

# Consumer Swaps: Laundry Detergent vs. Eco-Friendly Laundry Alternatives

## Environmental Impact of Laundry Detergent

The average laundry detergent contains micro plastics and a variety of harmful chemicals. Phosphate, for example, is commonly used and “[gets] into our waterways where they cause eutrophication (huge algae blooms) which suck up all the oxygen and suffocate fish and aquatic life.” (Webb) That is just one ingredient in a long list of environment-impacting ingredients often included in our detergents. These are often marketed as vital for keeping clothes clean, bright, and smelling fresh. In reality, a few natural ingredients are all that is necessary to achieve those results and they can be found in forms that are just as convenient as conventional detergents.

## Eco-Friendly Laundry Sheets and Powders

The first step to reducing this impact is to simply wash clothes less frequently. Even with a more eco-friendly detergent, washing clothes still requires a great deal of water and energy. Jeans, slacks, and sweaters worn with undershirts beneath can all generally be worn more than once before needing a trip in the washing machine. (Kellogg) If you have only worn an item for a few hours, check if it is soiled before determining if it should go in the hamper.

When it’s time to throw that hamper of clothes in the wash, consider using plastic-free laundry sheets or laundry powders. These environmentally friendly alternatives often have only a few natural ingredients which are safe for both the environment and your skin. Sheets are a more convenient option, requiring no measuring and washing your clothes as well as the conventional choice.

## Dryer Sheets and Softeners

“Fabric softeners became popular in the mid-1900s because the dyes, detergents, and dryers were harsh on clothes, making them rough and scratchy.” (Webb) For this reason, the eco-friendly products devoid of such caustic chemicals usually leave your clothes as soft as they were before. However, if you want to further soften your clothes or have previously used chemical-based products, wool dryer balls are a suitable, sustainable option. They can be used for up to 10,000 loads and reduce dryer time while softening your clothes over time. (Kellogg)

*Produced by the Utility Arborist Association Environmental Stewardship Committee and Davey Resource Group:*

### Works Cited

Kellogg, Kathryn. “Laundry Detergent: The 10 Best All-Natural, and Eco Friendly Options.” *Going Zero Waste*, 18 Aug. 2022, <https://www.goingzerowaste.com/blog/safe-all-natural-eco-friendly-laundry-detergent/>.

Webb, Charlie, et al. “Laundry Detergents Are Bad for the Environment and for You: Here’s Why and the 5 Best Eco-Friendly Alternatives.” *Vera*, 17 Mar. 2022, <https://www.vera-bee.com/blogs/news/>