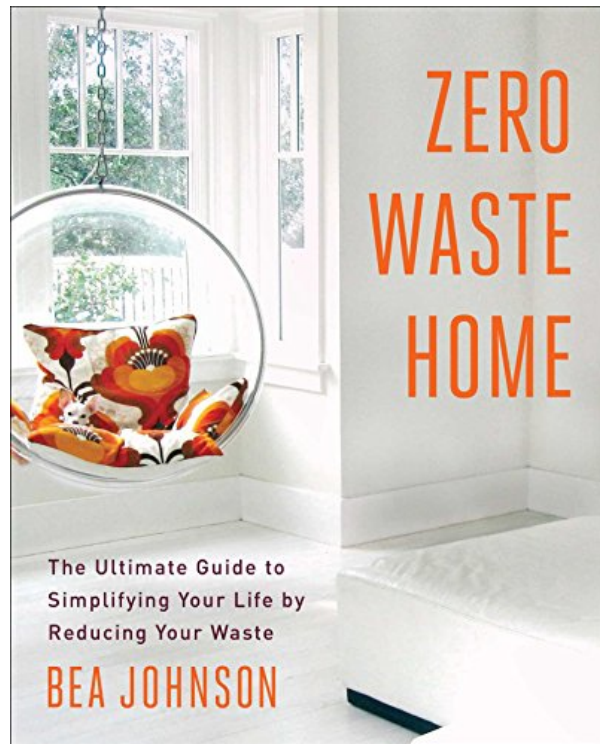
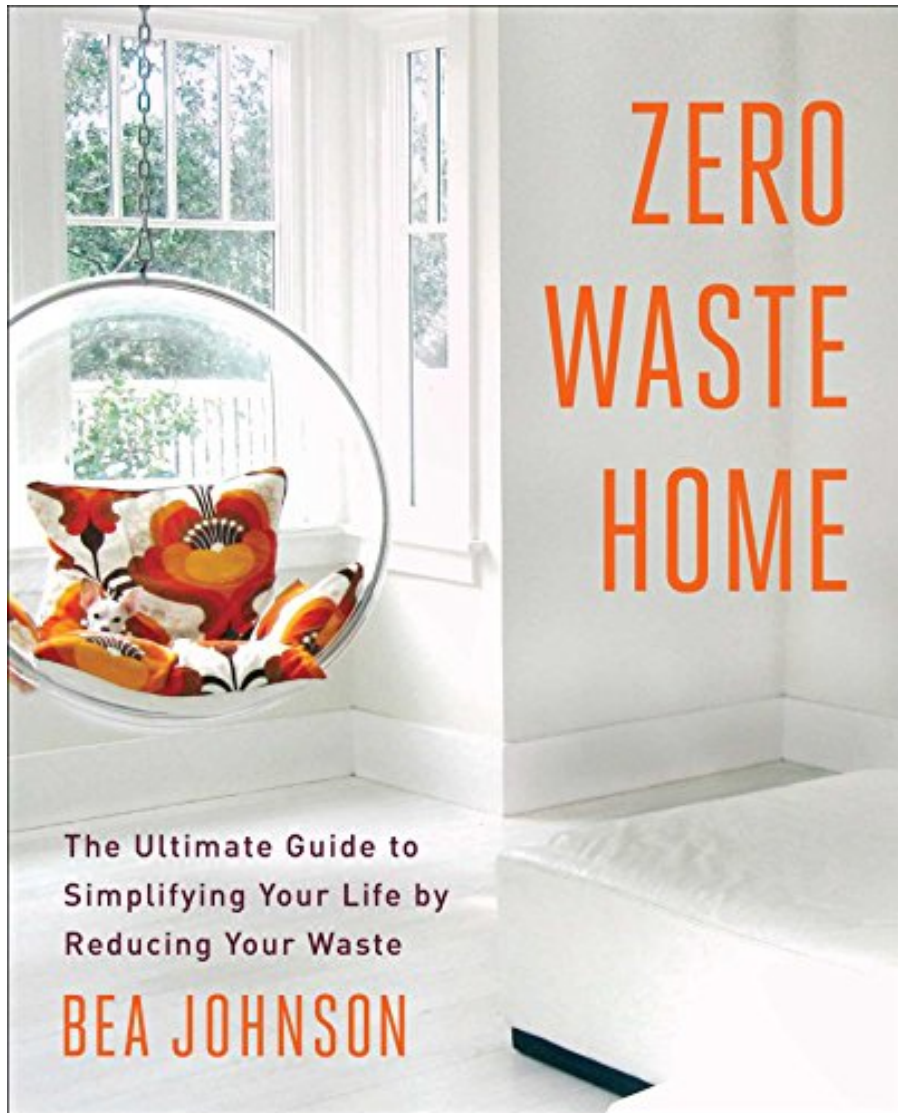


ZERO WASTE HOME: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SIMPLIFYING YOUR LIFE



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Review

“Bea Johnson’s book has allowed me to get even closer to Zero Waste than I was before I picked it up. Read it today. It will transform the way you view waste.” (Ed Begley, Jr.)

