and acidic foods, and toys that may end up in someone's mouth!

Plastic is also made from petroleum, which is a fossil fuel, which means it contributes to pollution and global warming. To avoid these and other problems, you can test your plastic for lead, look for numbers 2, 4, 5 or certified BPA-free plastic, avoid 1, 3, and 7 plastics, and buy American. Avoid microwaving food in plastic, and don't let your kids chew on it to limit exposure. For alternatives to plastic, try glass and stainless steel, foil, wax/parchment paper (look for plastic free ones), ceramic, card/paperboard, paper towels, and real cellophane.

Thank you for helping make our school, and world, greener.

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Q: How can I help reuse/recycle for the holidays?

A: Many people already have plans and have sent cards and wrapped gifts by this time. If you haven't yet, consider using materials with recycled content, whether new or just pretty newspaper, magazines, ribbon pulled from old videos, or kids' artwork for wrapping. Cards can also be reused by cutting off the front or gluing in a blank piece of paper inside.

If you have already done your holiday prep, save trees the next time by saving and reusing wrapping paper and ribbon, garlands, boxes, and other decor and wrapping supplies. You can use biodegradable alternatives like popcorn garlands, popcorn instead of Styrofoam peanuts, pinecones and found or edible objects to decorate a tree, and cotton twine or raffia.

Find more ways to be creative here:

<http://www.seventhgeneration.com/gif-guide>

<http://www.redtri.com/kids/diy-holiday-gifts>

Please consider our planet for the holidays, and you'll prove that reducing can help create abundance and joy.

Happy holidays from the Green Team!

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Green Team Question of the Year

Q: If I were going to make one resolution for the planet for the new year, what could it be?

A: Consider something simple to offset holiday lavishness - buy carbon offsets to plant trees for each mile you traveled by plane or car, donate to a worthy environmental cause, clean out and donate items you no longer use or need, or help support someone in your own community. When we build on our own local communities, we use less energy importing stuff and services from elsewhere, a win-win for everyone.

Happy New Year!

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Q: How can I stay warm and save energy?

A: Cutting down on energy at home saves you money, too, and helps us reduce our dependence on fossil fuels like coal and gas.

Simple steps like wearing a sweater and socks will help, and if you can slowly set your thermostat a few degrees lower, you'll save more. Turning down a thermostat by 1 degree C saves 300kg of CO₂ from going in the atmosphere (CO₂ is one of the gases that contributes to global warming).

Save further by using a programmable thermostat, opening your curtains during the day to let the sun in and closing them before dark, and weatherstripping around doors and windows (or use a draft dodger). You can also call your utility company to ask for renewable energy. In Palo Alto 100% renewable energy from PA Green costs just a few dollars more per month.

Thanks for saving - stay warm!

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Q: I'm looking for local produce. Where can I go?

A: Lots of places! Local produce is great because it saves on gas miles, supports our local economy, and you can more easily find out just what went into it (like pesticides or chemical fertilizers).

At the grocery store, look for signs that say "Locally grown" or "California Grown" ("Farm fresh" can be misleading), and check the sticker to see if it says California. If there's no info, ask - you have a right to know where your food comes from. While you're at it, ask the store to stock more local options. Locally, Whole Foods, Piazza's, Country Sun, Mollie Stone, Milk Pail, and Sprouts often label their local produce, but don't discount the others - keep asking.

A farmer's market is a great option, too. If you're at a farmer's market, most things are local, but some produce might come from as far away as San Diego. Ask the farmer - they're usually eager to let you know details on where they are, how they grow it, and how to prepare it, too. (There is a year-round farmer's market on California Avenue Sunday mornings, and May-Nov on Gilman downtown)

A good option is a garden share. There's one each month in Palo Alto and Sunnyvale, but you can start sharing food with neighbors who have gardens or fruit trees.

Finally, if you want to go really local, you can grow your own! Check out our PNS

garden, the Green shelf, and ask the Gardening team if you need help getting started.
Have a Happy Week!

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This week, a special treat: www.greenninja.org

The fun videos teach about making choices that are better for you and the planet.

Look for other good video options that are also eco-friendly at this site:

<http://www.goinggreentoday.com/blog/video-7-fun-green-videos-for-kids/>

Stay green from the Green Team!

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This week, an announcement: we have real hand towels in the adult bathroom!

Look for a colored towel marked AB - and if you're in charge of the adult bathroom, please change the towel at the end of the day with a new one from the cabinet under the changing table. The used towels may be dried outside if very wet, or else in the laundry. Please use these after washing your hands and help us save trees by using fewer paper towels.

When sorting laundry, if it's your week, please set the towels marked AB aside for the adult bathroom.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to help us save!

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Q: How can I make Valentine's Day more eco-friendly?

A: Valentine's Day is one of the biggest shopping days of the year. Look for recycled cards or better yet, make your own from recycled-content papers (or repurposed materials like cereal boxes and office paper, milk jugs and more).

When shopping for chocolate and gifts, look for ones that are fair trade or responsibly produced, or made locally. Opt for a pot of blooms instead of a bouquet. Take your sweetheart to a local restaurant, or prepare a meal with farm-fresh foods.

Stay green and sweet!

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Q: How can I help improve my children's appreciation of nature?

A: Take a hike - no, really, use the beautiful weather as a chance to head outdoors. Take a walk through the Stanford Dish, Foothills Park, the Baylands, Hidden Villa, or any of the other outdoor areas. You can pack a picnic in reusable containers and eat while you look for birds, lizards, butterflies, and other wildlife.

You can also head to the farmer's market and talk to farmers about where the food comes from, buy and try out a new fruit or vegetable or flower. If you're more indoor inclined, visit a local museum or garden (the Palo Alto Junior Zoo, Gamble Garden,

Papua New Guinea Gardens, and others) that has an outdoor component or teaches about nature.

