



# ZERO WASTE LIFESTYLE

## Ways to Make Far Less Trash

by Avery Mack

In manufacturing, a zero waste policy means designing products so that all resources are used or reused. It's a concept Bea Johnson, author of *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste*, embraced for her family a decade ago in Mill Valley, California. "My goal was to simplify our lives," she says. "We found a zero waste lifestyle isn't what we expected; it's better. It's good for the environment and for our family."

Johnson reports achieving 40 percent savings in annual household costs. "Voluntary simplicity has also changed our daily routines. Simple living focuses on experiences versus things, and we find we have more free time," she says. "Our minimalist wardrobes now fit into carry-on bags for travel."

### A Doable Personal Goal

"Don't expect to reach zero. Go for zero-ish," counsels Celia Ristow, a freelance writer who blogs at *Litterless.com*. In 2017, Ristow and two friends, Moira Kelley and Bailey Warren, started a grassroots group called Zero Waste Chicago to raise awareness and connect locals with needed resources to reduce trash.

"We speak at grocery stores, community events, schools, colleges and to employees on their lunch hour. We love how responding readers send suggestions and outlets for reusing items," says Ristow.

Local efforts can take off when people find like-minded others through using hash tags like *#zerowastechicago* on Instagram, search for a local blogger or host a mini-meet-up in a grocery that sells in bulk or at a coffee shop that uses ceramic cups or no plastic stirrers. Similar grassroots organizations are active in Colorado (*EcoCycle.org/home*) and Seattle (*EcoCollectiveSeattle.com*).

"Zero waste seems difficult to imagine in the U.S. People think change is costly and time-consuming," Johnson says. "My vocation is to shatter these misconceptions. Follow the 5 R's: refuse what you don't need, reduce what you need, reuse, recycle and rot. Refuse single-use plastics and junk mail, reduce the volume of clothing items and sports equipment, buy used, recycle the unwanted and compost (rot) food waste, lint, hair and floor sweepings. It's not that complicated."

Due to her experience, Johnson can now store a year's worth of waste in a pint-sized Mason jar. "Inside is deteriorated foam from headphones, a dental retainer, silicone caulk from the sink, fruit and veggie stickers, clothing labels, plastic mini-bumpers from cabinet corners I replaced with felt and a plastic-coated spike from the dishwasher," she says. "I'm still amazed when people have a use for something I don't want or need. Start by saying no to flyers, freebies, party favors, business cards, plastics, excessive packaging and junk mail. Accepting them creates more. Refusing such clutter is the first rule to a less wasteful lifestyle."

Kathryn Kellogg, the Vallejo, California, author of the *Going Zero Waste* blog and a content creator for Pela Case, a Canadian eco-friendly smartphone case maker, offers many zero waste swaps. "I use silicone cupcake liners instead of paper, bar soap in lieu of plastic-packaged body wash and make my own lip balm." She also has alternatives for sponges, plastic wrap, cooking pans and toothbrushes. Consider her 31-day challenge at *GoingZe-*

roWaste.com/31-day-video-challenge. She notes, "Since I started working toward zero waste, I have more confidence, am able to speak up about less waste and am mindful when I shop."

## A World View

In May, Johnson toured 16 countries in 17 days giving presentations. "Surprisingly, we often had to open another room because interest was higher than expected. In Russia, they broadcasted my talk to 17 cities," she says.

Johnson learned that many countries have no waste collection or recycling programs. Plastic bottles, bags and trash litter many landscapes. "Life in the United States is different. Here, we have bigger houses, need more and create more waste. Elsewhere, grocery shopping is done daily instead of weekly, produce is local, seasonal and sustainable instead of imported," she observes. "In a way, it's easier to go zero waste there because they're using just what they need. Everyone deserves a place to live and life's necessities. Past that comfort level, it's excess."

Johnson sees rapid changes underway in consumer thinking and is hopeful looking forward. "I don't want to tell others how to live. I just want to share our experiences. The United States' example has a huge impact worldwide. Zero waste is the necessary lifestyle of the future, and it begins at home."