“Zero Waste Home is an amazing story of personal transformation. It compels us to recognize that our heedlessly wasteful ways are not gateways to prosperity and convenience, but barriers to a good life and a healthy planet. Bea Johnson has produced an invaluable resource.” (Edward Humes, author of Garbology)

“Waste not, want not isn't about penny pinching. It's about gratitude and loving our lives. Bea Johnson doesn't just teach us to save the planet. She teaches us to save ourselves.” (Colin Beavan, author of No Impact Man)

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“Clear, authentic, knowledgeable, helpful and a great read. Zero Waste Home will make a difference.” (Paul Hawken, author of Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution)

About the Author
Bea Johnson has been shattering preconceptions attached to a lifestyle of environmental consciousness through her Zero Waste lifestyle. She regularly opens her home to educational tours and the media, and she has appeared in segments on the Today show, NBC and CBS news, Global TV BC (Canada), and a mini Yahoo! documentary. Bea and her family have also been featured in print publications, including People, Sunset, the San Francisco Chronicle, as well as The Huffington Post, MSNBC, USA TODAY, Mother Nature Network, among others. They live in Mill Valley, California.

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Zero Waste Home Introduction

Not so long ago, things were different: I owned a three-thousand-square-foot home, two cars, four tables, and twenty-six chairs. I filled a sixty-four-gallon can of trash weekly.

Today, the less I own, the richer I feel. And I don't have to take out the trash!

It all changed a few years ago. The big house did not burn down, nor did I become a Buddhist monk.

Here is my story.

I grew up in the Provence region of France, in a cookie-cutter home on a cul-de-sac: a far cry from my father's childhood on a small farm, or my mother's upbringing on a French military base in Germany. But my dad was dedicated to making the most of his suburban tract of land. In the warm months, he would spend all his free time working the garden, true to his farming roots, laboring over growing veggies and quenching the soil with his sweat. In the winter, his attention would move to the garage, where drawers full of screws, bolts, and parts lined the walls. Deconstructing, repairing, and reusing were his hobbies. He was (and still is) the kind of person who does not hesitate to stop on the side of the road after spotting a discarded vacuum cleaner, radio, television, or washing machine. If the item looks repairable to him, he throws it in the back of his car, brings it home, takes it apart, puts it back together, and somehow makes it work. He can even repair burned-out lightbulbs! My dad is talented, but his abilities are not unusual for the region. People in the French countryside possess a certain kind of craftiness that allows them to extend the life of their belongings. When I was a child, my dad took the drum out of an old washing machine and turned it into a snail trap, for example, and I remember using the washer's empty shell as a (rather tiny and hot) playhouse.

Through my young eyes, my home was a modern version of *Little House on the Prairie*, a TV series I watched religiously in reruns as a kid. Though we lived in the suburbs, and my two brothers and I were not as helpful as the Ingalls brood (my older brother even had a phobia of the dish sponge), my dad was the handy type and my mom the accomplished homemaker on a tight budget. She prepared three-course meals for lunch and dinner. Just like Laura Ingalls's mom, my mom's week was organized around church, cooking, baking, cleaning, ironing, sewing, knitting, and seasonal canning. On Thursdays, she scouted the farmer's market for deals on fabric and yarn. After school, I would help her mark sewing patterns and watch her turn cloth into elaborate garments. In my bedroom, I emulated her ways and created clothes for my two Barbie dolls out of old nylons and gauze (the latter came from my parents' visits to the blood bank.) At twelve, I sewed my first outfit, and at thirteen, knitted my first sweater.

Apart from the occasional fraternal fights, we had what seemed a happy family life. But what my brothers and I hadn't perceived were the deep rifts between my parents that would ultimately turn their marriage into a sad divorce battle. At eighteen, ready to take a break from psychological and financial hardship, I set off to California for a yearlong au pair contract. Little did I know then that during that year I would fall in love with the man of my dreams, the man I would later marry, Scott. He was not the surfer type whom young French girls fantasize about, but he was a compassionate person who provided me with much-needed emotional stability. We traveled the world together and lived abroad, but when I became pregnant, my yearnings to try the American soccer-mom lifestyle (as seen on TV) brought us back to the United States.

MY AMERICAN DREAM: PLEASANT HILL

Our sons, Max and, soon after, Léo, were born into the trappings of my American dream: a three-thousand-square-foot contemporary home, on a cul-de-sac, complete with high ceilings, family and living rooms, walk-in closets, a three-car garage, and a koi fishpond in Pleasant Hill, a remote suburb of San Francisco. We owned an SUV, a huge television, and a dog. We stocked two large refrigerators and filled an industrial-size washing machine and dryer several times a week. That's not to say that clutter ever crammed our house or that I bought everything new. The thriftiness that I inherited from my parents led me to shop thrift stores for clothes, toys, and furnishings. Nevertheless, on the side of the house, an oversize garbage can collected leftover house paint and mountains of weekly refuse. And yet we felt good about our environmental footprint because we recycled.

