

Why Zero Waste is Unrealistic and What to Try Instead

Zero waste is a goal that many people aspire to, but it's often seen as an unrealistic one. This is because most people produce too much waste to be able to go zero-waste.

However, this doesn't mean we should give up on reducing our waste. There are many ways to reduce waste, from bringing your own reusable bags to the grocery store to composting your food scraps.

What is zero waste, and why is it becoming more popular

Zero-waste is a lifestyle that encourages reducing unnecessary waste and recycling materials to prevent pollution. The goal is to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators. Zero-waste living is becoming more popular as people become more aware of the environmental impact of their consumption habits.

It's become more popular over the last decade thanks to bloggers and influencers posting super "aesthetic" vlogs and informational videos about how we can all go zero-waste. There are many criticisms of the zero-waste movement, though.

- For one thing, most zero-waste influencers are young adults who can spend their entire income only on themselves or a roommate/spouse. Not many zero-waste influencers are trying to feed a family or provide for a group of people.
- Zero-waste is tricky to scale up because our food system and capitalism are not built for it.
- The idea of "your carbon footprint" was introduced by BP to shift blame and responsibility to consumers. In reality, large corporations have the responsibility of combating climate change.
- It's not cheap to buy in bulk, buy high-quality clothing, and to purchase sustainable swaps that are safe to reuse for years.

- Not everyone has access to bulk stores or good secondhand shops.
- Zero-waste seems to focus more on the packaging rather than the supply chain, fair wages for workers, cruelty-free products, and greenwashing.

Still, there are some benefits to borrowing ideas from the zero-waste movement. But let's talk about the challenges of going zero-waste on a systemic level first.

The challenges of going zero waste

Going zero-waste is often portrayed as this Utopian lifestyle where you produce no trash and live off the land in perfect harmony. However, going zero-waste is not realistic for the majority of people. Going zero-waste would require a complete lifestyle overhaul for most of us, and that's just not always practical or sustainable.

A major issue with the zero-waste movement is that it's kinda elitist and classist. Not everyone has access to the money needed to replace their plastic baggies with expensive, silicone bags. Not everyone can grow their own food – not everyone has the space, money, or time to do that.

Some of these things are difficult or nearly impossible for people with an average or lower-than-average income. Heck, even people who are relatively well-off will have financial issues being zero-waste in this economy.

Additionally, some communities do not have adequate composting or recycling services available. And the ones that do might price a majority of the community out of the market. Recycling and composting are services, so it makes sense for people to charge for them, but even so, it's not in everyone's budget.

Some waste is inevitable, even in perfect circumstances and with no financial or infrastructure challenges. The key is to focus on reducing and reusing as much as possible.

Focus on making little changes to your lifestyle, rather than perfection.

Every little bit counts and even the smallest changes can make a big impact. So don't be discouraged if going completely zero-waste isn't feasible for you. Just do what you can and know that you're making a difference.

How to reduce your waste without spending money

Reducing your waste doesn't have to be expensive – or even all that time-consuming. Here are a few simple tips to help you cut down on the amount of stuff you're sending to the landfill without going broke or going crazy in the process.

- Get into the habit of **recycling and composting** if possible. If your municipality doesn't offer these services, there are plenty of resources online that can help you set up your own system at home for low cost or zero cost, depending on what you have lying around already.
- **Food storage techniques** for making your food last longer in the fridge or freezer will help you end up throwing less away. Even if you already compost your food waste and food scraps, this is an awesome way to make sure you're using more of your food to feed your family rather than throwing into the bin.
- On the same note, **meal planning and being intentional about what you're buying at the grocery store** will reduce your food waste. Avoid impulse purchases and buying vegetables "just to have them" unless your family eats a bunch of raw vegetables. Buy the vegetables! This is a pro-vegetable blog. But just make sure to have a plan for those vegetables.
- **If you do grocery pickup, add in a note that you don't want plastic bags** or you'd like them recycled. Most places will comply with this and remove the bags before you drive away.
- **Join a local "buy nothing" group on Facebook.** These places are amazing for swapping items with the people in your neighborhood or for finding things that you could make use of but your neighbors no longer want. These groups can be such a great resource if you're committed to saving money and living a bit more sustainably.