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"Zero Waste is NOT just about recycling. The ironic thing about Zero Waste is that there is little evidence it is in play! Zero Waste is a planning process. If you plan from the very beginning to protect resources, reduce consumption, source locally and responsibly and choose durable goods over disposable, then there will be little left to recycle or compost. That is Zero Waste!

I recommend Catalog Choice ([www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org)) for junk mail reduction, and encourage people to thrift shop, share tools and repair what they can. Reuse Alliance is a great resource. Reuse agencies such as Scrap Exchange, Reuse Warehouse, Fillaree, Durham GreenToGo, Habitat for Humanity ReStores, ReCyclery, Goodwill stores and BuyMeOnce can help reduce not only the amount of material going to landfills, they can inspire creativity and stimulate the economy. Recycling centers are ABSOLUTELY NOT at the heart of Zero Waste—they fall at the END!"

—Muriel Williman

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## LOCAL RESOURCES

### Fillaree, Durham

<https://fillaree.com>

### Goodwill Stores, NC

[www.gcfglobal.org/ourstores](http://www.gcfglobal.org/ourstores)

### GreentoGo, Durham

<https://durhamgreentogo.com>

### Habitat Wake ReStore, Apex

[www.wakerestore.org](http://www.wakerestore.org)

### Habitat Wake ReStore, Cary

[www.wakerestore.org](http://www.wakerestore.org)

### Habitat for Humanity Restore Durham/Chapel Hill

[www.restoredurhamorange.org](http://www.restoredurhamorange.org)

### Habitat Wake ReStore, Raleigh

[www.wakerestore.org](http://www.wakerestore.org)

### Habitat Wake ReStore, Wake Forest

[www.wakerestore.org](http://www.wakerestore.org)

### Reconsidered Goods, Greensboro

[www.reconsideredgoods.org](http://www.reconsideredgoods.org)

### ReCyclery, Carrboro

[www.recyclery.org](http://www.recyclery.org)

### The ReUse Warehouse, Durham

[www.facebook.com/thereusewarehouse](http://www.facebook.com/thereusewarehouse)

### The Scrap Exchange, Durham

[www.scrapexchange.org](http://www.scrapexchange.org)

### Scrap Thrift, Durham

<https://tinyurl.com/ya9de2m5>

## NATIONAL RESOURCES

### BuyMeOnce

<https://buymeonce.com>

### Freecycle

[www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)

### The Reuse Alliance

[www.reusealliance.org/about-us](http://www.reusealliance.org/about-us)

## Fun Places to Start

With the PaperKarma junk mail app, take a picture to unsubscribe from receiving bulky catalogs, credit card offers and unwanted paper mail ([PaperKarma.com](http://PaperKarma.com)).

Nike recycles worn-out sneakers, submitted pre-washed for odor removal, into Nike Grind, a material used to create athletic and playground surfaces and more ([Tinyurl.com/ReuseShoesFAQs](http://Tinyurl.com/ReuseShoesFAQs)).

Students in K-12 schools across the continental U.S. and parts of Canada can collect and repurpose all brands of plastic markers, including dry-erase and highlighters. A minimum of 100 markers and up to 40 pounds is the suggested package. Crayola's Colorcycle program provides prepaid FedEx shipping labels via [Tinyurl.com/ColorCycleInfo](http://Tinyurl.com/ColorCycleInfo).

Rubber bands can be donated to local schools or to the post office for mail carriers' use.

Donate old cell phones to charities. Because it reduces the need for coltan, an African ore mined in endangered gorilla habitat, zoos in San Diego, Oklahoma City, Oakland and Cincinnati are among those collecting cell phones for recycling. Check [Tinyurl.com/Phones4Charities](http://Tinyurl.com/Phones4Charities) and [CincinnatiZoo.org/savingspecies/recycle-your-cell-phone](http://CincinnatiZoo.org/savingspecies/recycle-your-cell-phone).

Listfully.org takes the guesswork out of gift giving. A user can select a date night at a favorite spot, a donation to charity or any item. It's not limited to a particular store or occasion. Avoid unwanted gifts and the guilt of regifting.

Use SwoondleSociety.com to swap children's clothing and keep clothes out of landfills.

The most Earth-conscious option is to reduce, re-use, then recycle or donate to charities.