

“Sustainable” Period products

Periods are a thing. A real thing (even though they don't get talked about enough). Many people with uteruses have them on a regular basis and don't want to stand around bleeding on things. We are polite in that sense. But the things that we must use to avoid bleeding from our nether regions on things largely contain plastic, and plastics are not polite for the world in which we inhabit. It's not the earth's fault that we are scorned for our super powers of reproduction and our involuntary need to bleed whilst not reproducing. So it's in our best interest to find ways to avoid polluting the planet while avoiding bleeding on things.

For those of you who are haunted by the idea that you will leave behind 400 pounds of plastic before menopause, I wanted to share some of the available commercial options. I encourage you to look into ways beyond the commercial. Ari Up, singer of The Slits, used to use wads of cotton.* You can also make your own products (patterns in the next section). That being said, the menstrual product industry was born out of convenience and the market is FLOODED with greenwashing.

GREENWASHING is a marketing scheme used to make companies and products seem more environmentally friendly, or “SUSTAINABLE”, than they really are. Though I used its marketing term “sustainable” in the title (because it's what most people are used to hearing it called and, hey, I can market, too. I got you this far didn't I?), I will henceforth use the term “reusable”. These products are great and they certainly save a lot of plastic going into the environment, but they still create an impact on it--even if it is a lesser one. This is an important thing to know, understand, and keep in mind. The last thing that I will say is that “sustainable” products, including menstrual ones, are trendy right now--the market is oversaturated with different companies and products. Take a look at the companies, manufacturers, missions, and materials and choose one that you think is truly doing its part for both people that need these products and the environment. And beware! There are a lot of marketing scams and fraudulent products, so be sure to buy from a reputable source! Protect yourself and your vagina!

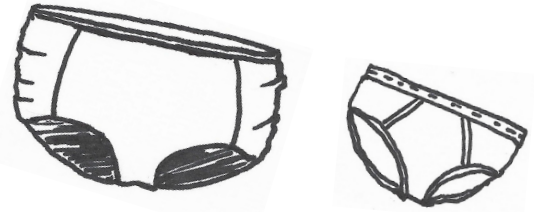
A note about the work: A trade-off that comes with every reusable menstrual product is that there is some level of time involved for hygiene's sake. Whether it is rinsing, soaking, or sterilizing. More to come on that in a moment.

Every period is different for every menstruating person. Know your period. It will definitely come into play when choosing a reusable menstrual product. You may use different products in different circumstances and combinations or at different points during your period. There is a more thorough review plus travel testimony in zine issue # 8 on the website (www.shoutshoutforyourhealth.com) Also, I'm not a medical professional, so feel free to have a dialogue with your doc about these things!

* Albertine, Viv. *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes: Music, Music, Music: Boys, Boys, Boys: A Memoir*. Thomas Dunne Books, 2014.

PERIOD PANTIES:

What are they?: Period panties are a multi-layered underwear that has wicking layers (layers that “wick” or release moisture) and layers that act as a barrier and keep moisture from leaking. Your hoo-hah stays dry and your



pants stay stain-free. They are for LIGHTER PERIOD DAYS. **CAUTION:** Always read the fine print. Companies will say things like “Holds up to 8 tampons worth of blood!” It’s a lie. Scroll down on their website descriptions where they will hide their light-flow recommendations. Take it from someone who has tested these on heavy days. These products also contain synthetic materials that are in no way, shape, or form biodegradable or environmentally friendly once they inevitably run their course.

I love my period panties, especially because the tail-end of my period is super light. They make them in a lot of different cuts for women of all shapes and sizes. They are easy to find and good ones are relatively affordable. Some brands are even covered under flex or health savings accounts, if you’re lucky enough to have insurance. I use them during my heavy days at night in conjunction with pads because they help to keep them in place and protect my pajamas and bedsheets in the event of a leak.

When finished using them during your period, it is good to rinse them and soak them in cold water for at least 30 minutes so that they do not stain, but it’s not necessary if they’re not heavily soiled depending on your preference. The inside of mine are a light grey, so I always do. They’re machine washable. I don’t put any panties in the dryer. They keep a lot longer that way.

REUSABLE FABRIC PADS/PANTY-LINERS:

What are they?: Exactly what you think! Menstrual pads made of fabric that can be reused. These products have multiple absorptive and wicking layers followed by a barrier layer that prevents leaks.