Give your kids a chance to examine pebbles, leaves, and other natural objects on a walk in your neighborhood - and get to appreciate nature yourself. They'll follow along and maybe teach you a thing or two!

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Q: Where do dirty diapers go again? And paper towels?

A: Please always put dirty disposable diapers straight into the trash bins in the parking lot. We will soon be switching to a black trash bin rather than a big dumpster, so it will be more like what you have at home. It's only a short walk out there, and someone will be happy to watch your little ones if needed for those 30 seconds.

Paper towels always go in the green bins, along with paper plates and cups, leaves, and cooked foods/dairy (but no plastic in there, please!). We now have two of these so there is plenty of space.

On a related note, feminine hygiene products go in the tiny trash container in the adult bathroom and should be emptied when the bathroom is cleaned.

Let's try to cut down on what we send to the landfill in the black bins! Go green!

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Q: What's so great about trees?

A: Trees may not seem like much, but they do a lot for us. During the day, they breathe in carbon dioxide, taking some pollution out of the air, and breathe out oxygen for our own cells. They filter other pollutants out of the air and soil as well. They provide homes for numerous birds, small animals, and insects that live in our community. Some trees offer food for us and them - fruits, nuts, seeds, spices, oils, syrups (like maple!). Others give us fragrant flowers. Still others give us other useful items, like rubber, rope, wood, and medicines. Their trunks and branches also offer homes for other species like mushrooms, and the leaves that fall from them or old logs make great homes for animals and insects, not to mention that they enrich the soil. Trees also have long, deep roots that help keep water in the ground so it's available for us, and they hold soil in, too, so we can farm. Finally, trees offer us shade and places to swing and climb and rest, and beautiful green vistas.

Each year we lost enough trees to cover Louisiana or Nicaragua. Want to keep them around? Buy recycled and reuse tree products (like paper), or find tree-free options. Support rainforest legislation and charities, and buy rainforest-certified products. See www.rainforest-alliance.org for more information and to get the kids involved. You can also take them on a Canopy tree walk to learn more about the trees in our neighborhood

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First, 2 quick notes:

1) Please put items only in a bright blue (recycling), green (compost/yard waste), or black (other trash, diapers) bin when dumping in the parking lot. Any gray, metal, or other round bins are only for overflow.

2) All feminine hygiene products will have a little trash can in the adult bathroom with liners. Please use these instead of the big bin in there which is only for compostables (paper towels).

Q: What's a good way to spend a rainy day?

A: Make some art with trash! Salvage some things from the recycle bin and make a sculpture, a collage, a dollhouse, a robot. Use your imagination or just go with the flow, and save on art materials too.

Here are some items and ideas you can use at school or home:

<http://www.seventhgeneration.com/learn/blog/dont-throw-out-its-art>

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Thanks to everyone for your diligence in keeping garbage and recycling and compost in the right place!

This week's question:

Q: What are all those flowers on the trees?

A: This is a great time of year to take a look at the trees in our neighborhoods. Many are blooming with bursts of color and showering petals like snow.

It's a great time to learn and teach kids about the circle of life - trees give leaves, and then develop buds which open as flowers, insects take the pollen around as they drink nectar, and the base of the flower turns into a fruit that contains a seed that makes a new tree!

Take a look - pinkish flowers with a few leaves will turn into plums, pink ones with no leaves - cherries, white ones into apples or pears. Keep watching them and you'll see the transformation!

When petals and flowers fall, use them for collages, collect them in a bowl, or make a makeshift flower crown. Some great books on flowers include Carle's The Tiny Seed and The Reason for a Flower.

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Q: How can I serve truly green eggs?

A: No need to dye to go green - instead get your eggs locally. Sadly, not all chickens have the loving lifestyle our PNS chickies do. Look for cage-free eggs, not just organic, which just means they were fed an organic diet. Even these may come with packaging, so look for ones that come in cartons rather than plastic, get them at the farmer's market, or join a local CSA that offers eggs and bring your own box to refill. For the most local option, you can raise your own chickens!

When coloring eggs, look for eco-friendly natural colors like turmeric, beet juice, carrot juice, and others. Instructions here:

<http://life.gaiam.com/article/make-every-easter-egg-green-easy-natural-egg-dyeing-tips>

Dr. Seuss would approve.

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Q: What can I do about all that packaging?

A: Get a fill-up - not on gasoline but with home and beauty products. Look for places that sell packaging that can be refilled like shopgreen11.com, Country Sun, Sprouts, and Whole Foods, among others. Bring your own bottles and boxes and containers and bags wherever you go so you don't accumulate more (think - reuse plastic containers for olives, shop from the bulk aisle with your own bags). When you buy, look for things in compostable (if you have a compost bin), reusable or easily recyclable containers (think glass bottles and wax paper or foil), or see if you can get it whole (a wheel of cheese). Buy in larger quantities - bulk or at big-box stores, but avoid the pack of mini-chip bags - you'll end up with more trash.

And finally, when you have something to give or package, use a reusable container, preferably reused already, and take it back after. Your friends will thank you for not adding one more bit of packaging to their lives, too, and the earth will be glad of one less bit of plastic film. Thank you for doing your bit!

Want some ideas of what to do with those packaging bits? Check out Toys from Trash: <http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/toys.html>

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Q: How can I spring clean greener?

A: You might want to go green with your cleaning for several reasons: allergies, air quality, water pollution, health, and having small children and/or pets in the house.

One way to start is to rethink what you have already - does it say "Toxic" "Contains chemicals known to cause..." Or "Keep out of reach of children"? Those in themselves are not necessarily problems but they should give you pause. Products that contain phosphates, and bleach can be irritants and pollute our waterways. Look for a concentrated version, too - it carries less water across the country to get to you (or opt for powders). Dye-free, biodegradable and recycled-content or plastic-free bottles will help reduce your impact, too.

