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**NATIONAL  
RECYCLING WEEK**

**PLANET ARK**

# The Waste-Free Lunch Challenge

A toolkit for pre-school and early primary school teachers



This photo is from St Andrew's Anglican College in Qld, it appeared on [http://www.noosariver.com.au/wastewise/schools\\_corner.html](http://www.noosariver.com.au/wastewise/schools_corner.html) enquiries@saac.qld.edu.au or telephone 617 5471 5555.

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## About the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge

The purpose of the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge is to:

- ♻️ Help students and their parents understand the benefits of a waste-free lunch and to be more aware of over-packaging in food
- ♻️ Encourage students and their parents to meet the challenge of a waste-free lunch day or week
- ♻️ Minimise waste from lunches at your school

## Why Hold A Waste-Free Lunch Challenge?

Waste-free lunches benefit the environment by reducing packaging waste, which in turn reduces energy and resource use. Participating in a waste-free lunch activity also promotes sustainability awareness among students, parents and school staff.

Waste-free lunches tend to result in reduced litter and they encourage healthy eating. Often, highly processed foods are packaged while unprocessed snacks, such as fruit and vegetables, are not. As a quarter of Australian children aged 5 – 17 years are overweight or obese (National Health Survey 2007-08), combining healthier eating with waste-free lunches is a great way to meet social as well as environmental goals.

The Waste-Free Lunch Challenge was developed by Planet Ark Environmental Foundation as a resource for the Packaging Covenant Schools Recycle Right Challenge, an initiative of National Recycling Week. The Schools Recycle Right Challenge offers a wide range of recycling-themed activities, lesson plans and events ideas that have been developed specifically for Australian schools. Each resource has been developed to enable learning by doing, and learning by having fun!

**For more information on the Schools Recycle Right Challenge, visit [SchoolsRecycle.PlanetArk.org](http://SchoolsRecycle.PlanetArk.org)**

## About this Toolkit

This toolkit contains:

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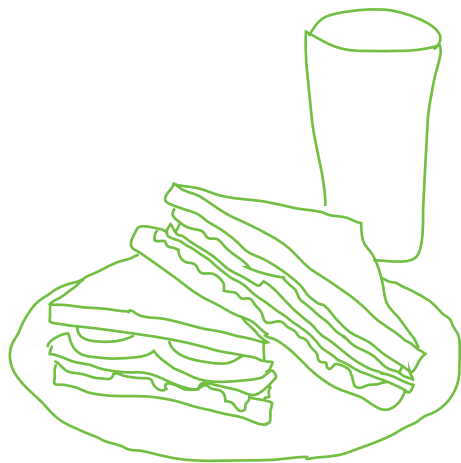
# Steps to holding a Waste-Free Lunch Challenge

There are many ways to hold a waste-free lunch day or week and the steps provided below are just one set of recommendations. We encourage you to modify these steps to best suit your school.

## Step 1: Work out the scale of your Waste-Free Lunch Challenge

**Will the entire school participate in the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge?** This is ideal, as the excitement generated by a whole-of-school activity will increase motivation and awareness.

**Will the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge be held for one day, one week, or one day a week for a whole term?** There are advantages to holding the *Challenge* over a week as the practice of bringing a waste-free lunch becomes a habit and there is more time to appreciate the benefits of switching to reusable containers. However, the appropriate duration and frequency will depend on your school's unique situation.



**Can the school canteen get involved to provide waste-free lunches to children who may not be able to bring one from home?** With enough preparation and discussion, the canteen may be able to prepare lunches that can be served in reusable containers that children bring from

home. The canteen will need to work out a menu of waste-free food items (e.g. sandwiches, yoghurt, fruit salad, drinks) and advise students which type of receptacles are needed (e.g. a reusable plate or container for sandwiches, a reusable cup or small container for yoghurt).

## Step 2: Assess the composting and recycling systems at your school

**Does your school currently have composting/worm farming and recycling systems?** These are important elements for helping students achieve a waste-free lunch at school. They are also excellent for teaching students about sustainability and for improving your school's operational sustainability. For information on how to set up compost/worm farming at your school, see [Costa's Guide to Composting and Worm Farming for Schools](#). For more information on how to set up recycling systems at your school, please refer to the [How To Set Up A Recycling System Guide](#).

