Ethical and green living
Ethical and green living with Lucy Siegle

The eco guide to microplastics

Seafood eaters consume up to 11,000 tiny pieces of plastic a year. Scary, isn't it?

< 835 32

Lucy Siegle

Sunday 6 August 2017
06.00 BST



Dirty business: a beach strewn with plastics on the Isle Of Mull. Photograph: Will Rose/Greenpeace

I'm officially declaring this the Summer of Plastic. With the rising tide of plastic waste - 38.5 million plastic bottles a day in the UK alone and production set to quadruple by 2050 - the plastic pollution crisis in our oceans has become the breakout issue.

Activists are stepping it up from quiet beach cleans to strident zero-tolerance campaigns. In terms of severity, Surfers Against Sewage (sas.org.uk) rates plastic pollution up there with climate change. Its campaign, Wasteland, urges us to boycott throwaway plastics now. Meanwhile, Greenpeace continues to hound soft-drinks brands, mapping their alarming use of plastic and abject failure to take responsibility.

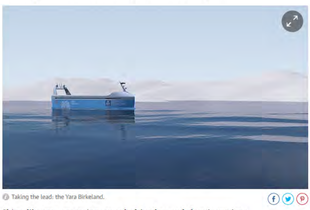
Actually, it's the Summer of Microplastics. An estimated 5 trillion have rapidly accumulated in our oceans. Often described as "salt and pepper sized" flakes of plastic, microplastics don't just resemble salt, they're likely to be in it.

The latest study confirms concentrations of microplastics in 16 out of 17 brands of sea salt from eight countries (with a potential market of 6 billion consumers). If the sea contains plastics, so do the products we harvest from it.

According to research by Ghent University, European seafood consumers are likely to be ingesting up to 11,000 tiny pieces of plastic per year. Microplastics have been detected in the edible tissues of commercial fish. But they have also been found in milk, beer and honey (where plastic has been deposited in pollen).

Aplasticplanet.com finds that nine out of 10 of us want plastic-free aisles in supermarkets. But the plastic inside our products should be concerning us, too. If we got rid of those, would our plastic-free aisles be empty?

The big picture: the first electric container ship



Taking the lead: the Yara Birkeland.

Ships, like cars, are racing towards driverless and electric versions. This time shipping is taking the lead with the unveiling of the Yara Birkeland. When it sets sail next year, the Yara Birkeland will be the world's first driverless electric container ship to cross the ocean. Sadly, however, according to reports, its cargo will be fertilisers and chemicals, which you could argue somewhat undermines its green sensibilities.

Well-dressed: Gung-Ho



'Wear what we believe in': Gung-Ho.

There's wearing your heart on your sleeve, and then there's wearing the story of species decline and reversal on your bow-tie or belted day dress.

Each design from London startup Gung-Ho takes an environmental issue – say the decline of bees or the stag beetle – and turns the species into a hand-drawn print.

The garments are handmade in London using 100% organic fabrics and with every purchase the brand donates to charities that work with that specific issue.

The founder, Sophie Dunster, explains that she wanted to bring more meaning to ethical fashion. 'As our style choices tell us so much about our personalities, this way we can not only wear what we love, but what we believe in,' she says.

Given that ecology is about interconnectedness, it's great to see ethical fashion that joins the dots.

Gung-Ho, from £90, gung-ho-design.com

Email Lucy at lucy.siegle@observer.co.uk or follow her on Twitter @lucysiegle

Since you're here ...

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading the Guardian than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. And unlike many news organisations, we haven't put up a paywall – we want to keep our journalism as open as we can. So you can see why we need to ask for your help. The Guardian's independent, investigative journalism takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. But we do it because we believe our perspective matters - because it might well be your perspective, too.

I appreciate there not being a paywall: it is more democratic for the media to be available for all and not a commodity to be purchased by a few. I'm happy to make a contribution so others with less means still have access to information.
Thomasine F-R.

If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps to support it, our future would be much more secure.

Become a supporter → Make a contribution →

Topics
Ethical and green living | Ethical and green living with Lucy Siegle
Plastic bags | Plastics | Oceans | features

Reuse this content

Most popular in US


Failure to relaunch: Matthew McConaughey needs another McConaissance


US federal department is censoring use of term 'climate change', emails reveal

Secretive search for man behind Trump dossier reveals tension in Russia inquiry

Landlord troubles: rich San Franciscans in uproar after their private street is sold

Trump could be out of office within a year - but the US's problems would be just beginning | Paul Mason

comments (32)

Sign in or create your Guardian account to join the discussion.

Order by Newest | Threads Collapsed

SGde3a 30m ago 0
They keeping selling plastic bags at coles... its like they're trying to make a new continent of junk in the ocean some where.
Reply Share Report

subtropics 7h ago 1
Plastics along with the likes of the chemical industries are killing this planet, its biodiversity and all of us.
It's probably too late?
We seriously need a miracle, if there is such a thing!
Reply Share Report

View more comments

most viewed

Sign up to our daily email
Email address Sign up

become a supporter | advertise with us | terms & conditions | all topics
make a contribution | work for us | privacy policy | all contributors
securedrop | contact us | cookie policy | facebook
solve technical issue | complaints & corrections | digital newspaper archive | twitter

© 2017 Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.