You can also make your own! A few ideas:

- baking soda and water paste for scouring
- 1/2 bar grated soap, 1 cup borax, and 1 cup washing soda for laundry
- borax and washing soda in the dishwasher
- vinegar in the rinse cup of your dishwasher, and vinegar and water on glass
- microfiber cloths to clean, or to use in your swiffer
- liquid Castile soap for hands, dishes

Lots more ideas here:

<http://www.onegoodthingbyjillee.com/category/homemade-solution/cleaning>

Here's to squeaky clean green!

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Q: Do I need antibacterial soap or gel to get really clean?

A: The best way to wash off 99% of germs is good old soap and water, with good scrubbing (sing the ABC song). Antibacterial soaps will kill a similar number of bacteria as well, but overuse can lead to resistance - which means that you're creating stronger "superbug" bacteria who cannot be killed by the same soap that worked a while ago. In addition, triclosan, the antibacterial agent found in such soaps, can form environmental pollutants including dioxins, and can enter the skin. It has been linked to allergies and endocrine dysfunction.

What about the gels? Most contain alcohol, but look for ones that have a natural base, which means no added chemicals that might have other unknown health effects (some have triclosan, for example). They have similar benefits to soap against bacteria and viruses, but you can take them out and about. As with antibacterials of any kind, they kill both germs and good bacteria - so if you use them, replenish with yogurt, miso, or other probiotics.

In short: stick to tried and true soap and water, but go for an alcohol gels as a backup when you're away from a sink or a particularly bad cold's going around. Toss the antibacterial soap!

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It's Earth Day - April 22!

Q: What can I do to celebrate?

A: If you missed the Earth Day events this weekend, don't worry - more are coming. Here are a few:

- April 27 – Paper Shredding Event at SMaRT Station
- April 27 - Declutter for a cause at Barron Park, and 11am showing of the Lorax - email greta.gize@gmail.com for more info
- April 27 – The Great Race for Saving Water 5k funrun - email Wendy.Hediger@CityofPaloAlto.org
- Through May 10 – Sign up for the Citywide Yard Sale
- Eat a local, organic dinner at the Peninsula Macrobiotic Society <http://peninsulamacro.org>
- April 23 - attend a talk on "Stalling global warming"
- April 26 - attend the Gamble Garden Spring Tour and Sale - [gamble garden.org](http://gamblegarden.org)
- commit to one thing to reduce your trash, water, or fuel use.

Or just year out with your little ones and help them appreciate the Earth for what it is - something to celebrate, indeed.

Happy Earth Day!

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Q: Now that Green Week is over, how can I keep up the momentum?

A: Earth Day is every day, so keep the conversation going with your kids. Each person can pledge to do one small thing to help the planet. Read books that promote a love of nature - check out the Green Shelf opposite the bathrooms and borrow some books. Make sculptures from your recycle bin. Grab some gloves and pick up trash on your next walk. Talk about why we need and love water, energy, and clean air. Spend plenty of time outdoors - enjoy all that the area has to offer. Celebrate the earth with its bounty - fresh local foods, flowers, vistas, hikes, fresh air, play with mud and stones and sticks, creeks and ponds, hills and mountains. Take a moment to see the Earth the way our children do - as a place of wonder and delight.

Stay cool!

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Q: I hate to throw out all that artwork. What should I do with it?

A: First, don't throw it in the garbage! Paper art should be recycled in the blue bin (even if it has paint on it). Take off any pasta, clay, or craft sticks, though (all compostable in the green bin).

It is that scrapbook time of year though, so as you cull your little ones' masterpieces, remember they can have other uses:

- use them as disposable placemats (if they get messy you may be able to compost afterward)
- use the back to make a notebook or notepad
- wrap gifts with them
- make into cards, thank you notes, or a set of note cards
- cut up and make an artwork collage
- shred then blend into new paper
- wrap around a votive for a stunning display
- cover books
- make origami or fans
- make paper airplanes
- gather 12 at a time and make a DIY calendar (draw or attach Calendar grids on back)
- cut out the middle for a photo frame or mat
- use the artwork itself as a page in your ongoing scrapbook (decorate with photos/writing)
- make paper baskets by weaving strips together
- cut out shapes or make loops and make a garland or banner
- frame a favorite
- make paper doll or doll clothes
- make play money or game pieces

- cover a tin or box to reuse
- make holiday ornaments - affix a photo
- make snowflakes or paper flowers
- cut into squares and make mosaics
- use them for grown-up artwork, little love notes, or signs
- cut pieces to fit store magnets and glue on
- make paper beads or jewelry
- use for children's sewing practice
- paint over them!
- let your kids come up with ideas of their own!

For the sentimental, take photos.

And if you do recycle the paper anyway, don't worry, you're not the only one

As always, please continue to support PNS's green efforts with your ways - whether it's contributing to the solar project, recycling your goods, printer cartridges and cell phones at the rummage sale, saving resources at school and home, visiting the garden, or sharing the joy of all this with our children.

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Q: Now that warmer weather's here, what can my family do to be more sustainable?

A: This is a perfect time to make some changes you may not miss.

For starters, turn your thermostat if you have air conditioning and turn off your pilot lights on gas furnaces. If you have a fan or ceiling fan, use it to keep cool, and open up the windows.

This is also a great time to line dry clothes outside or on a rack indoors at night (5 min in the dryer will fluff towels).

Water is key at this time of year, so set your sprinkler for evening or before dawn so the water doesn't evaporate. You can also save the cool water from before your shower to water plants.

Finally, this is a great time to get outside. Take a walk, bike ride, watch the sunset, go to the beach, visit the farmer's market for sweet berries. It's glorious summer!

To all the moms out there: Happy Mother's Day!

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Q: How can I stay sun safe this summer and still be green?