Over the course of seven years, Scott climbed the corporate ladder, making a very comfortable living that covered semiannual international vacations, lavish parties, a rich diet of expensive meats, membership to a private pool, weekly shopping trips at Target, and shelves of things you use only once and then throw away. We had no financial worries, as life rolled by effortlessly and afforded my Barbie-like platinum-blond hair, artificial tan, injected lips, and Botoxed forehead. I'd even experimented with hair extensions, acrylic nails, and "European wraps" (rolls of Saran wrap tightly wound around my body while I rode a stationary bike). We were healthy and had great friends. We seemed to have it all.

Yet things were not quite right. I was thirty-two, and deep down I was terrified at the thought that my life had settled and set. Our life had become sedentary. In our bedroom community, with large avenues and strip malls, we spent too much time in the car and not enough on foot. Scott and I missed the active life and roaming the streets of the capitals we had lived in abroad. We missed walking to cafés and bakeries.

A MOVE TOWARD SIMPLICITY

We decided to relocate across the bay to Mill Valley, a village boasting an active European-style downtown; we sold our house, moved into a temporary apartment with just the necessities, and stored the rest, with the mind-set that we would eventually find a home to accommodate my Moorish decorating style and a whole lot of matching furnishings.

What we found during this transitional period is that with less stuff, we had time to do things we enjoyed doing. Since we no longer spent every weekend mowing our lawn and caring for our huge house and its contents, we now spent our time together as a family, biking, hiking, picnicking, and discovering our new coastal region. It was liberating. Scott finally understood the truth behind his father's words: "I wish that I didn't spend so much time caring for my lawn." As I reflected on the numerous dining sets I had acquired to furnish the kitchen nook, the dining room, and the two backyard patios in our old home, I also recalled a remark made by my good friend Eric: "How many sitting areas does one home need?"

I came to realize that most of the things in storage were not missed, that we had spent innumerable hours and untold resources outfitting a house with the unnecessary. Shopping for the previous home had become a (worthless) pastime, a pretext to go out and be busy in our bedroom community. It became clear to me that much of what we now stored had served no real purpose, except to fill large rooms. We had placed too much importance on "stuff," and we recognized that moving toward simplicity would provide us with a fuller and more meaningful life.

It took a year and 250 open houses to finally find the right home: a 1,475-square-foot cottage built in 1921, with no lawn, a stone's throw away from the downtown that we were originally told had no listings in our price range. Home prices were twice as much per square foot in Mill Valley as in Pleasant Hill, and the sale of our previous home afforded us half the house. But it was our dream to live within walking distance of hiking trails, libraries, schools, and cafés, and we were ready to downsize.

When we first moved in, our garage and basement were packed with furniture from our old life, but we slowly sold off what would not fit into the new small house. What we did not truly use, need, and love had to go. This would become our motto for decluttering. Did we really use, need, and love the bike trailer, kayak, Rollerblades, snowboards, tae kwon do gear, boxing and sparring gloves, bike racks, Razor scooters, basketball hoop, bocce balls, tennis rackets, snorkels, camping gear, skateboards, baseball bat and mitt, soccer net, badminton set, golf clubs, and fishing poles? Scott had some initial trouble letting go. He loved sporting activities, and he had worked hard to acquire all that equipment. But, ultimately, he realized that it was better to make decisions about what he truly enjoyed and focus on fewer activities rather than let golf clubs gather dust. And so, within a couple of years, we parted with 80 percent of our belongings.

FROM SIMPLICITY TO TRASH REDUCTION

As we simplified, I found guidance in Elaine St. James's books on simplicity and revisited Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House collection. These books inspired us to further evaluate our daily activities. We disconnected the television and canceled catalog and magazine subscriptions. Without TV and shopping taking up so much of our time, we now had time to educate ourselves on the environmental issues that had been on our periphery. We read books such as Natural Capitalism, Cradle to Cradle, and In Defense of Food, and through Netflix we watched documentaries such as Earth and Home that depicted homeless polar bears and confused fish. We learned about the far-reaching implications of unhealthy diets and irresponsible consumption. We started to understand for the first time not only how profoundly endangered our planet is but also how our careless everyday decisions were making matters worse for our world and the world we'd leave behind for our kids.

