

Making Ripples

Adventures Against Take-Out Containers

by Amanda Bancroft

It was a cold winter day, and the smell of coffee drew me inside the café area. Past the bookshelves, the greeting cards, and the small tables where people sat hunching towards their partner in conversation, I approached the counter. Deciding on a caramel latte, I ordered a small mug over the whirl of the coffee machines. Perhaps because it was hard to hear me, or because he was on autopilot, the barista reached for a disposable cup, squeezing syrup into it just as my hand shot out to remind him about the mug. Shrugging apologetically, he tossed the disposable cup away and began again!

Sad to see another cup headed for the landfill, I have since approached this situation with foxy preparedness. Of course, I try to remember my Chococat (friend to Hello Kitty) mug, but if I forget, there are entertaining ways around it. For the barista who suggests I use a disposable cup so she won't have to wash another mug, I offer to wash the cup for her. For the seemingly hard-of-hearing, I have another tactic some might find slightly offensive. Following the example of Zorro's sidekick, I pretend to be deaf and mute for the betterment of our world and one less disposable cup. This works well, because the server will have to read the order I write on a piece of paper, which takes them out of autopilot mode.

To get a to-go order of French fries, I use a Tupperware container and say it keeps the fries hot longer. For a burrito bowl at Chipotle, we say the order is "for here", then after paying, whip out our Chipotle bowl lid which we reuse several times. In my backpack, I carry chopsticks and a metal fork and spoon so I won't need plastic ones. New employees at Wasabi are quickly trained in the art of wastelessness once I explain about my bento box for sushi!

I often get odd looks, but those don't go to the landfill! According to CarryYourCup.org, styrofoam cups in the landfill today will still be around 500 years from now, which is also the number of cups used by the average American office worker. Placed end-to-end, America's annual paper coffee cup total (over 14 billion) would wrap around the Earth 55 times! It's my job as a customer to assert my sustainable choice, and change the cultural habit. Luckily, local businesses are helping.

Jammin' Java offers 10% off their coffee if you bring your own reusable mug, and gives a \$1 refill. "We encourage people to bring their own cup," says Catherine Witherspoon, Jammin' Java employee. Arsaga's also promotes reusable mugs, giving ten cents off a coffee when the customer brings in their thermos or mug. Nice!

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org