



Avoiding Palm Oil

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Every one of us can contribute to saving the rainforest every day, whether it's choosing one product over another at the grocery store, donating a few dollars to rehabilitation efforts, sending an email to an irresponsible company, or explaining to a friend why you can't, in fact, pick up a certain brand of cookies. And one important way to deal with palm oil is to avoid it. Like contacting companies on a smaller scale, refusal to use unsustainable products can cause a ripple effect which spreads all the way to palm oil suppliers and producers, inducing a motivating reason for many companies to become sustainable.

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RAINFOREST CHALLENGE #3

Over the next three months, there are many opportunities to choose sustainable products. We at the Orangutan Gang encourage you to help us decrease palm oil use through this issue's Rainforest Challenge.

Did you know that 300,000 tons of candy was sold last year for Halloween alone? Much of that candy contained palm oil. This year, we challenge you to try buying entirely sustainable Halloween candy. Check out [our interactive infographic](#) for more sustainability information!

ORANGUTAN GANG NEWS

Palm oil is common in many products that you'll see throughout the next several months. You can research palm oil free products for Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the holidays through our interactive infographics, available on our [Resources Page](#).

In addition to these dangerous holidays, [Orangutan Caring Week](#) is just around the corner! The dates this year are November 10-16 and the theme is Respecting the Rights of Critically Endangered Species.

Speaking of critically endangered species, the world's rarest great ape is facing fragmentation in northern Sumatra. Tapanuli orangutan habitat is still being destroyed for the Batang Toru Dam. [Take action](#) to save these beautiful apes today!

You can find information about the Orangutan Gang's planned events over on our [Upcoming Events page](#). Thank you for saving the rainforest today!



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Heidi Hill

"My name is Heidi Hill, and I am a middle school educator in the discipline of Family and Consumer Science. I became interested in palm oil education through reading an Orangutan Gang blog post and am now a proud member of the Orangutan Gang. I have become an educated and selective consumer regarding grocery product selection. I also teach consumer research pieces to my students and in part, I teach about avoiding the use of palm oil. Because I have a formal education in Food Chemistry and Clinical Nutrition, I have taught myself the skill of reading labels, and I have learned to discern which products have misleading ingredients hiding vegetable oils. Joining the Orangutan Gang has made me feel like part of a global solution to the palm oil issue that is currently wiping out our rainforests and endangering at least 193 species including the orangutan and Sumatran elephant. Depleting palms for the purpose of oil is a direct threat to the biodiversity of our planet, and a practice that our planet cannot sustain. My hope is that the Orangutan Gang's passion for the preservation of our planet will be contagious to others like it has been to me."

If you are an Orangutan Gang member looking to be featured in an upcoming Member Spotlight, contact us at orangutangang.org@gmail.com and you could end up in our newsletter!





THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Remember the tuna boycott? People around the world avoided canned tuna in protest of the industry's fishing, which killed tens of thousands of dolphins annually. After pressure from customers, the three largest tuna brands became dolphin safe.

That's exactly what avoiding palm oil does for our environment. Sure, the palm oil industry is much more expansive, but the supply chain is structured in such a way that it's still possible to make an impact. And that impact starts with you.

You can raise awareness about the palm oil issue in your community to target one branch of a market. Try avoiding one product at a time, contacting and asking them to drop each product and save rainforest. After repeated organized boycotts, the store might start rethinking the products they're carrying. And if everyone does the same throughout different locations, the store might drop the brand entirely, causing the company to start rethinking its suppliers- and so on, up the supply chain all the way to producers. And through this strategy, avoiding palm oil makes an impact.

FEATURED PRODUCT #3

WILD FRIENDS

This issue, we feature Wild Friends, the first nut butter company to become [Certified Palm Oil Free](https://wildfriendsfoods.com/collections/shop). Wild Friends has a range of nutritious nut butters, including a chocolate hazelnut spread, that can be found in stores near you or online at <https://wildfriendsfoods.com/collections/shop>.