We were using the car extensively, packing lunches in disposable plastic bags, drinking bottled water, dispensing paper towels and tissues (liberally), and using countless toxic products to clean the house and care for our bodies. The numerous trash cans I had filled with grocery bags in Pleasant Hill and the frozen dinners I had nuked in plastic also came back to mind. I realized that as we enjoyed all the trappings of the American dream, what thoughtless citizens and consumers we had become. How did we get so disconnected from the impact of our actions? Or were we ever connected? What were we teaching our boys, Max and Léo? On the one hand, what we learned brought tears to our eyes and made us angry for having been in the dark so long. On the other hand, it gave us the strength and resolve to drastically change our consumption habits and lifestyle, for the sake of our kids' future.

Scott felt strongly about putting his theories into practice, and although the economy was in recession, he quit his job to start a sustainability consulting company. We took the kids out of the private school we could no longer afford, and I tackled the greening of our home.

With the newfound knowledge that recycling was not the answer to our environmental crisis and that plastics were devastating our oceans, we switched from disposable to reusable water bottles and shopping bags. All it took was remembering to bring them along when needed. Easy. I then started shopping at health food stores and realized that the selection of local and organic produce was worth the extra dollar and that wasteful packaging could be avoided altogether by shopping the bulk section. So I adopted laundry mesh bags for produce and sewed cloth bags out of an old sheet to transport bulk. I designed them in a way that would eliminate the need for disposable ties. As I accrued a collection of empty bottles and storage jars, I slowly reduced our consumption of packaged goods, and soon had a pantry stocked with bulk. You might even say that I became addicted to shopping in bulk, driving far distances within the Bay Area, searching for suppliers. I sewed a dozen kitchen towels from the same old sheet and with the purchase of microfiber cloths broke our paper towel habit. Scott started a compost pile in the backyard, and I enrolled in botany classes to learn about uses for the wild plants we spotted on our local hikes.

As I had come to obsess about our kitchen's trash, I had overlooked the bathroom but soon proceeded to try waste-free alternatives there, too. For six months, I washed my hair with baking soda and rinsed with apple cider vinegar but when Scott could no longer stand the "smell of vinaigrette" in bed, I resorted to refilling glass bottles with bulk shampoo and conditioner instead. The high I used to get shopping in Pleasant Hill was replaced by the high of learning new ways to green our home and save money to survive the belt-tightening due to Scott's new start-up.

Max and Léo were doing their parts, too, riding their bikes to school, competing for shorter showers, and turning off light fixtures. But one day, as I chaperoned Léo's class on a school field trip to the local health food store, which included a stop in the bulk food aisle, I watched him stumble on his teacher's question "Why is it green to buy in bulk?" At that moment, it dawned on me: we had not yet informed the kids of our

waste-reducing efforts. Provided daily with a homemade cookie, they hadn't noticed the lack of processed ones. That night, I pointed out the whys and hows of our atypical pantry and talked to them about other changes that they had already unconsciously adopted. With the kids now aware, and the whole family actively on board, we could aim at "Zero Waste."

When searching for alternatives, I had run into the term in reference to industrial practices. I did not look up the definition and ignored what it entailed for industries, but somehow, the idea clicked for me. It gave me a quantitative way to think about my efforts. We did not know whether we could eliminate every piece of trash, but striving for zero would provide a target to get as close to it as possible, to scrutinize our waste stream and address even the smallest items. We had reached a turning point.

TESTING THE EXTREMES OF ZERO WASTE

I examined what was left in our trash and recycling cans as a directive for our next steps. In the waste bin, I found packaging of meat, fish, cheese, bread, butter, ice cream, and toilet paper. In the recycling, I found papers, tomato cans, empty wine bottles, mustard jars, and soy milk cartons. I set out to eliminate them all.

I started presenting mason jars at the store's meat counter, generating looks, questions, and remarks from onlookers and employees. Explaining to the person behind the counter "I don't have a trash can" became my standby tactic. The pillowcase I brought to the bakery to collect my weekly order of bread drew remarks at first but was quickly accepted as the usual routine. With a new farmer's market opening, I tried my hand at canning, turning fresh tomatoes into a winter stash of canned goods. I found a winery that would refill our bottles with table red, I learned how to make paper from the handouts my kids brought home from school, and I tackled every bit of junk mail landing in our mailbox. There weren't books at the library on waste reduction, so I opened myself to suggestions and googled my way to substitutes for the items for which I couldn't find package-free solutions. I learned how to knead bread, blend mustard, incubate yogurt, craft cheese, strain soy milk, churn butter, and melt lip balm.

One day a well-meaning guest showed up on my doorstep with a prepackaged dessert. It was then that I realized we would never achieve our Zero Waste goal without the help of our friends and family. I understood that Zero Waste starts outside the home, mostly at the store when buying in bulk and opting for reusables over single-use items, but it also starts with asking friends not to bring waste into my home when they come for a visit, and rejecting unneeded freebies. We added "refuse" to the sustainability mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle, rot," and I started a blog to share the logistics of our lifestyle, with a mission to let our friends and family know that our efforts were real and our Zero Waste objectives serious. I prayed for no more unwanted cake boxes, party favors, or junk mail, and I started a consulting business to spread my ideas and help others simplify.