A: Better green than red! You and your children do need sunlight to make vitamin D and to feel happy. But good sun habits start young - hats (model it by wearing one), staying in the shade or using a beach umbrella, especially between 10 and 4, using aloe to soothe burns.

For sunscreens, use a tested-brand without all the extra chemicals that can pollute our water. Check the Environmental Working Group's list, which have been whetted for actually working, blocking both UVA and UVB, and being safe. <http://www.ewg.org/2012sunscreens/>

Go further with a plastic-free brand like Avasol, which comes in cardboard. If you have an old sunscreen that is safe, repurpose it as lotion. Ones that are on the taboo list, should be tossed!

Stay safe, and while you're at it, more eco-friendly summer fun here: <http://www.treehugger.com/htgg/how-to-go-green-summer.html>

And a few crafts...

<http://www.spitthatoutthebook.com/2012/05/guest-post-5-summer-green-crafts-projects-kids/>

And a few more ideas...

<http://pinterest.com/planetpals/green-crafts-for-kids/>

ok, sad to go, but thank you all for being your bright, beautiful, Green Selves!

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Q: What is a carbon offset?

A: It's a way to sort of make amends for the CO₂ we are putting in the air. You buy an offset which will do some good, such as planting trees or rehabilitating arid land, or running a windmill, which will supposedly take the amount of CO₂ you specify out of the air. Think of it this way - if you accidentally hurt an animal, you could adopt a pet, or you might donate to a shelter that protects animals or an animal hospital that treats them. Carbon offsets do the same for our air - helping us balance out the pollution we create with some other, unrelated good. They don't erase what we've already done.

Thinking of offsetting your travels? (I know I will need to!) You can do them by

supporting tree plantings, wind energy, remediation. You can offset just one trip or your whole year's carbon footprint.

Ready? Read more, then choose one of the five listed here: <http://grist.org/article/gies2/>

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Q: How can I be sure I'm staying safe with the products I use?

A: It can be tricky knowing what is and isn't safe. When buying, be sure by checking the ingredient list, looking for natural ingredients, nontoxic labels, organic and local. But when that's not possible, make a small sweep of your home, looking for the worst offenders, throwing out old medications and toxic and potentially dangerous cleaners, paint, and more. These can be dropped off on city hazardous waste days, or you can call for a pickup. Do it regularly and you'll be well on the way to a safe, green home.

(Further from Theresa Hentzel)

I'm going to piggyback on this email, because there are different ways to rid your home of old/expired medications. The Palo Alto Medical Foundation has a drop off at the pharmacy, and this website has some suggestions of the best way to throw out medication.

<http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm101653.htm>

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Q: I'm looking to make my cosmetics more sustainable and healthy. What can I do?

A: Check out EWG's Skin Deep cosmetics database, and purge your bathroom of the worst offenders. www.ewg.org/skindeep

(A tip - old makeup makes great crayons/paint for older kids)

Then stock up on what you need - find local companies like Lush, 100% pure and others even at the farmer's market so you can discuss what's in the stuff you use on your face. (The average woman eats 4-7 lbs of lipstick in a lifetime!).

You can also try making your own - people have been using shea butter, olive oil, natural kohl, rock minerals, clay, and plant extracts since ancient times. Try out a few recipes here:

<http://www.treehugger.com/style/make-your-own-eco-friendly-cosmetics.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/my-diy-beauty-brand-homemade-cosmetics-794826.html>

If you really want to go green, though, consider another route altogether - reducing or eliminating using most cosmetics. After all, nothing is more beautiful than a radiant smile and a healthy planet.

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Q: What goes in the trash?

A: Unlike your waste collection at home, PNS falls under the commercial waste collection of Palo Alto, which is serviced by Greenwaste. This means we have commercial composting of yard waste and also food/food-soiled paper/other compostable materials, plus commercial recycling. Because these are large, industrial processes, the rules are different!

We'll learn more later about what goes in blue recycling bins (generally hard plastic, any metal, and dry paper) and green compost bins (food, food soiled paper, plant material). For now, here's what definitely goes in the trash bin - the small trash cans outside or the black bin in the wooden area in the parking lot:

- disposable diapers
- wipes
- plastic bags
- cling wrap
- ziplock bags
- plastic utensils (forks, spoons, etc. if they don't say "compostable")
- shiny plastic (potato chip bags, juice pouches, candy wrappers)
- tetrapaks (tall juice/milk boxes, soup boxes, soymilk packs)
- plastic straws
- broken glass
- pom-poms, ribbon, yarn, feathers and other art materials that are not paper or plastic
- animal waste (guinea and chicken waste and newspapers)
- Styrofoam (cups, trays, packaging or peanuts)
- padded envelopes

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Q: How can I make Halloween greener?

A: Candy and treats aren't so bad are they? Well, they do result in dental and health issues, generate a lot of plastic waste, and are rarely produced with local or organic ingredients that are kind to both people and planet. Production of cocoa for chocolate still uses slavery and child labor in parts of the world! Face paint often has lead in it, and we still spend \$6 billion a year on Halloween stuff, most of which ends up in landfills.

So what's a conscientious parent to do? Here are some small steps to try:

- Swap costumes with someone, and hand them down. Rather than buying yet another slightly large vampire cape, find one that's new-to-you at a costume swap or from an older child. Then hand down outgrown costumes so others can enjoy them.
- Reuse or make your own decorations. Kids' art, reusable banners, spiderwebs, bats and more can last year after year if stored well.
- Pumpkin patches, haunted houses, and more are in your neighborhood - go visit (for free!) what your community has to offer, and if you like, buy locally-grown pumpkins and local handicrafts.
- Hand out non-food treats (stickers, pencils, even reused toys are great for those with allergies!) or healthy alternatives (juice, fruit leather, etc.). If you offer candy, organic or fair trade items can help ensure your treats make for a Happy Halloween for all!