If it's not feasible to collect recyclables within your school, part of the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* can involve asking students and staff to take their recyclable items home. They can check which recycling services are available for their household by visiting [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](#).





### Step 3: Conduct a waste audit before starting the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge

Before starting the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge*, carry out a lunchtime waste audit with your class. This will give you information about the type and quantity of waste generated in your school before undertaking the *Challenge*. At the end of the *Challenge*, you can use the same methods to see whether your school has reduced waste as a result of your efforts.

A simple waste audit process, suitable for pre-school and early primary school grades, is provided in the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge Activities – Teachers’ Notes* on page 6.

### Step 4: Introduce the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge to your students and colleagues

If the whole school is involved in the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge*, holding a presentation during school assembly is a great way to introduce the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* to all students and staff.

Within the classroom, use *Activity A* on page 8 to discuss examples of a waste-generating lunch and compare it to a waste-free lunch. The activities

suggested in this toolkit are designed for children in pre-school or early primary school. If your students are older (mid-primary to early secondary) you may wish to use the **Packaging Lesson Plan**.

Use the adaptable poster provided (page 12) to remind students and staff about the upcoming Waste-Free Lunch Challenge. If participating, the school canteen will need to advertise its waste-free meal options in advance so that parents can plan accordingly.

### Step 5: Introduce the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge to parents and guardians

For homework, ask your students to show their Activity Sheet to their parents or guardians and to explain what they have learnt in class. Provide your students with a letter for their parents or guardians, which explains the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* (a template letter is provided on page 10), as well as the ‘*Tips for Waste-Free Lunches*’ on page 11.

It’s a good idea to provide a contact person for parents to ring if they are unsure about the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge*.



## Step 6: Hold the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge

### Measure progress

Conducting another waste audit during the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* will allow your students to compare their results to those recorded prior to the *Challenge*. If the *Challenge* is being held over a week, create a giant chart that measures the progress of the class or school and hang it prominently in a public area. If you took photos of sample lunches during the first waste audit, take more photos during the *Challenge* so that your class has a visual comparison.

### Make it fun!

Make the *Challenge* as fun as possible by combining it with other recycling and sustainability-related activities. Check out the ideas and resources available for teachers and educators on Planet Ark's Schools Recycle Right Challenge website ([SchoolsRecycle.PlanetArk.org](http://SchoolsRecycle.PlanetArk.org)). You could also look into organising a group or communal lunch for the class(es).

If school policy allows, take photos during the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* for a story in the next school newsletter or for the classroom wall.

