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How to toss the tampon and save the Earth

By Adriana Ramirez | Thresher staff

Forget about oil and those plastic rings that hold your six-packs of diet-vanilla-cherry carbonated beverages. No, the real threat to the environment lies in bathroom cabinets everywhere ? the countless tampons that end up in landfills every year. 'But there's no alternative,' you may say. 'What can I do? I love my Playtex pearly tampon of doom ...' Don't resign yourself to a life of tampons or pads. After poking around and testing several alternatives, I have emerged from the Internet unscathed and with an answer: Throw away your synthetic products of earth-death and start living anew. Beyond the bizarre absorptive power of the tampon and the lumpy, fiber-full swathing that is the commercial pad, there is hope. Before I delve in, take a second to clear your mind and pretend that you are comfortable with your period. Boys, you too can be comfortable with menstruation. Just say it out loud: 'Menstruation.' Let the healing begin. Most 'natural' menstrual alternatives fall into two categories: exterior wear and interior wear. Washable cloth menstrual pads, the likes of which were seen in Victorian times, still exist, as do padded panties. When I say, 'padded panty,' I don't mean 'granny panty.' No, these fabulous britches come in all shapes and sizes. They are very subtle, and no one will note that your pants are packing a swinging fleece lining, if that's your thing. In the department of the interior we also have two alternatives: Sea Sponges and the menstrual cup, the most popular of which is the Keeper. Both products lack dioxin and rayon and do not have the same drying effects as tampons. Most importantly, neither have any of the health risks associated with regular tampon use, like toxic shock syndrome. Sea sponges are actually sponges from the sea, fancy that. But my choice in monthly care is the Keeper. The Keeper contains no dyes or chemicals and is made of either natural gum rubber from a non-tree-cutting process or 100 percent medical grade silicon. It works like this: You insert the cup into your vagina and the little cup catches your flow. The only drawback is that you have to empty one-and-one-half ounces of fluid as often as you would change a tampon and stick your hand in places you normally wouldn't want to. The good thing is that the Keeper will last approximately 10 years, can be cleaned in a dishwasher and sterilized, has a one-time cost of about \$30 and according to its Web site, does not deplete your 'essential vaginal moisture along with your menstrual flow.' I'm not sure what that means, but it sounds good. Sometimes I forget I'm wearing mine. It is rather comfortable, I never have to throw away tampons or pads in other people's restrooms, which is a little unnerving for me, and I can empty it and put it back in whenever I want without the worry of carrying a tampon or pad. If you are in a public restroom things can get a little icky, but once you have mastered the Keeper, every situation is manageable. There is no leakage, no discomfort and lots of smiling. I am not saying it works for everyone, but all the people I know who have tried it have liked it. I tried it primarily due to curiosity and am still using it one year later. I have never attended an Earth Day rally. Sometimes I forget to recycle. But I know that by wearing my little cup, I am not only saving money ? think about it: one \$20 box of tampons a month, times 12 months, times 10 years ? but also saving landfills from my bloody excess. And at the end of the day, that's a great feeling. I never thought I'd say that about my period.

Adriana Ramirez is a Lovett College senior.

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