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Q: Is climate change real?

A: Everyone is saying the weather is getting crazy, there are storms and hurricanes and floods, but does that mean global warming? And how is it global warming anyway when it's cold?

The term global warming is misleading - climate change more accurately describes what the scientific and most of the general population now agree on - the earth's temperature and atmosphere have changed since humans have been here. And much if not all of that change is due to our activities and pollution.

The UN now says we must cut down our pollution by 2100 - or else we can never reverse our effects on it. More details here: <http://time.com/3553269/un-climate-change-report/>

So, what can you do about it? Here are 10 things:
<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/top-10-ways-you-can-stop-climate-change/>

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Q: What's compost, anyway?

A: Compost is a material that's made when biodegradable matter is broken down by a combination of heat and mixing and the action of insects and worms. Put simply, our food scraps, soiled paper, and yard trimmings combine to turn into good, clean dirt.

Compost is full of the nutrients from these materials, so it's great for the garden and helps plants and trees grow. It's also a fantastic way to keep a lot of stuff out of our landfills and put it to good use.

At PNS, our green bin's contents get turned into compost in an industrial facility. You can get some of this compost for free at the SMaRT station:
<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pwd/zerowaste/whatgoeswhere/landfill.asp>

Want to start composting at home? It can be as simple as burying food scraps into the dirt, or having a worm bin, or a compost pile or bin. Learn more here:
<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pwd/zerowaste/resources/giveaways.asp>

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Q: How can I express my gratitude to the Earth for Thanksgiving?

A: Our planet deserves our thanks for all it gives us - food, shelter, water, chocolate! We can teach ourselves and our children to say thanks by treating it gently, being grateful for all we get from the earth, and appreciating what we have. If you have a family ritual for Thanksgiving, consider the planet in your thoughts.

There are also great ways show your gratitude by giving back. If you are traveling, purchase carbon offsets to plant trees for the carbon your flight or ride produces (<http://grist.org/article/gies2/>). You can also plant a tree yourself, volunteer to help restore a preserve (Acterra.org), put up a bird feeder. Help kids come up with their own ideas - we all have a lot to be thankful for.

Thank you all. Happy Thanksgiving!

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Q: How can I help reuse/recycle for the holidays?

A: Many people already have plans and have sent cards and wrapped gifts by this time. If you haven't yet, consider using materials with recycled content, whether new or just pretty newspaper, magazines, ribbon pulled from old videos, or kids' artwork for wrapping. Cards can also be reused by cutting off the front or gluing in a blank piece of paper inside.

If you have already done your holiday prep, save trees the next time by saving and reusing wrapping paper and ribbon, garlands, boxes, and other decor and wrapping supplies. You can use biodegradable alternatives like popcorn garlands, popcorn instead of Styrofoam peanuts, pinecones and found or edible objects to decorate a tree, and cotton twine or raffia.

And if you get a gift you won't use - pass it on, that's the kind and eco-friendly thing to do.

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Q: I need to send holiday cards! How can I go green?

A: Many options allow you to make your holiday cards easy on the trees. Here are just a few ideas:

- make them 100% recycled and handmade - kids' artwork makes great and adorable cards, or make your own from the recycle bin or cut-outs from magazines

- reuse old cards - the fronts are rarely written on - just tear off the back and use as a card. Or glue to another piece of card stock. These also can be cut to make great gift boxes, tags, bags, and even

ribbon.

- find cards at thrift stores or freecycle.org or Craigslist or your neighbors - you can mix and match boxes.

- if you're buying, look for cards with post-consumer recycled content (100% would be ideal). Some cards are made from tree-free paper as well. If you include a sheet of paper inside, the recipient can reuse it (see below).

- send a reusable card. Some special cards come with a paper insert - the outside stays the same but the recipient can reuse the card with a new sheet of paper!

- save paper altogether by sending digital cards! Some of them give you the feel of opening a card these days, and kids go crazy for animated ones.

- Send it as a postcard. Did you know you can save an envelope and postage by sending your single-page cards as postcards?

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Q: What can I do with all the leftovers from gifts and boxes?

A: Wrapping and ribbons can be reused from year to year, and boxes can be reused too. Save it up for next year, and you will have to buy less. Plain papers and ribbons can be used out of season too for birthdays and other occasions.

If you still have too much, boxes and packaging materials (brown paper and peanuts and can be donated in your neighborhood or to a local mailing store. Wrapping paper, bows, and ribbons make great craft materials (easel paper? paperdolls anyone?) or can be donated to Goodwill or SCRAP or freecycled in your community.

Toss natural materials into your yard or yard waste bin. And arrange for cut up chunks of trees to be picked up - they will turn into good compost for a future tree!

Happy holidays!

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Happy new year!

Q: How can I make this new year greener?

A: Take on what you can. A simple idea - ask each person in the family to choose a single pledge for each year to help the earth. Start with something simple but very specific, so that it's easy to keep and

stick to. For little ones, things they can do themselves are best. Make it fun!

A few examples:

- Turn off the water while I'm brushing my teeth
- Use a five-minute timer for the shower (try an egg timer for a satisfying ding)
- Plant a tree together
- Turn on lights only when it's dark outside (kids can check)
- Use the back side of every sheet of paper before recycling it (find uses!)
- Ride a bike to school every Monday
- Start your own little garden and tend it on the weekend
- Find a trip you can take this year without driving

You and your families are sure to come up with creative and fun ideas!

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Q: Isn't it too late to go green?

A: According to climate scientists, the effects of what we have done so far will be seen 50 years from now, even if humans disappear today. If we want our children to live in clean air and have pure water to drink, we must act strongly, and now.