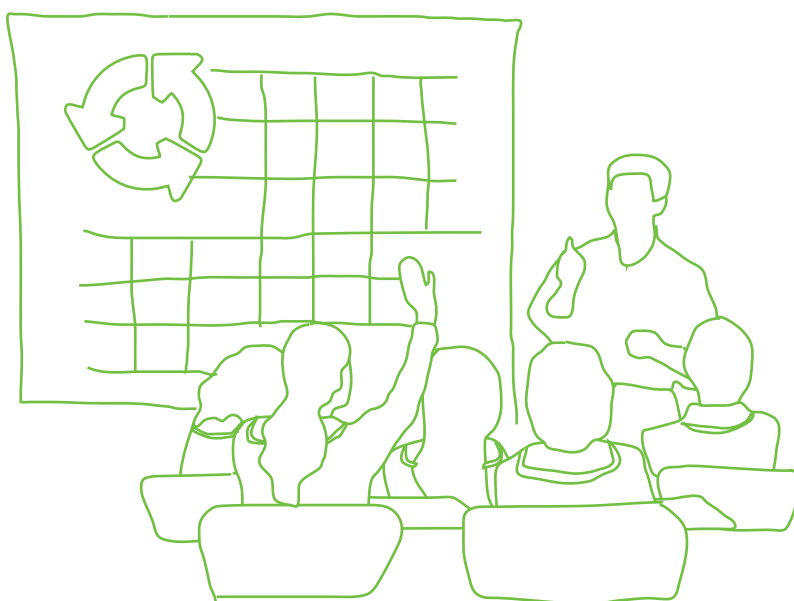
### Sensitivities

Children in pre-school and early-primary school grades are particularly reliant on their parents to choose and pack their lunches. During the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge*, some of the students may bring lunches containing throw-away waste items. Children with special dietary or religious needs may also need to continue bringing pre-packaged food items in their lunch. Plan ahead for how you can ensure that other children will understand if a classmate's lunch is not waste-free, and that children are not embarrassed by the reactions of others to their lunch.

## Step 7: Reinforce change

Congratulate your students on successfully completing the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge*. If you've kept an audit or chart of lunchtime waste before and during the *Challenge*, they'll be able to see the tangible result of their efforts. Giving each child a certificate is another positive reinforcement – an adaptable template is provided at the end of the Guide.

Once your class or school has gone waste-free for a day or a week, it's even easier to do it again! Some schools even choose to hold waste-free lunches once a week for a term. This reinforces the practices learnt from the initial *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* and children (and parents) are more likely to adopt them as a habit.



# Waste-Free Lunch Challenge Activities – Teachers’ Notes

These activities are designed for pre-school and early primary school students.

## Activity: Conducting a Pre-Challenge Waste Audit

Use these steps as a guide to help your class conduct a simple waste audit.

1. Choose a day or a week before the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge* has commenced. Ask your students to keep all of their packaging and waste from recess and lunch.
2. In the classroom or another designated area, place nine large containers labelled with the following categories: plastic containers, glass, milk and juice cartons, paper and cardboard, metal, squeeze pouches, chip packets, plastic wrap and bags, and food scraps. On the first day, the class can work collectively to identify their packaging items and sort them into one of these nine categories.
3. After each recess and lunch, ask your students to continue placing their packaging and waste items into the correct boxes.



4. Keep a tally of the number of items collected in each box over the week or the day. Groups of students can be allocated this task over different recess and lunch periods. Ask the students to fill in the results on a large chart.
5. Optional: take a photo of some of your students’ lunches to capture a visual representation of the composition of their lunches.

ITEM	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	TOTAL
Milk and juice cartons						
Plastic containers						
Glass						
Paper and cardboard						
Metal						
Squeeze pouches						
Chip packets						
Plastic wrap and bags						
Food scraps						

## Activity: Discussing Waste-Free Lunches

Discuss the concept of waste-free lunches with your class. *Activity A* on page 8 may be useful to prompt your students to think about how food can be brought to school in a waste-free way.

## Activity: Comparing Packaging for Bulk and Single-Serve

For this activity (relating to *Activity B* on the students' *Activity Sheet*), you'll need a weighing scale, a 2 litre drink carton (or similar) and as many single-serve drink containers (e.g. foil pouches or poppers) as are equivalent in volume to the large carton.

Ask the students to weigh the large container, then the smaller containers all together. Ask them to compare the amount and type of packaging in each.

The smaller containers will collectively weigh more than the larger container as there is more packaging in total. Ask the students to talk about the differences in the packaging in terms of resource use and recycling. Which option would fill up a recycling bin faster?

## Activity: Discussing Recycling

Although it's important to try to reduce the amount of packaging we use, recycling whatever packaging we can is much better than throwing it in the rubbish bin.

Discuss the concept of recycling with your students. For more resources on recycling, see Planet Ark's recycling-related teaching resources on the **Schools Recycle Right Challenge website**. These resources include posters, fact sheets, lesson plans, colouring-in sheets, physical activity games and recycled arts and crafts.

Use *Activity C* on page 9 to help your students determine what can be recycled at your school. If recycling is not available at your school, change the activity to 'What can I recycle at home' and

discuss what they can recycle at home (check [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](http://RecyclingNearYou.com.au) for information on the recycling services available to households in your school's area). Students who have recyclable items in their lunch can then be encouraged to take them home for recycling.