We soon winnowed our recyclables to the occasional mail, school handout, and empty wine bottle. I contemplated moving toward the goal of Zero Recycling, and as we left for our annual trip to France, I daydreamed that my family might take Zero Waste to the next level when we got back and cancel our curbside recycling service.

FINDING BALANCE

Seeing all the trash at the airport and on the flight quickly brought me back to reality. I'd been living in a bubble. The world was as wasteful as ever. Spending a couple of months at my mom's, however, in a "normal" home, gave me the break needed to relax and let go of judgments and frustrations. I was also able to take a step back for a broader look at my frantic attempt to go Zero Waste. I saw clearly that many of my practices had become socially restrictive and time-consuming, and thus unsustainable. Making butter was costly, considering the amount needed to bake cookies weekly, and making cheese was high maintenance and unnecessary, considering that I could buy it from the counter. I realized that I had taken Zero Waste too far. I had foraged moss to use in lieu of toilet paper, for God's sake!

After all, it seemed that we would be more likely to stick with Zero Waste if we took it easy on ourselves and found some balance. Zero Waste was a lifestyle choice, and if we were going to be in it for the long haul, we had to make it workable and convenient to the realities of our lives. Simplification was once again in order.

Upon my return home, I decided to concentrate on letting go of extremes without compromising the gains we'd made on waste reduction. I reevaluated my tendency to fetch faraway bulk by finding satisfaction in available local supply instead. I also stopped making ice cream and instead refilled a jar at the local Baskin-Robbins. We accepted wine from visitors and gave up the idea of Zero Recycling. I stopped making butter and settled for composting the store-bought wrappers. Butter was (and still is) the only food we would buy in packaging. Within a month, Zero Waste became easy, fun, simple, and stress free.

Scott, who all along had a nagging fear that my passion for farmer's markets, greener alternatives, and organic bulk, in order to reduce packaging waste, was an overall drain on our finances, took the time to analyze our household costs. He compared expenses between our old (2005) and new (2010) lifestyles, reviewing past bank statements and taking into account that our two boys were eating significantly more (being five years older). What he found was better than either of us had dared hope: we were saving almost 40 percent on annual household costs! In his analytical mind, that number along with the amount of time that he knew we were saving—from living a simple lifestyle and taking fewer trips to stores—eliminated his fear.

Today, we are at peace with Zero Waste. The four of us have adopted practices into our daily routines, and we can fully enjoy all the lifestyle has to offer, well beyond the obvious ecological “feel good” aspects. With the implementation of Zero Waste alternatives, we have noticed undeniable life improvements: notable health benefits, along with considerable financial and time savings. We learned that Zero Waste does not deprive; on the contrary, through Zero Waste, I have found a sense of meaning and purpose. My life has been transformed—it's based on experiences rather than stuff, based on embracing change rather than hiding in denial.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Our country's environment, economy, and health are in crisis. Natural resources are running out, the economy is volatile, our general health is declining, and our standard of living is at a record low. What can one person do in the face of these monumental problems? The overwhelming reality of these facts can feel paralyzing, but we must remember that individual action matters and that change is our hands.

Natural resources are running out, but we buy petroleum-based products. The economy is weak, but we indulge in foreign products. Our general health is declining, but we fuel our bodies with processed foods and bring toxic products into our homes. What we consume directly affects our environment, our economy, and our health, by supporting specific manufacturing practices and creating a demand to make more. In other words, shopping is voting and the decisions that we make every day have an impact. We have the choice to either hurt or heal our society.

Many of us do not need to be convinced to adopt a green lifestyle, yet we yearn to find simple ways to do more, beyond recycling. . . . We found that Zero Waste offers an immediate way to feel empowered by meeting the challenges that we face head-on.

Zero Waste Home will take you beyond the typical eco-friendly alternatives covered well in other publications. This book will encourage you to declutter and recycle less, not just for a better environment but also for a better you. It offers practical, tested solutions to live richer and healthier lives using the sustainable, waste-free resources available to us today, while following a simple system in order: refusing (what we do not need), reducing (what we do need), reusing (what we consume), recycling (what we cannot refuse, reduce, or reuse), and rotting (composting) the rest.

Over the last years, I've learned that everyone has a different take on our lifestyle. Some think that it is too extreme because we do not buy junk food, for example. Others say that it is not extreme enough because we buy toilet paper or eat meat once a week or occasionally fly. What matters to us is not what people think but how good we feel about what we do. It is not the preconceived restrictions but the infinite possibilities that we have discovered in Zero Waste that make it a subject worth elaborating. And I am excited at the prospect of sharing what we have learned to help others better their lives.