The situation seems dire at times - how will we make it? It can be scary for us and our children. But hope is not lost - we can create a better world not only of natural resources, but of connection, community, and interdependence. Here are two of many, many ways:

- share, save, reuse, and repair stuff so you don't use/buy/make new stuff with new materials (resources)
- get things and services locally to save on transportation (energy) and know where and how your things and food were made (community)

Brainstorm with your family other ways you can help clean up and build connections at the same time.

Want more science info?

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/effects-of-climate-change-irreversible-un-panel-warns-in-report/2014/11/01/2d49aee6-6142-11e4-8b9e-2ccdac31a031_story.html

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Q: It's raining, so the drought is over, right?

A: California has been in a drought this year (and last, and the year before...), meaning we are in a state of emergency and recommended to cut water use voluntarily by 20%. We still only have 2/3 of our average storage for Santa Clara county, and much less in other parts of the state. Rain will have to be heavy and continuous to the end of the year to keep us up to average levels.

So, what is a water-conscious family to do? Save water wherever you can - 5 minute showers or shallow baths, turn off taps, fill the sink with water or use dishwasher for dishes, use cold shower water in the garden. You can also consider installing rain barrels under your downspouts to collect any rainwater we do get.

Kids can help by taking shorter showers, using a cup when brushing teeth, turning off the water when soaping hands, and even collecting rainwater in buckets and watering plants!

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Q: Winter is here! How can I save on heating?

A: Wear a sweater! Jokes aside, setting your thermostat to 68 (or less) can help minimize the amount of heating. Wear socks and sweaters, put out rugs, then check if your doors or windows have any leaks - simple weatherstripping or a door snake can keep out drafts. Install thick double curtains to retain heat at night, and let in sun during the day. Your water heater's hot water pipe can also use a foam sleeve for insulation - while you're there, set your water heater knob to 120F, or the low setting (keeps kids from getting scalded too).

If you are looking into home improvements, insulation (walls and attic), double pane windows, and window liners can help. If you need a new heating system altogether, consider a central system, a radiant heat system that uses hot water, or a heat pump that is electric - these can be offset by using solar panels or renewable energy rather than using natural gas, a fossil fuel. The same holds true for fireplaces.

Finally, turn your heat as low as possible when you leave town - both the heater and the water heater. No need to heat the place when you're not there!

Have a great week!

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Q: How can I do something helpful for the planet this MLK day?

A: Martin Luther King, Jr. supported many ideals, including equality, liberty and justice. He, along with Thoreau and Gandhi, initiated civil disobedience and nonviolent protest. These have also been useful tools in the environmental movement. In addition, these leaders supported fair treatment of other species and stewardship of nature. These days, issues of social justice are usually also environmental issues - think of oil wars, blood diamonds, hunger in the face of drought, to name a few. We can support King's ideals with what we already do for the earth and for other people (and our children) - espousing fairness and respect for all life.

Read more here: <http://baynature.org/2013/01/20/was-mlk-an-environmentalist/>

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Q: What can I do to cut down on junk mail?

A: Junk mail is a big source of paper waste in this country. Start by checking each piece and calling each person/company to get off their list (the phone is often fastest). Opt out of junk mail by calling the senders to say you want to get off their lists and not share, sell, lend, or trade your info with affiliates or hird parties. You can also sign up for DMAchoice.org, Directmail.com, GreenDime.com or a similar service to be removed from marketers' lists.

If you'd like to stop receiving the Yellow Pages, go to <https://www.yellowpagesoptout.com/> , click on "opt-out" and follow the instructions. Instead of receiving a phone book each year, they'll leave you a door hanger reminding you that you have opted out.

For other items that say "Return service requested" you can actually return the mail to the sender. You might also consider sticking a stamp on it and crossing out your address to send it back (with a note that says "remove me from your list." Make sure to request no paler mail when you donate to causes and also don't fill out a change of address form - the addresses are sold to marketers - instead hold your mail if you can and slowly let people know your new address.

When you do get some mail in, check for Good On One Side paper, envelopes to turn inside out or for notepads, catalogs to cut up, and recycle the rest!

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Q: How can I save water on my lawn?

A: Now that we are in an official state of drought, the state is mandating a 30% cut in water use and no more than 2 days a week of watering. How do you do that? Water deeply and less frequently - a nice,

deep watering twice a week is plenty. Water when it's dark or not sunny and you'll save on evaporation too.

Even better, switch your lawn to a native landscape of drought - tolerant plants covered with mulch - a neighbor of mine only waters once a year! You can also consider a no-mow meadow, all mulch, vegetable beds. Switch your watering from pop-up sprays to a drip irritating system to allow a slow flow of water to each plant rather than a heavy shower.

The Santa Clara Water District also has a landscape rebate for people that change there landscape and or irrigation. They also do a water wise check-up to see if you could be using less water. The city of Palo Alto also has landscape rebate programs programs and free water friendly seminars. Check with your city and utility company for rates and rebates, as well as how-tos (Thanks, Angela, for this tip!)

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Q: How can I get the kids to use less water?

A: Kids are little sponges - in more ways than one. So, after you set an excellent example of saving water and talking about how and why you do it, give them some tools.

A small timer in the shower can help them know when to turn it off or get out, or use a bucket (or fill the bathrub up to a low tape line) so they have a limited amount of water to play with.

Have them count or sing a song to show how long it's ok to leave the water on at the sink.

Don't forget to involve them in grownup things - using cold shower water to water houseplants, saving water to drink later (or water something), using a cup to rinse the brush or their mouths.

Finally, be aware that saving water isn't just about water itself - a 2 liter bottle of soda takes over 100 liters to make, and a new T-shirt? 400 gallons! Buying used, less, or reusing is another, indirect, way to save water. More water facts:

<http://www.treehugger.com/clean-technology/how-many-gallons-of-water-does-it-take-to-make.html>

And more ways to save <http://www.treehugger.com/green-home/11-clever-ways-conserve-at-home.html>

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Q: My kids waste a ton of food, what can I do?