- **Grow food from seeds from your grocery store purchases.** It's true that some items might not grow true to their parent fruit or plant, but many things from the grocery store WILL grow perfectly edible food. Things like lettuce and green onions will regrow their leaves. Tomato, pepper, melon, and cucumber seeds from store-bought produce will frequently be able to sprout into fruit-bearing plants as well. It's really just a numbers game with these seeds. Plant as many as you can!
- **Take public transport if it's available in your area** (and don't feel bad if it isn't!) or see if you can start **carpooling** with a friend, roommate, or coworker to work or to shop for groceries.

And if all else fails, there's always the old-fashioned method of **using less stuff** if and when you can. A little bit of creativity can go a long way in helping you reduce your impact on the planet.

Things you can buy to reduce waste if you do have a budget for that

Ditching paper towels in favor of reusable clothes will save you money in the long run – and it's better for the environment, too. Especially if you can introduce sustainable products like these to your family and friends. Not every sustainable swap will work for everyone or every family, but it's a great idea to see what you can begin to replace in your home.

Explore the idea of buying 1 or 2 sustainable swaps per month to build up a stash of items you can re-use and avoid having to buy them again and again. I've had a lot of success with swapping plastic baggies for silicone bags, swapping paper towels for microfiber cleaning cloths, adding a compost bin to my backyard, and growing some of my own food in the limited space we have available.

Here's some of the posts I've made about sustainable swaps you can try:

- [Eco-Friendly Swaps for your Kitchen](#)

- [8 Iconic Sustainable Online Stores to Replace Big Box Stores](#)
- [9 Straightforward Ways to Make your Home More Sustainable](#)

Do what you can with what you have when it comes to sustainability

Zero-waste living is plastered all over social media if your algorithms recognize that you're interested in sustainability, but let's be honest: it's not realistic for everyone. You probably can't compost if you live in an apartment, and you definitely can't if you live in a country where there is no infrastructure for it.

And going completely plastic-free? Good luck with that. Even the most sustainability-minded among us use some products that come in packaging. That's not your fault.

The important thing is to do what you can with what you have.

You might not be able to go completely zero-waste, but you can definitely reduce your waste. And even small steps can make a big difference when it comes to sustainability.

The benefits of reducing your waste

So why should we bother trying to reduce our waste if it's not going to be perfect? The answer is simple: sustainability. **When we produce less and consume less, we put less strain on our environment.** And every little bit counts.

Yes, the majority of eco-responsibility lies on corporations changing their supply chains and production practices to save the planet. This is true. But we still vote with our dollars and we can slowly enact change by keeping that in mind.

Reducing your waste doesn't have to be all or nothing; even making small changes can make a big difference. So next time you're about to throw

something away, ask yourself if there's a better way. Chances are, there is. And your planet will thank you for it.

It's not just the environment that benefits from reduced waste—it's also your wallet. The less stuff you throw away, the less money you have to spend on replacement items. So don't be discouraged if you can't go completely zero-waste overnight—just take it one day (and one piece of trash) at a time.

Wrap up and what to do next instead of focusing on zero-waste

Reducing your waste is a great way to make a positive impact on the planet, and it doesn't always have to be difficult or expensive.

There are plenty of ways to get started, and even small changes can make a big difference. So don't be discouraged if going completely zero-waste isn't feasible for you – just do what you can and know that you're making a difference.

- **I'd recommend watching or listening to sustainability-related YouTubers** who can go into depth and explain the nuances of why it still matters to shop sustainably and live sustainability even if the majority of the responsibility lies on corporations to change their ways. [Shelbizleee](#) is one of those. So is [Naturally Mermaid](#), [JHÁNNEU](#), and [Sustainably Vegan](#).
- **Follow more sustainability and climate change activist profiles on social media** to have more relevant info in your feed. These accounts often post about opportunities to show up at an event, sign a petition, or donate to a cause. Even sharing posts from accounts like Intersectional Environmentalist, Impact, and on Instagram is an effective way to get more eyes on much-needed content and information.
- When **shopping for anything, think twice about whether you actually need that thing** or if you can re-use or repair something you already own. If you do need it, **consider shopping secondhand**. If you can't shop secondhand for it, do your best to

shop from a sustainable brand that does not appear to be greenwashing.

- Check out challenges like Plastic Free July to encourage yourself to become more aware of just how prevalent plastic is in your daily life. But this will also help you explore alternatives in your area so that you might be able to change your habits to avoid as much plastic for the rest of the year.