This is not a book about achieving absolute Zero Waste. Considering the manufacturing practices in place, it is evident that absolute Zero Waste is not possible today. Zero Waste is an idealistic goal, a carrot to get as close as possible. Not everyone who reads this book will be able to implement all that I mention or be able to go as far as reducing his/her yearly household waste output to the size of a quart jar, as my family has. Based on my blog readers' feedback, geographic and demographic disparities come into play in determining how close to Zero Waste one can get. But how much waste one generates is not important. What matters is understanding the effect of our purchasing power on the environment and acting accordingly. Everyone can adopt the changes that are possible in their life. And any small change toward sustainability will have a positive effect on our planet and society.

I understand that given my viewpoint, many will call into question my decision to publish a printed book. But should valuable information be made available only to those who read electronic ones? At this point in time, a printed book is the best way for me to reach a maximum of readers. I believe it is my moral obligation to spread the word about Zero Waste as much as possible, to make every attempt to change our patterns of overconsumption, and to encourage companies to account for the products and choices that impact our health and use our finite resources. I've thought long and hard about this decision. And my cost-benefit analysis has led me to believe that inspiring one person to reduce their daily trash output is well worth the environmental cost of one book. I think it would be hypocritical for me not to print it, considering that I am an ardent patron of the library myself, and I would encourage you to donate the book to your library or pass it along to a friend when you no longer need it.

This is not a scientific book. Statistics and hard data are not my expertise. Numerous authors have done a great job at analyzing the underlying evidence to demonstrate the dire need for our society to adopt Zero Waste. In *Garbology*, Edward Humes exposes the ugly truth behind our waste problem, and in *Slow Death* by Rubber Duck, Rick Smith and Bruce Lourie raise awareness about toxicity in common household items. This book is different. This is a practical guide based on my experience.

It's my goal and ambition to offer readers the tried-and-true ways that have helped me to get as close to Zero Waste in the home as possible. I share with you what's worked and what's failed miserably! Some may dabble and others may decide to take it to the extreme. Whatever the case, my hope is that you'll find some useful alternatives regardless of personal or geographical circumstances.

The home should be a sanctuary. We—mothers, fathers, and citizens—have the right, if not the duty, and certainly the power, to bring positive change to the world through our daily decisions and actions.

A brighter future starts at home! Welcome to Zero Waste Home.

ZERO WASTE HOME: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SIMPLIFYING YOUR LIFE PDF

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Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life. The developed innovation, nowadays assist every little thing the human requirements. It consists of the day-to-day activities, tasks, workplace, amusement, and a lot more. Among them is the great web connection and also computer system. This condition will reduce you to assist among your pastimes, checking out habit. So, do you have going to review this publication *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life* now?

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ZERO WASTE HOME: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SIMPLIFYING YOUR LIFE PDF

Part inspirational story of Bea Johnson (the “Priestess of Waste-Free Living”) and how she transformed her family’s life for the better by reducing their waste to an astonishing one liter per year; part practical, step-by-step guide that gives readers tools and tips to diminish their footprint and simplify their lives.

In *Zero Waste Home*, Bea Johnson shares the story of how she simplified her life by reducing her waste. Today, Bea, her husband, Scott, and their two young sons produce just one quart of garbage a year, and their overall quality of life has changed for the better: they now have more time together, they’ve cut their annual spending by a remarkable 40 percent, and they are healthier than they’ve ever been.

This book shares essential how-to advice, secrets, and insights based on Bea’s experience. She demystifies the process of going Zero Waste with hundreds of easy tips for sustainable living that even the busiest people can integrate: from making your own mustard, to packing kids’ lunches without plastic, to canceling your junk mail, to enjoying the holidays without the guilt associated with overconsumption. *Zero Waste Home* is a stylish and relatable step-by-step guide that will give you the practical tools to help you improve your health, save money and time, and achieve a brighter future for your family—and the planet.

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Today, the less I own, the richer I feel. And I don't have to take out the trash!

It all changed a few years ago. The big house did not burn down, nor did I become a Buddhist monk.

Here is my story.

I grew up in the Provence region of France, in a cookie-cutter home on a cul-de-sac: a far cry from my father's childhood on a small farm, or my mother's upbringing on a French military base in Germany. But my dad was dedicated to making the most of his suburban tract of land. In the warm months, he would spend all his free time working the garden, true to his farming roots, laboring over growing veggies and quenching the soil with his sweat. In the winter, his attention would move to the garage, where drawers full of screws, bolts, and parts lined the walls. Deconstructing, repairing, and reusing were his hobbies. He was (and still is) the kind of person who does not hesitate to stop on the side of the road after spotting a discarded vacuum cleaner, radio, television, or washing machine. If the item looks repairable to him, he throws it in the back of his car, brings it home, takes it apart, puts it back together, and somehow makes it work. He can even repair burned-out lightbulbs! My dad is talented, but his abilities are not unusual for the region. People in the French countryside possess a certain kind of craftiness that allows them to extend the life of their belongings. When I was a child, my dad took the drum out of an old washing machine and turned it into a snail trap, for example, and I remember using the washer's empty shell as a (rather tiny and hot) playhouse.