A: A few tips can help you make the most of the food you buy and prepare. First, plan meals, including space for lunches and leftovers, as well as how !much your family eats. Before you plan or shop, take a quick look at what is lurking in the fridge, and make a space if things that need to be used up fast.

Encourage kids to take only what they can eat, and then get more if they want. You can also serve

leftovers for snack, freeze them for later, or repurpose them.

Still some left? Feed em to chickens or start a compost pile for your family.

Wanna learn more?

Check out the documentary Eat it.

If you want to learn to compost, the city of Palo Alto has free workshops.

Palo Alto workshop dates: June 6, July 25, August 15, September 5, and October 24.

Palo Alto residents can receive a free compost bin while supplies last by attending a compost workshop.

Need more compost than you can make? Don't have time to make your own?

Pick up free compost and mulch at the Sunnyvale Materials Recovery and Transfer (SMaRT) Station at 301 Carl Road, Sunnyvale. Call (408) 752-8530, Monday-Friday, 8 am -5 pm, to check on availability.

For more information, visit www.cityofpaloalto.org/compost or call (650) 496-5910.

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Q: How does eating meat and dairy affect the environment?

A: Meat and dairy products themselves don't cause pollution, but making them does. Animal agriculture causes equal effects on climate change to burning fossil fuels.

The animals, after all, need crops grown for feed, extra land (usually forests cut down) for grazing, and produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas. There are also effects on pollution of soil, which in turn affects drinking water, the rise of antibiotic resistance, soil erosion, and energy use for transportation (meat takes nine times more energy than grain).

In fact, 70% of global water use comes from feed and growth of meat and dairy (and 20% of greenhouse gases, and almost 40% of land). Eating meat and dairy increases your personal water use by fourteen times (4200 gallons vs. 300)!

Eating less meat and dairy has other benefits, too, but for environmental reasons, even the UN recommends cutting back on consumption.

Try Meatless Mondays, limiting to weekends, or consider going vegetarian or vegan. When you buy meat and dairy, look for products that have been grown without the use of pesticides and fed with grass rather than grain, and from companies that use good stewardship of the land.

Want more information or help?

Here are some tips to get started:

<http://nakedfoodmagazine.com/10-tips-to-eating-less-meat-and-dairy-and-sticking-with-it/>

<http://www.sustainabletable.org/794/should-you-eat-less-meat>

<http://www.ewg.org/meateatersguide/helpful-tips-for-meat-eaters/>

Happy eating!

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Q: Where do I put those milk cartons again?

A: The school year is near the end, so you may have forgotten what goes where. At school, we have recycling, commercial compost, and landfill trash. We also have chickens, so there are multiple options. A few guidelines:

Chickens - food. Check the posted list if something is not safe for them, then put in...

Compost - any food, paper that had food on it (like milk cartons and paper cups), any plants/parts or plant material (eg unpainted wood), napkins/Kleenex/paper towels, and compostable plastics (they should say "compostable" on them or on the package, you can rarely tell because they are off-white).

If it's not one of those, it could be...

Recycling - any dry paper, hard plastic containers (do the shake test to remove any food), plastic lids (think coffee cups) metal, unbroken glass.

If it's broken glass, something small plastic, or a bonded mix of any of these, it's

Trash - genuine landfill trash includes everything else - plastic utensils, straws, zip lock bags, plastic wrap, foil chip bags, lined juice boxes, yogurt foil covers, anything sharp and broken (eg glass or razorblades), soiled guinea bedding, miscellaneous items that don't go anywhere else.

Of course if you think you or someone else could reuse it first, you should!

If you still have questions, ask! Or check out the guide here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pwd/zerowaste/whatgoeswhere/toolkit.asp>

Happy sorting!

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Q: How can I quit my disposable habit?

A: Switch to reusables! You'll save paper and water (it takes a lot of water to make paper). Here are a few simple way to go reusable:

- Carry a handkerchief

- carry a set of cloths for hand-wiping
- wipe down counters and spills with cloth rags instead of paper towels
- when hosting parties or events, use or borrow reusable dishes (the city of Palo Alto has Zero Waste party packs that serve 24 each you can borrow for 72 hrs)
- buy a big bin or from the bulk bin instead of getting a new container
- take a mug to the coffee shop and get it refilled
- say no to straws and plastic utensils (take your own)
- take your own to-go containers to the restaurant when you order take-out or have leftovers
- when you have the choice, choose "for here" instead of "to go."

Reduce, Reuse, then Recycle!

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Q: How can I get ready for a greener summer?

A: It's starting to warm up! Here are a few tips:

- If you use the AC, set it a few degrees higher on your thermostat. If you
van, instead get those windows open, use a fan to cool, and close curtains
during the hottest part of the day

- Switch to an earth-friendly sun protection

- Bugs buggin' ya? Try a homemade bug spray

<http://wellnessmama.com/2565/homemade-bug-spray/>

- Rent or borrow specialty equipment for water sports instead of buying new
(or buy secondhand)

- Notice the changes of the summer - longer days, warmer weather, fruit ripening, birds, and enjoy and appreciate your summer!

- Go local, go buy train/bus/carpool, and offset your travels

- Support the local economy wherever you are with purchases from smaller stores, artisans, and people who are doing their own part to be more sustainable

- Help kids notice that wherever we are, we try to take only pictures and leave only footprints.

Have a great summer!

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Q: How am I gonna be green now that school is over?

A: Fear not! I'll keep posting Green questions over the summer when I can, and publishing Green Kids Mags also. Your local library is a great source of information, and PNS's green shelf is also available to you. If you have a question, just ask!

Of course, the best teacher? Mother Nature.

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Q: It's just sooo hot, what can I do?