DAWN HEAD INTERVIEW

Dawn Head is the founder and editor of [Products Without Palm Oil](#), an informative website listing palm oil free options so that customers can more easily avoid palm oil. Here, she is interviewed by Pangaea Finn, Orangutan Gang founder and director.

PF: What originally motivated you to create Products Without Palm Oil?

DH: We figured out my son is intolerant to palm oil. It affects him in various ways: congestion, hoarse voice, cough, hives, sore throat, fever, lethargy, facial dermatitis, etc. At first, I stopped buying foods with "palm" in the name, but my son was still reacting to some foods. After research, I learned there are hundreds of names for palm oil derivatives. I printed out the list, brought it to the store, and consulted it before buying anything. Once I realized how prevalent palm oil ingredients are in all types of products, I was discouraged. It was difficult to find packaged food he could eat and safe self-care products he could have. This was an all-around frustrating time for me and my son. We felt like we had to do something to spread awareness. We wanted to start a website that listed products without palm oil, as well as writing about how palm oil makes my son sick to help anyone else who experiences symptoms from it. We didn't think he could be alone. (In fact, there are several comments around the website about how other people also react to palm oil.) By providing palm oil free options for consumers, it becomes easier to choose palm oil free. I teach people how palm oil is hidden in many products, what to look for, and easy substitutions they can make. On [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), I showcase different products without palm oil to further highlight them as well.

PF: When did you first learn about palm oil's detrimental environmental and human rights impacts?

DH: After looking online for information about palm oil intolerance, I learned about the environmental impacts from palm oil. It's unfathomable to comprehend that hundreds of soccer-sized fields are cleared every hour. At this rate, what will become of the rainforests and all the biodiversity they bring? What about the native people and animals who depend on rainforests in order to survive? Rainforests affect everyone, no matter where we live. Our earth depends on rainforests to produce oxygen and clean the atmosphere.



All articles by Pangaea Finn unless otherwise stated

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PF: Was it difficult to deduce that your son was having a specific allergic reaction to palm oil and palm oil derivatives?

DH: There were many times he was congested or sick, and we didn't know why. One fall he had been congested for months. We started paying closer attention to the foods he was eating. We logged everything he ate. When he stopped eating all processed foods, the congestion he experienced for months went away. From there, we kept a food journal. He ate only whole foods, and we would introduce one new processed and/or packaged food at a time to be sure he was okay. From there, we learned of some safe snacks he could have, including pretzels and popcorn. These were among the first posts I wrote. Even now, he only has one new product at a time so if he has a reaction, we know what it's from.

PF: What are some good methods and resources for consumers trying to avoid palm oil?

DH: 1.) Buy real, whole foods. Cook and bake from scratch.

2.) Read labels. Even avoiding ingredients with "palm" in them will make a big difference.

3.) Use [this list](#) from the International [Palm Oil Free Trademark Certification Programme \(POFCAP\)](#). This includes the hundreds of names for palm oil ingredients.

4.) Install the [Spoon Guru](#) app on your phone. It does a great job of finding the hundreds of names for palm oil ingredients. Even though it's not 100% accurate for health purposes, it's a fast way to weed through products that you can't have.

5.) After you find palm oil free products you like, be loyal. From there, pick another product type and find a palm oil free option. Continue going with the categories of foods you eat regularly.

6.) Buy products with fewer ingredients. Products with fewer ingredients have a lower probability of palm oil.

7.) [My website!](#) I am always updating my website with information to help consumers avoid palm oil.

PF: Is finding palm oil free products challenging given that palm oil now appears in over 50% of packaged foods?

DH: Since December 2016, we've diligently worked to keep him palm oil free. There are many areas of concern, including:

Products changing ingredients to include palm oil.

We read labels every time. It's challenging when we find a product he likes -- like a type of candy -- and they change the formula to include palm oil or palm oil derivatives.

Products not spelling out what is in their "Natural Flavors".

In the United States, "Natural Flavors" are often listed on packaged foods. Unless you check with the company, you won't know if it contains palm oil.