Through my young eyes, my home was a modern version of *Little House on the Prairie*, a TV series I watched religiously in reruns as a kid. Though we lived in the suburbs, and my two brothers and I were not as helpful as the Ingalls brood (my older brother even had a phobia of the dish sponge), my dad was the handy type and my mom the accomplished homemaker on a tight budget. She prepared three-course meals for lunch and dinner. Just like Laura Ingalls's mom, my mom's week was organized around church, cooking, baking, cleaning, ironing, sewing, knitting, and seasonal canning. On Thursdays, she scouted the farmer's market for deals on fabric and yarn. After school, I would help her mark sewing patterns and watch her turn cloth into elaborate garments. In my bedroom, I emulated her ways and created clothes for my two Barbie dolls out of old nylons and gauze (the latter came from my parents' visits to the blood bank.) At twelve, I sewed my first outfit, and at thirteen, knitted my first sweater.

Apart from the occasional fraternal fights, we had what seemed a happy family life. But what my brothers and I hadn't perceived were the deep rifts between my parents that would ultimately turn their marriage into a sad divorce battle. At eighteen, ready to take a break from psychological and financial hardship, I set off to California for a yearlong au pair contract. Little did I know then that during that year I would fall in love

with the man of my dreams, the man I would later marry, Scott. He was not the surfer type whom young French girls fantasize about, but he was a compassionate person who provided me with much-needed emotional stability. We traveled the world together and lived abroad, but when I became pregnant, my yearnings to try the American soccer-mom lifestyle (as seen on TV) brought us back to the United States.

MY AMERICAN DREAM: PLEASANT HILL

Our sons, Max and, soon after, Léo, were born into the trappings of my American dream: a three-thousand-square-foot contemporary home, on a cul-de-sac, complete with high ceilings, family and living rooms, walk-in closets, a three-car garage, and a koi fishpond in Pleasant Hill, a remote suburb of San Francisco. We owned an SUV, a huge television, and a dog. We stocked two large refrigerators and filled an industrial-size washing machine and dryer several times a week. That's not to say that clutter ever crammed our house or that I bought everything new. The thriftiness that I inherited from my parents led me to shop thrift stores for clothes, toys, and furnishings. Nevertheless, on the side of the house, an oversize garbage can collected leftover house paint and mountains of weekly refuse. And yet we felt good about our environmental footprint because we recycled.

Over the course of seven years, Scott climbed the corporate ladder, making a very comfortable living that covered semiannual international vacations, lavish parties, a rich diet of expensive meats, membership to a private pool, weekly shopping trips at Target, and shelves of things you use only once and then throw away. We had no financial worries, as life rolled by effortlessly and afforded my Barbie-like platinum-blond hair, artificial tan, injected lips, and Botoxed forehead. I'd even experimented with hair extensions, acrylic nails, and "European wraps" (rolls of Saran wrap tightly wound around my body while I rode a stationary bike). We were healthy and had great friends. We seemed to have it all.

Yet things were not quite right. I was thirty-two, and deep down I was terrified at the thought that my life had settled and set. Our life had become sedentary. In our bedroom community, with large avenues and strip malls, we spent too much time in the car and not enough on foot. Scott and I missed the active life and roaming the streets of the capitals we had lived in abroad. We missed walking to cafés and bakeries.

A MOVE TOWARD SIMPLICITY

We decided to relocate across the bay to Mill Valley, a village boasting an active European-style downtown; we sold our house, moved into a temporary apartment with just the necessities, and stored the rest, with the mind-set that we would eventually find a home to accommodate my Moorish decorating style and a whole lot of matching furnishings.

What we found during this transitional period is that with less stuff, we had time to do things we enjoyed doing. Since we no longer spent every weekend mowing our lawn and caring for our huge house and its contents, we now spent our time together as a family, biking, hiking, picnicking, and discovering our new coastal region. It was liberating. Scott finally understood the truth behind his father's words: "I wish that I didn't spend so much time caring for my lawn." As I reflected on the numerous dining sets I had acquired to furnish the kitchen nook, the dining room, and the two backyard patios in our old home, I also recalled a remark made by my good friend Eric: "How many sitting areas does one home need?"

I came to realize that most of the things in storage were not missed, that we had spent innumerable hours and untold resources outfitting a house with the unnecessary. Shopping for the previous home had become a (worthless) pastime, a pretext to go out and be busy in our bedroom community. It became clear to me that much of what we now stored had served no real purpose, except to fill large rooms. We had placed too much importance on "stuff," and we recognized that moving toward simplicity would provide us with a fuller and more meaningful life.

