

Over Plastic Straws? These Designers Have a Few Other Ideas for Reducing Your Plastic Waste

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Runway



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VOGUE

by [Emily Farra](#)







Girlfriend Collective's new Lite leggings use Econyl's fabric made from discarded fishing nets, carpet fluff, and other waste. They also come in a wide range of sizes, from XXS to XXXL.

Photo: Courtesy of Girlfriend Collective
Are plastic straws the new cigarettes? Maybe that's a little extreme, but in the week or so since Starbucks, American Airlines, and the entire city of Seattle announced that they're going straw-free, those little plastic tubes have begun to feel like a dirty habit. (Our own cafeteria here at One World Trade Center has gone strawless, too.) It's serendipitous timing, considering we're at the height of summer—i.e., peak cold-brew season. Our Instagram feeds have become an endless scroll of friends showing off their new no-plastic-straw lifestyles, either by drinking their coffee through a reusable (and chic!) copper straw, or by sipping it the old-fashioned way.



Ditching your straw is a small victory you can feel good about, and it's greatly heightened awareness of plastic waste in general. Straws are a serious offender because they're single-use (plastic utensils are also a culprit) and according to For a Strawless Ocean, most straws are too lightweight to make it through a mechanical recycling sorter, so they slip through the cracks and contaminate recycling loads or end up in a landfill, where they won't break down. Ultimately, millions of discarded straws and other pieces of plastic end up in the ocean, where they've severely harmed wildlife. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation writes that at this rate, the oceans could contain more plastic than sea life by 2050.

Fixing the problem clearly goes way beyond your morning cup. On a big-picture scale, companies need to start using less plastic in general, but what about all of that plastic floating around the ocean? Several designers are addressing it with new technology that's turning ocean plastic into fabric: Adidas and Stella McCartney have partnered with Parley for the Oceans on shoes, clothing, and accessories in a special yarn comprised of Parley Ocean Plastic, which is upcycled waste found on the beach. Then there's Girlfriend Collective, an indie athletic brand dedicated to sustainability: Each pair of compression leggings repurposes 25 water bottles; its T-shirts are made from 100 percent Cupro, a natural byproduct of the woodcutting industry; and its dyes are eco-friendly. Girlfriend's latest release, the Lite legging,

is made with [Econyl](#), a fabric by the Italian company Aquafil comprised of discarded nylon fishing nets found in the ocean. To feel the leggings, you'd never know they were made of trash; they're sleek, stretchy, and supersoft—and as a bonus, they're extremely light and moisture-wicking, which makes them ideal for hot days. On the site, the product description cheekily reads: "Lite was made for all those heated workouts like hot yoga, cycling, and picking up trash on the beach."



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The Lite leggings were a year and a half in the making, so it's something of a coincidence that they're launching in tandem with the straw ban. But they were first and foremost designed as a response to Girlfriend's shoppers asking for thinner, lighter leggings: "We had so many customers who loved the softness, thickness, compression, and support they got from our first leggings, and they wanted a product with the same [qualities] but in a lighter weight," cofounder Quang Dinh tells *Vogue*. "From that feedback, we went through the same rigorous product development cycle that we used on our first legging and were finally able to come out with something that we're proud of." Girlfriend will be introducing bodysuits and sports bras in the Econyl fabric, too.

Swimwear designers are also using Econyl and other recycled-plastic materials, including [Araks Yeramyian](#); [Tropic of C's](#) Candice Swanepoel; [Vitamin A's](#) Amahlia Stevens; and [Mara Hoffman](#), who uses Econyl as well as [Repreve](#). There's a reason these fabrics are mainly popular with athletic and swim brands: They're sleek, techy, and quick-drying, so they're well suited to body-conscious performance pieces, but few designers are testing recycled plastic fabrics in ready-to-wear, too: [Maggie Marilyn's](#) Resort 2019 collection included a full, pleated

white skirt made from 100 percent recycled plastic water bottles. Similarly, Svilu's Marina Polo and Britt Cosgrove developed a taffeta with post-consumer bottles, which has a silky, semi-stiff finish on their Vestry dress. (Then, of course, there's Stella McCartney, who has been moving the needle in her ready-to-wear line with glue-less sneakers, recycled nylon fibers, and a new, non-PVC material she developed for clear "Lucite" shoes.)

Gabriela Hearst is rethinking plastic waste in another way: shipping. She recently swapped out her plastic packaging for compostable Tipa bags, which biodegrade in 24 weeks (as opposed to 500-plus years, which is how long it can take plastic to do the same). That may not be the sexiest talking point, but we can't think of many other designers who are analyzing their impact quite so closely. In a few years, we have a feeling plastic hangers, price tags, and buttons will be next to go; in the meantime, scroll through a few of our favorite game-changing, upcycled-plastic looks in the slideshow above.



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