A: Before you turn on the air conditioning, try a few alternatives:

- keep window treatments closed during the hottest part of the day
- use a fan - ceiling, floor, handheld, or whole house
- open the windows

- keep a pitcher of ice water in the fridge
 - take a cool shower
 - sit in the shade and enjoy the breeze
 - go for a walk or bike ride
 - enjoy a cold meal
 - get some ice cream
 - wear white or light colors
 - go somewhere you can share the air conditioning!
 - keep a spray mister of cool water for your body
 - chill towels in the freezer or fridge
 - use peppermint, lemon, and cucumber to bring your body temperature down
 - oddly, a hot drink can lower your body temperature by a degree or more!
- See what else your family can come up with. Stay cool!

.....

Q: My kids want to help the earth, but they just keep wasting too much (water, paper towels, food, etc). What can I do?

A: Start with yourself. When you go to take a paper towel, do you stop at one or go back for a second? Do you finish what's on your plate, or usually order too much? Is the water on when you shave? They are noticing!

You can also talk about your choices - "I really want a second helping but I think I won't be able to finish it," "Hmm, I should have shaken my hands off first so I didn't need a second paper towel." This helps them understand.

Finally, make a connection - the paper comes from trees, the water comes from a river and rain, food from a farm. Help them remember all the people and resources that went into making each of these things. Take them to see some trees and rivers and farms. Let them enjoy the outdoors - when they are older, they will have fond memories to preserve.

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Q: How can I have a greener summer party?

A: Aim for a zero-waste one. Skip disposables in favor of a city Party Pack (free to borrow) or your own reusable dishes. Instead of juice pouches, serve drinks from a jug or pitcher with reusable cups (use stickers or washable markers for names). Use real napkins.

If you just can't avoid the disposables, look for ones that say Compostable - now, you can put these in your green yard waste bin.

For decor, use fabric banners and ribbon, avoid balloons if you can (lanterns?). Help kids think of alternatives to plastic as gifts and for goody bags.

And the food? Shop local or organic, find a talented neighbor (or make it if you can!), or have a potluck!

Happy summer!

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- Switch to an earth-friendly sun protection

- Bugs buggin' ya? Try a homemade bug spray <http://wellnessmama.com/2565/homemade-bug-spray/>

- Rent or borrow specialty equipment for water sports instead of buying new (or buy secondhand)

- Notice the changes of the summer - longer days, warmer weather, fruit ripening, birds, and enjoy and appreciate your summer!

- Go local, go buy train/bus/carpool, and offset your travels

- Support the local economy wherever you are with purchases from smaller stores, artisans, and people who are doing their own part to be more sustainable

- Help kids notice that wherever we are, we try to take only pictures and leave only footprints.

Have a great summer!

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Q: How can I go back to school a little more green?

A: In the US, an average of \$594 is spent by each family going back to school! How does yours fare? Save some cash by going greener:

- reuse what you have. Do they really need a new backpack? Lunchbox? Another whole set of pencils, rulers? Can you tear out the used pages of that notebook and use the backs for scratch paper?

- avoid it if you can. Many schools offer basic school supplies for use in the classroom, so you may not need to bring supplies at all other than a bag, lunchbox and water bottle. Check with your teacher.

- buy used, and reused and recycled - biodegradable pencils, recycled paper, ecofriendly crayons are all out there, plus goods from thrift stores and your neighborhood garage sales! For books, try used book stores, library sales, and Betterworldbooks.com

- buy reusable and refillable and in bulk. Instead of running out for the 2000-pack of goldfish packets, can't you buy the giant bag and refill a little box each day? Can you get a refillable pen? A binder with looseleaf paper instead of a notebook?

- this is a great time to start a green getting-to-school habit - can you get the kids to ride (a bike or bus or scooter or skateboard) or walk, or start a carpool?

Read more:

<http://www.treehugger.com/htgg/how-to-go-green-back-to-school.html>

Enjoy the last few weeks of summer!

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Q: How can I start off the year green?

A: Last week was full of great ideas for going back to school green. Now it's time to put the plan in action. Make a plan and set yourself up for success - will you bike to school? Check the tires and put helmets by the door. Carry a reusable lunch? Wash the bottles and boxes. Buy the big bag and separate out? Fill small boxes with crackers ahead of time. Reuse paper? Set up a scrap paper bin, and let everyone know about it.

Whatever you can do to make it easier on you and others can make it that much more likely to happen!

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Q: How can I be greener at PNS?

A: Did you know PNS has a Green Team? It's just a group of parents committed to helping us connect with nature, preserve our natural resources, and help our kids and families learn to be lighter on the planet.

Interested in a topic, from organic and healthy food, to fewer paper products, green reading material to gardening? Reply and we will have a Green Team meeting later in the year. Feel free to email back with your own ideas as well!

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Q: My kids have way too many toys. What can I do with extras?

A: Don't throw them in the trash! Each family in the US purchases at least one new toy a year, and we spend over \$20 billion on em. That's a lot of toys!

To cut down, start with what is age appropriate and what they actually can and will play with. Purge things of dicey origin (think: potential lead contamination), in poor condition, or that are unsafe. Then, you choose (or let them!)

Good toys can be donated on Freecycle.org or at a store like Goodwill or your neighborhood list, and broken hard plastic and electronic toys can be recycled in your blue bin. [Also the PNS Rummage sale!]

When you do buy again, or take in new toys, consider what value they add.

Can they grow up with your child? Do they have multiple uses? Are they

recyclable? Recycled content? Little or no packaging? Consider purchasing used toys, have a toy swap, or making them (here's a great site for that: <http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/toys-from-trash.php>)

Remember that nature offers many easy and time-tested toys - sticks, sand, rocks, leaves, bark, mud, and more that will be biodegradable, recyclable, reusable, and won't break the bank.

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PS - thanks to everyone who expressed interest in Green Team! Look for a meeting soon. If you are interested and haven't yet, please reply to me.

last 8/31/15

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