

RYE DRIFTWOOD GARDEN CLUB

Topic: Save the Straw!

2018 Environmental Report

By Carol Bourret

There is a new movement that has gone global and I want to share this information with you so you will be in the know. It's called "Save the Straw" or "The Last Plastic Straw".

Yes, the straw, the ordinary simple drinking straw. What's the big deal? It is small, often wrapped in flimsy paper, disposable, doesn't cost much, they are found everywhere, restaurants, drive thru, bars, kids and adults use them. So innocuous, what could be bad about them, what harm can they do?

Well, according to *The Last Plastic Straw*, 500 million straws are disposed of daily in the US, that is 175 billion a year filling landfills, littering our waterways and oceans. Enough straws to wrap around the circumference of the earth 2.5 times, a day. Or enough to fill Yankee Stadium over 9 times a year!

The United Kingdom will implement a ban on plastic straws as early as next year (2019), becoming the first country to do so.

Locally, the Blue Ocean Society, last year picked up 1,700 straws at their beach cleanups, nearly half of those were on Hampton Beach. Straws are routinely on the Top Ten lists of cleanups globally.

According to research that sheds new light on how the artificial, toxic substance is getting into the food chain, they say the plastic starts to smell like food to fish after it has been in the water. Fish, seabirds, whales, dolphins, seals, turtles swallow plastic bags and straws thinking it is food.

There is a video that has gone viral, that I could not watch, about an Olive Ridley sea turtle that researchers off the coast of Costa Rica found with a 4" plastic straw sticking out of his nostril that they needed to remove. It's likely that the sea turtle accidentally swallowed the straw, and then had it stuck up its nostril while trying to cough the straw out.

Think about it, for an item that is "single use", that maybe we use for 20 minutes ~ it will take hundreds of years to break down. "We are grownups; we can drink out of a glass *without* a straw."

If you're not an environmentalist and really don't care about saving marine life or trash, think about this, straws can add pucker to your cheeks, create wrinkles around your mouth and inspire intestinal gas. Just saying. . .

If you need or like using straws, purchase reusable straws. There are many options available from bamboo, glass, silicone, stainless steel. They are easy to throw into your purse or suit coat.

RYE DRIFTWOOD GARDEN CLUB

A little history lesson on straws:

In the US in the 1800's it was common to use a rye grass straw for drinks but it had an unfortunate tendency to turn to mush in liquid.

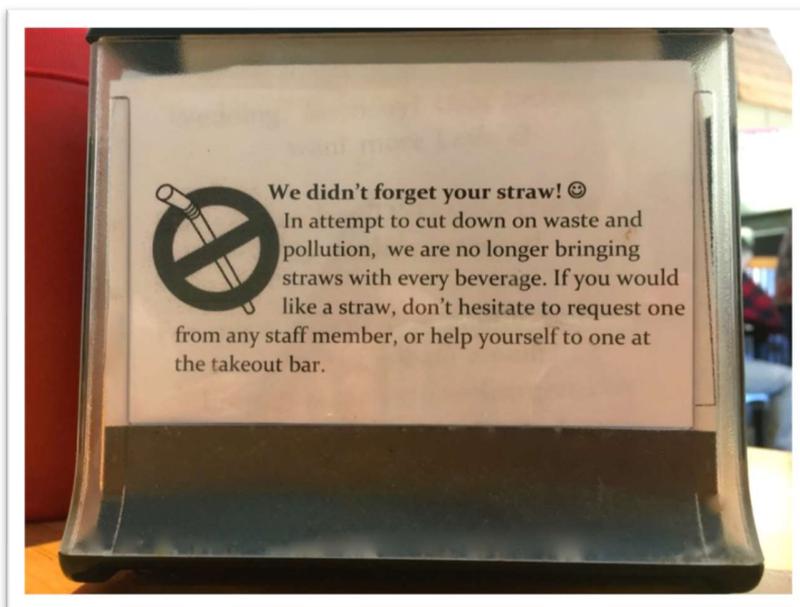
While Marvin Stone was **drinking** a mint julep in 1888 on a hot day in Washington, D.C.; the taste of the rye was mixing with the drink and giving it a grassy taste, which he found unsatisfactory and came up with an idea. He wound paper around a pencil to make a thin tube, slid out the pencil from one end, and applied glue between the strips. He later refined it by building a machine that would coat the outside of the paper with wax to hold it together, so the glue wouldn't dissolve in his bourbon.

What can I do?

1: Go to the website of "The Last Plastic Straw". Sign their pledge to join the movement to help keep your community pollution free and stop plastic pollution at the source.

2: **Make a personal commitment to say "no" to plastic straws.** Whenever ordering a drink, politely request "no straw, please." Encourage and educate your friends and family, too.

3: Reach out to some local eateries in your neighborhood or town and ask them to change their protocol to **only serve straws upon request.** Encourage those eateries to make a change to **non-plastic straw options** - like paper - if diners do request a straw.



Picture is from Portsmouth eatery.

RYE DRIFTWOOD GARDEN CLUB

1. Plastic Straws can't be easily Recycled

Straws are most commonly made from type 5 plastic, or polypropylene.

Although type 5 plastic can be recycled, it isn't accepted by most curbside recycling programs. When plastic straws aren't recycled, they end up in landfills, or even worse, polluting our oceans. Check your local municipality website to see if plastic straws can be recycled in your area.

2. Plastics do not Biodegrade, and never fully Degrade

In order to understand the environmental impact of straws, it is important to know the difference between biodegrading and degrading:

Biodegrading is when an item can be naturally broken down and digested by micro-organisms, and then naturally recycled into new organic molecules and life.

On the other hand, **degrading** is just the process of breaking down into smaller pieces. When plastic degrades, the bulk of the plastic will seem to disappear – However, what's really happening is the plastic is breaking into smaller, invisible pieces that will always still be on Earth.

With that being said, **plastic straws take up to 200 years to degrade, but will never be fully off the Earth**, as plastics are not **biodegradable**. To make matters worse, the degrading of plastic releases chemicals that are toxic to wildlife and the environment.

3. Straws are littered very often, and harm Ocean Wildlife

Plastic straws never fail to make it on the list for the most found litter for ocean coastline cleanup. Straws and other plastic objects polluting our oceans are having a negative impact on marine life. Straws are also especially dangerous to seabirds, as they can be easily picked up and swallowed, suffocating and choking the bird. In fact, over 1 million seabirds die each year from ingesting plastic.