## Activity: Drawing pictures of their lunch

In this activity, students draw a picture of their lunchboxes, complete with food items inside, during the *Waste-Free Lunch Challenge*. Ask your students to explain to the class, or each other, how their waste-free lunch is different from a waste-generating lunch.



# Waste-free Lunches

Waste-free lunches contain only items that are eaten, composted or recycled.

They don't contain wrappers or packaging that will be thrown in the rubbish bin.

## Activity A: Let's look at food in reusable containers

Waste-free lunches are often packed in reusable containers. Here are some pictures of foods that have been packed in a reusable container. Can you name the food in each picture?



Photo credits (left to right then down): flickr/Stephen Cummings; Anna Doubell; flickr/plouay; flickr/plouay; flickr/plouay; flickr/Stephen Cummings; flickr/eskay8



## Activity B: Large containers, small containers – what's the difference?

A reusable drink bottle is a good way to bring water, milk, juice and other drinks to school. We can fill them up from big containers at home.

There is less packaging in one large drink container





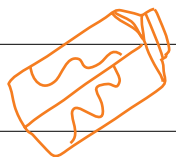
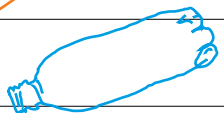
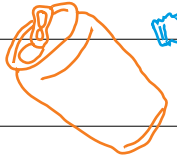
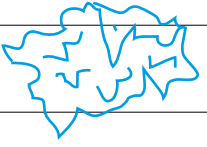

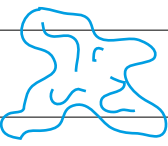

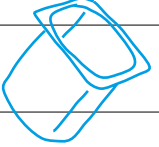


than in many small drink containers



## Activity C: What can I recycle at school?

Some types of packaging can be recycled. Although it's important to try to reduce the amount of packaging we use, recycling whatever packaging we can is much better than throwing it in the rubbish bin.

In the table below, draw a happy face next to those items that can be recycled at school. Draw a sad face if they can't be recycled and must be thrown into the rubbish bin.

	Can recycle at school 	Can't recycle at school 
Juice or milk carton 		
Plastic drink bottle 		
Aluminium can 		
Aluminium foil 		
Paper bag 		
Plastic wrap (e.g. cling wrap) 		
Chip packet 		
Plastic tub (e.g. single-serve tub of yoghurt or fruit salad) 		
Squeeze pouch 		
Tin (e.g. small tin of fruit pieces) 		

# A template letter for parents

Dear Parents,

<Class Name(s)> at <School Name> is holding a Waste-Free Lunch Challenge <on / from> <insert date period>.

<On this/these days / During this period>, we ask that your child's lunch contain as few items as possible that must be thrown away. Ideally, your child's lunch will only contain items that will be eaten, composted or recycled.

Examples of how to pack waste-free lunch items are provided in the attached guide. Reusable containers are a handy way to pack a waste-free lunch. They also make it easy to buy food and drink in bulk (instead of in single-servings) which can save money over time.

The Waste-Free Lunch Challenge is one of <School Name>'s sustainability education initiatives. By participating, students will have a better understanding of how we can take action to reduce our waste. Waste-free lunches also save money and promote healthy eating.

*[If the school canteen has agreed to provide waste-free lunches]:* If your child cannot bring a waste-free lunch from home, the school canteen can provide waste-free lunches <on the day / during the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge>. *[Provide details of what lunches will be served including prices, and details of what type of container the students need to bring].* All your child needs to do is bring reusable receptacles into which the lunch will be served, e.g. a reusable container, plate, bowl or cup, and reusable fork, spoon and /or knife.

*[If applicable]:* Fruit and vegetable scraps (e.g. apple cores and banana skins) will be composted at the school through our compost/worm farming system.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge, please don't hesitate to contact <Name of Designated Contact Person> on <Phone number>.

Thank you for supporting your child's participation in <School Name>'s Waste-Free Lunch Challenge.

Yours sincerely,

<School principal, teacher, coordinator, administrator etc>

# Tips for Waste-Free Lunches

Waste-free lunches contain only items that are eaten, composted or recycled. They don't contain wrappers or packaging that will be thrown in the rubbish bin.

