



# Creative Containers



**Purpose:** Students will learn how to upcycle items that would normally end up in the landfill.

**Background:** (Information courtesy of Project Learning Tree)

Straws, plastic water bottles, and plastic bags belong to a group of materials known as single-use plastics. Here are some facts that show how ubiquitous single-use plastics have become:

- Half a million straws are used in the world every day.
- Each minute 1,000,000 plastic bottles are purchased worldwide, yet only about 23% of plastic bottles are recycled within the U.S.
- Americans purchase about 50 billion water bottles per year, averaging about 13 bottles per month for every person in the U.S.! That means by using a reusable water bottle, you could save an average of 156 plastic bottles annually.
- An estimated 4 trillion plastic bags are used worldwide each year.
- Americans throw away 100 billion plastic bags each year, which equates to about 306 plastic bags per person. All that waste can be eliminated by switching to reusable shopping bags.
- 500 billion disposable cups are consumed every year. Americans alone throw away 25 billion polystyrene coffee cups every year. Polystyrene cannot be completely recycled. Most of the Styrofoam disposed of today will still be present in landfills 500 years from now. The main cause for the increase in plastic production is plastic packaging. Plastic packaging was 42% of all non-fiber plastic produced in 2015, and it also made up 52% of plastics thrown away.
- Even when single-use plastics are sent to landfills (there are 3,091 active landfills in the U.S. alone), they aren't harmless. Landfill liners can leak harmful pollutants into the watershed and plastics on the tops of landfills can be carried away by the wind. The best way to curb single-use plastic pollution is to reduce your personal plastic consumption!
- Single-use plastics do not always make it to the landfill or get recycled. Thirty-two percent of the plastics produced each year flow into our oceans. That equates to one garbage truck of plastic being poured into our oceans every minute.

**Materials per group:** (Preparation Before the Lesson: obtain soil to fill container, seeds or small plants)

recycled container: examples: water jug with top cut off, shoe, sock, colander, burlap bag, plastic bucket, plastic pail, basket, any size plastic water container, etc., nail & hammer or drill. Option: decorating supplies for containers – googly eyes, permanent markers, yarn, ribbon, etc.

\*If there are no drainage holes in the containers, use a nail and hammer or drill to make some.

## Activity:

1. Distribute containers to each child. Option: decorate container
2. Fill the container almost to the top with soil.
3. Plant seeds or transplant a plant into the container. Top off by adding more soil if needed.
4. Talk about what a plant needs to grow: air, water, sun, space.
5. Water the plant and place it in the sun.
6. Observe over time.