Fab-pads are great alternatives for people who are not comfortable with tampons or menstrual cups.

I bought a standard/medium/regular-sized pack of reusable pads with a gray-colored absorption area. They do make them in black for you squeamish bleeders, but I feel that it is important to know the color and consistency of your menstrual blood. It is one of the best gauges for your health as a menstruating person. The pack that I purchased came with 6 pads (of two different designs! Yay! Period fashion!) and a sleek storage bag for on-the-go use. The pads have wings with snaps on them to keep them secure and so you can wrap them up hygienically when you change them. They also provide protection against odors. Like, you will still notice the menstrual smell when your pants are down, but the world won’t smell it when your drawers are pulled up.

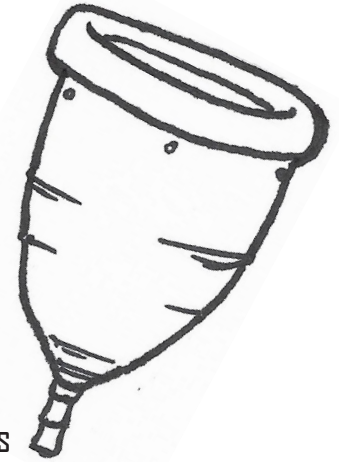


Fab-pads are machine washable and dryer safe (just don’t use fabric softener and tumble on low if you use a dryer). Check the label, though. After you’re done using a fab-pad, ya gotta wash ‘em real good and soak them for at least 30 minutes (both in cold water). It takes a bit of time to get the red out.

Barrier layers tend to contain synthetic materials that will not biodegrade.

THE MENSTRUAL CUP:

What is it?: Menstrual cups can be categorized as durable medical devices. They're made of 100% medical-grade silicone (be sure to check!). The cup is a flexible reservoir that is inserted into the vagina, creates a seal, and catches menstrual blood.



Menstrual cups are internal devices. As such, it is extremely important that you research before choosing a cup, whatever brand you use. They are different shapes, sizes, materials, etc. Toxic Sock Syndrome (TSS) is a thing. Beware counterfeits! That's also a thing. Know where it's coming from and if the brand is reputable beyond the reviews. But also... **READ THE REVIEWS.** I'll talk more about this in a minute.

Alright, I'm going to come right out and say it. **There is a learning curve with menstrual cups.** Every woman has a differently shaped vagina. Though research is happening, there is not a ton of available information and you may not know anything about your shape. It's okay. Neither do I. You're gonna read some horror stories when you read reviews, especially from those who have long vaginas (if you think you might be someone with a higher cervix/longer vagina, you may consider using a brand with a longer stem).

Cups will come in various shapes and sizes, so be sure to read before you buy. I bought a Diva Cup® (they have a recycling program and have been established for some time) size I though I am older than the recommended age. I've never given vaginal birth, so it was a good choice for me. Other menstruating women will talk about choosing sizes in the reviews, and it is beyond helpful. There will also be reviews that talk about trouble-shooting. Have I mentioned to read the reviews?

Cups need to be boiled before and after use for sterilization purposes. Be sure to wash hands both before and after insertion/removal. Watch videos specific to your cup for insertion techniques and troubleshooting on the brand websites. IT TAKES PRACTICE! Until you master the seal, combine with period panties or fab-pads to prevent leaks. Don't be discouraged!

Low-hanging peach pose **KEEP CALM AND POP A SQUAT:** When removing a cup, you may find that... well... you CAN'T find it. DON'T PANIC. It cannot get into your uterus and everything is going to be okay. Here is what to do:



Remain calm. Squat all the way down. Remain calm and relax for a second. Deep breaths. Bear down and push your pelvic muscles, but **DON'T STRAIN** or anything like that (you should not be red in the face or not breathing. I cannot stress this enough. You could really hurt yourself. These are **gentle** pushes. Do them through an exhale).

Think of when you have a uterine cramp before a period-blood gush (you know what I'm talking about bleeders, I don't need to go into that one. Email me if I do). Keep breathing, bearing down, and being calm. It will come forward and you'll eventually be able to grab it and take it out. Might be a bit messy, so most of the reviewers recommend doing this in the tub. It sounds intimidating, but menstrual cups are great once you get the hang of them. Just ask the reviews.