Going to restaurants; going on vacation

It's very challenging and scary eating out at restaurants. We go out infrequently, and when we go, we call ahead and stay loyal to the places we know he can eat safely at. Going on vacations or anywhere away from our safe places is a cause of stress. On vacations, we try to rent a small place with a kitchen and bring snacks. My son is highly adaptable and does very well with these challenges.

Stigma of palm oil when I reach out to companies

Another big challenge is sometimes companies don't respond to my emails like they would if I were asking about another type of allergen, like nuts or dairy. Companies will give prewritten answers to questions about palm oil because of its environmental impacts.

However, even though there are challenges because palm oil is so prevalent, because we've been doing this for so long, many positive things have happened. First, my son can recognize questionable ingredients. We look at how companies attempt to look environmentally-friendly when they are actually using palm oil. Secondly, because I've been doing this for so long and have researched so much, I can look at a product and know whether there is palm oil in it based on the type of product it is. I typically assume all products have palm oil and am happily surprised when they don't. I'm emailing companies all the time and updating my website many times throughout the week. It's also important to note that palm oil is very common in self-care products and cleaning products as well. Find palm oil free products and be a loyal customer.

PF: Considering how difficult it is becoming to avoid palm oil containing products, how do you stay motivated?

DH: I get down about it -- especially when I see companies advertising and promoting how concerned they are about the environment but using palm oil in their products. I try not to negatively single out companies and products with palm oil, as that is not the focus of the website. However, it's frustrating when consumers think they are buying from an eco-friendly company when their ingredients are hidden under different palm oil derivative names. When our favorite products are discontinued or the company changes the ingredients, and they contain palm oil, that is upsetting. My motivation is my son. I keep trying to find products he can safely have, and together we continue to expand our knowledge about palm oil. My second motivation is my website. It's been a positive outlet to be able to showcase products that don't contain palm oil and to teach people how palm oil is hiding in products. I want to draw positive attention to palm oil free products so companies will keep making them and will use palm oil free ingredient options.

PF: How do you research what products do and do not contain palm oil for the Products Without Palm Oil website?

DH: I spend a lot of time in stores to continue to find additional products for my son and family. I'm always checking products I have listed on my site to be sure they are still palm oil free. I always have several categories of products I'm researching. I email companies many times each week to ask about their products. I use the [list from POFCAP](#) to cross-check ingredients and ask the companies the source of each ingredient that might be derived from palm oil. I use [Spoon Guru](#) as a backup as well. If I have the slightest doubt about a product, I don't include it on my website. In addition, the products I list are products my son can safely have. This website isn't my main job, but it's a passion. I am trying to make a difference for my son as well as to help spread awareness for environmental reasons.

PF: What are a couple palm oil free products that you love?

SS: Here are some good palm oil free products:

Toothpaste: (These are the only palm oil free ones we've found.)

- [Davids Toothpaste](#)

- [Earthpaste](#)

Ethique's shampoos, conditioners, lotions, deodorant

Bar soap:

- [Grandma's Baking Soda Soap](#)

- [Freedom Soap Company](#)

Foods:

- [Enjoy Life Foods Grain & Seed bars](#) and [Protein Bites](#). They have four flavors of each that are certified palm oil free.

- [Van's Gluten Free Cranberry Almond Snack Bars](#)

- [Purely Elizabeth Blueberry Hemp Ancient Grain Granola](#)

- [Angie's BOOMCHICKAPOP Sweet & Salty Kettle Corn](#)

- [Hershey's Kisses Milk Chocolate](#)

- [M&M's](#) Milk Chocolate (Note, they don't claim these are palm oil free but my son can have them.)

- [M&M's](#) Almond (They don't claim they are palm oil free but my son loves them.)

Are you an activist who works to help save orangutans and the rainforest? Contact us at orangutangang.org@gmail.com and we could interview you for this newsletter!

To learn more, view merchandise, sign petitions, and take the palm oil free pledge, please visit our website at www.orangutangang.org.