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BEYOND THE BOX

Options grow for parents seeking safe containers for lunches

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BuiltNY's lead-free animal-shaped Munchler bags, made of polypropylene, are sure to make the kids smile.

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Thinking about what you're packing for your kid's lunch isn't enough these days. Now you've got to think about what you're packing it in.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Web site, between 1960 and 2007, the amount of waste each person generates jumped from 2.7 to 4.6 pounds per day.

If that's not enough to make you think green, add a growing lexicon of things parents are being encouraged to avoid in lunch boxes and food containers, including bisphenol A (BPA), PVC and lead.

When it comes to lead-free and BPA-free lunch boxes, availability is increasing.

Products such as Kids Konsense, ECOlunchbox Kit, Laptop Lunches, Lunchopolis, Snack Taxi and Lunch Skins were created by moms.

Leads on lead-free items

Madison-based Oompa Toys, which sells kid products at [Oompa.com](#) and its store, has pretty much phased out any items with bisphenol A, and all of the lunch boxes, bottles and food containers it carries are lead-free. Popular brands include Mimi the Sardine, Crocodile Creek, Dante Beatrix, Dabbawalla and Allerhand.

Neoprene, the wetsuit material, pops up in a variety of reusable bags, including the Tasty Lunch Tote from BuiltNY (\$20 to \$22, [builtny.com](#)). For younger kids, BuiltNY makes polypropylene animal-shaped Munchler bags (\$10 to \$15, available at Beans & Barley on Milwaukee's east side).

Mimi the Sardine's machine-washable, insulated Lunchbugs (\$23.95, [mimithesardine.com](#)) use acrylic-coated cotton that meets Oeko-Tek 100 standards. For parents, that means fabrics are not created using harsh chemicals that may be harmful.

ECOlunchbox Kits (\$45, [ecolunchboxes.com](#)) feature handmade cotton bags, stainless steel containers, a bamboo spork and cloth napkins.

If converting to a green lunchbox sounds confusing, just start small:

- **Trade in your sandwich bags.** Ziploc's new Evolve sandwich and snack bags are manufactured with wind power, made with 25% less plastic and packaged in recycled paperboard (\$2.19 to \$2.99).

"S.C. Johnson's food storage products, including Ziploc brand bags and containers and Saran brand wraps, do not contain bisphenol A," said Jenny Taylor, director of global affairs for Racine-based SC Johnson.

- **Opt for reusable packaging.** Try to generate as little trash as possible at lunch. Laptop Lunches and Lunchopolis lunch kits include bags and containers. Both are available at Outpost Natural Foods; Whole Foods carries Laptop Lunches.

- **Skip juice boxes and plastic bottles** in favor of stainless steel. Try BPA-free Thermos FUNtainers, available for beverages and food (\$15.99 each, available at Target and [thermos.com](#)). Crocodile Creek also makes stainless steel bottles with kid-friendly designs (\$9.99 at [oompa.com](#)).

Stainless steel containers with stainless steel lids are available from LunchBots. The most popular styles are Uno and Duo (\$14.99 each, [lunchbots.com](#)). Recent demand for LunchBots has been so high that the manufacturer is out of stock until Oct. 1; however they're in stock at [Amazon.com](#) and [Reusablebags.com](#).

- **Instead of plastic utensils, try bamboo.** Bambu makes an organic dino knife, fork and spoon set (\$8.99, [oompa.com](#)).

- **For machine-washable snack and sandwich bags,** try Snack Taxi ([snacktaxi.com](#)) or Lunch Skins ([3greenmoms.com](#)).

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