## Example of lunch items with waste

Sandwich in disposable cling wrap or plastic sandwich bag

Chips or pretzels in a plastic/foil packet

Juice in a squeeze pouch, with a plastic straw

Yoghurt in squeeze pouches or plastic 'shot' bottles

Individually-wrapped muesli bars

Pre-packaged fruit salad in a small plastic tub or tin

Pre-packaged 'snack pack' of crackers and cheese spread

Individually-wrapped confectionary bars or cakes

Individually-wrapped cheese sticks / strings

Disposable cutlery

Paper serviette

## Example of items in a waste-free lunch

Sandwich in a snug-fitting reusable container

Snacks in a reusable container

Water, juice or other drinks in a reusable and resealable bottle, filled at home from a bulk container

Yoghurt in a small reusable container, filled at home from a bulk container

'Trail mix' in a reusable container

Whole fruits without packaging or fruit pieces in reusable containers

Raw or salad vegetables such as carrot, lettuce, tomato, cucumber and celery, plus a small container of dip.

Muffin, fruit bread or biscuits in a reusable container

Cubes/slices of cheese in a reusable container

Durable cutlery that is designed to be washed and reused

Washable cloth napkin

**Reusable containers** – Using reusable containers is the cornerstone of a waste-free lunch! Suitably sized containers will keep sandwiches intact and make little treats easy to pack. Although reusable containers may have a higher upfront cost than a roll of plastic wrap, they are durable, they will save you money in the longer term and they will help to reduce waste.

**Buying in bulk** – Buying items such as juice, yoghurt, crackers, biscuits and cheese in bulk quantities or containers, rather than in individual servings, will probably save you money as well as reduce waste. It also allows your child to drink or eat only as much as they want at one time, and then they can reseal the container.

**Recyclable packaging** – We understand that some children's lunches may need to contain packaged food items for dietary, religious or other reasons. Check which types of packaging are recycled at the school (there is a guide on the Activity Sheet). You can also check which items can be recycled at home, by visiting [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](http://RecyclingNearYou.com.au) and searching under your council area. This information may be relevant for your bulk containers at home, or if recycling is not available through the school.

Packing a bottle of **frozen drink** with the lunch will give your child a cold drink and also keep the lunch cool.

Lastly, **join the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge!** Seeing you go waste-free for lunch at the same time is the best possible motivation for your child.

# is taking part in the **Waste-Free Lunch Challenge!**

all students and staff are encouraged to bring waste-free lunches to school

**Reuse**

- Reusable food containers
- Reusable forks, spoons and knives
- Refillable drink bottles
- Cloth napkins

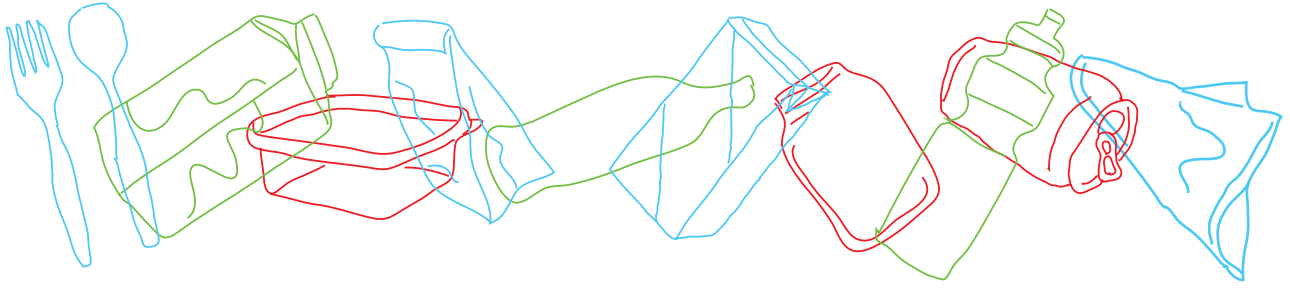
**Recycle**

- Milk and juice cartons
- Aluminium cans
- Paper
- Glass

Compost your food scraps

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