

Lifestyle

School lunches: How to pack an eco lunchbox for your kid

From Bumkins to vegan backpacks, how to be eco-friendly



Bumkins reusable snack bags (Bumkins)

By **KAREN D'SOUZA** | kdsouza@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: August 28, 2017 at 12:10 pm | UPDATED: September 6, 2017 at 10:04 am

Gaggles of pint-sized tykes have marched back to school, toting home made lunches in their sporty new backpacks. But what's inside those lunchboxes may be a little different than you remember.

As environmental awareness grows and more schools pursue zero waste goals, you can kiss those brown paper sacks and Ziploc bags goodbye, unless you want your kids to get shamed about their anti-eco lunches. Trust us, we have been there.

This is a quick and handy cheatsheet for any parent who has had to survive their kid coming home in tears on Earth Day when their lunch didn't pass inspection because they had a granola bar in its wrapper and grapes in plastic containers (heaven forbid!).



Stainless steel containers with silicone lids from ECOLunchbox (ECOLunchbox)

If you want to bone up on the subject you should can also check out [Cal Recycle](#) and [Waste Free Lunches](#), which have exhaustive details on how parents and schools can cut down on waste. But if you're short on time, here is a breezy guide to give the old lunchbox an eco makeover.

Let's begin with banishing the plastic baggies of yore. One alternative is a reusable eco-friendly bag. [Bumkins](#) makes sturdy ones of recycled materials that come in a variety of sizes and a slew of cheerful patterns, including owls and dinosaurs. They are dishwasher safe so you don't have to dread those inevitable food explosions. Go with the little ones (\$7.95 for two) for small recess-worthy snacks.

Next up, we trade away the beloved plastic tubs for stainless steel lunch containers. Admittedly plastic containers are reusable but a lot of schools frown on plastic and many parents are concerned about potential chemicals that leach into food in general and exposure to phthalates, which have been related to endocrine disruption, in general.

Our favorite pick in this category comes from [ECOLunchbox](#), which offers a dizzying array of shapes and sizes in its Bento Box line. Snacks of grapes or crackers fit inside a mini Seal Cup (\$9.99). A full sandwich or a piece of pizza tucks nicely inside the Splash Box (\$22.99). All of them come with silicone lids (no plastic) that are super easy for kids to open and leak proof. If you want to check them out in person, some Container Store, Target and Bed Bath and Beyond stores carry them.

As for utensils, ditch the plastic ones and try a stainless spork, like the nicely rounded one from ECOLunchbox (\$5.50), or just pack some old silverware from home. Make sure it's not a set you're attached to because not everything makes its way home.

The same goes for napkins. Switching to cloth napkins just requires adding them to the weekly laundry.



Stainless steel lunch boxes with silicone lids from ECOLunchbox (ECOLunchbox)

Also consider going with a thermos that's plastic free. You can't switch to glass for obvious reasons, but you can sip on the Scout collection from [EcoVessel](#). This fancy vacuum-insulated sippy cup has no plastic, no BPA and no liners (\$16.95). It's made from stainless steel with a silicone spout and a silicone straw. You should handwash it. Get a feel for these bottles at Home Depot or Kohl's.

You also can check out the nifty kiddo collection at [Green's Your Color](#) with its triple-insulated water bottles bedecked with kittens, dinos or owls. It's BPA free and you don't have to worry about a toxic inner liner (\$35.)

For extra green bonus points, you can top off your back to school ensemble with a vegan backpack. Seriously. The reversible [Chooze](#) (\$40.00) backpack (try donuts on one side, cupcakes on the other) allows you to switch sides when one gets grungy. That's environmentally sound and thrifty, too.



Karen D'Souza Karen D'Souza is the theater critic for the Mercury News and the Bay Area News Group papers. She is a three-time Pulitzer juror, a former USC/Getty Arts Journalism Fellow and a longtime member of the Glickman Drama Jury and the American Theatre Critics Association. She has a Master's Degree in Journalism from UC Berkeley. She is a Twitter addict (@KarenDSouza4), a fangirl and a mommy and her writings have appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Miami Herald, the San Francisco Chronicle and American Theatre Magazine.

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