It took a year and 250 open houses to finally find the right home: a 1,475-square-foot cottage built in 1921,

with no lawn, a stone's throw away from the downtown that we were originally told had no listings in our price range. Home prices were twice as much per square foot in Mill Valley as in Pleasant Hill, and the sale of our previous home afforded us half the house. But it was our dream to live within walking distance of hiking trails, libraries, schools, and cafés, and we were ready to downsize.

When we first moved in, our garage and basement were packed with furniture from our old life, but we slowly sold off what would not fit into the new small house. What we did not truly use, need, and love had to go. This would become our motto for decluttering. Did we really use, need, and love the bike trailer, kayak, Rollerblades, snowboards, tae kwon do gear, boxing and sparring gloves, bike racks, Razor scooters, basketball hoop, bocce balls, tennis rackets, snorkels, camping gear, skateboards, baseball bat and mitt, soccer net, badminton set, golf clubs, and fishing poles? Scott had some initial trouble letting go. He loved sporting activities, and he had worked hard to acquire all that equipment. But, ultimately, he realized that it was better to make decisions about what he truly enjoyed and focus on fewer activities rather than let golf clubs gather dust. And so, within a couple of years, we parted with 80 percent of our belongings.

FROM SIMPLICITY TO TRASH REDUCTION

As we simplified, I found guidance in Elaine St. James's books on simplicity and revisited Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House collection. These books inspired us to further evaluate our daily activities. We disconnected the television and canceled catalog and magazine subscriptions. Without TV and shopping taking up so much of our time, we now had time to educate ourselves on the environmental issues that had been on our periphery. We read books such as Natural Capitalism, Cradle to Cradle, and In Defense of Food, and through Netflix we watched documentaries such as Earth and Home that depicted homeless polar bears and confused fish. We learned about the far-reaching implications of unhealthy diets and irresponsible consumption. We started to understand for the first time not only how profoundly endangered our planet is but also how our careless everyday decisions were making matters worse for our world and the world we'd leave behind for our kids.

We were using the car extensively, packing lunches in disposable plastic bags, drinking bottled water, dispensing paper towels and tissues (liberally), and using countless toxic products to clean the house and care for our bodies. The numerous trash cans I had filled with grocery bags in Pleasant Hill and the frozen dinners I had nuked in plastic also came back to mind. I realized that as we enjoyed all the trappings of the American dream, what thoughtless citizens and consumers we had become. How did we get so disconnected from the impact of our actions? Or were we ever connected? What were we teaching our boys, Max and Léo? On the one hand, what we learned brought tears to our eyes and made us angry for having been in the dark so long. On the other hand, it gave us the strength and resolve to drastically change our consumption habits and lifestyle, for the sake of our kids' future.

Scott felt strongly about putting his theories into practice, and although the economy was in recession, he quit his job to start a sustainability consulting company. We took the kids out of the private school we could no longer afford, and I tackled the greening of our home.

With the newfound knowledge that recycling was not the answer to our environmental crisis and that plastics were devastating our oceans, we switched from disposable to reusable water bottles and shopping bags. All it took was remembering to bring them along when needed. Easy. I then started shopping at health food stores and realized that the selection of local and organic produce was worth the extra dollar and that wasteful packaging could be avoided altogether by shopping the bulk section. So I adopted laundry mesh bags for produce and sewed cloth bags out of an old sheet to transport bulk. I designed them in a way that would eliminate the need for disposable ties. As I accrued a collection of empty bottles and storage jars, I slowly reduced our consumption of packaged goods, and soon had a pantry stocked with bulk. You might even say that I became addicted to shopping in bulk, driving far distances within the Bay Area, searching for

suppliers. I sewed a dozen kitchen towels from the same old sheet and with the purchase of microfiber cloths broke our paper towel habit. Scott started a compost pile in the backyard, and I enrolled in botany classes to learn about uses for the wild plants we spotted on our local hikes.

As I had come to obsess about our kitchen's trash, I had overlooked the bathroom but soon proceeded to try waste-free alternatives there, too. For six months, I washed my hair with baking soda and rinsed with apple cider vinegar but when Scott could no longer stand the "smell of vinaigrette" in bed, I resorted to refilling glass bottles with bulk shampoo and conditioner instead. The high I used to get shopping in Pleasant Hill was replaced by the high of learning new ways to green our home and save money to survive the belt-tightening due to Scott's new start-up.

Max and Léo were doing their parts, too, riding their bikes to school, competing for shorter showers, and turning off light fixtures. But one day, as I chaperoned Léo's class on a school field trip to the local health food store, which included a stop in the bulk food aisle, I watched him stumble on his teacher's question "Why is it green to buy in bulk?" At that moment, it dawned on me: we had not yet informed the kids of our waste-reducing efforts. Provided daily with a homemade cookie, they hadn't noticed the lack of processed ones. That night, I pointed out the whys and hows of our atypical pantry and talked to them about other changes that they had already unconsciously adopted. With the kids now aware, and the whole family actively on board, we could aim at "Zero Waste."

When searching for alternatives, I had run into the term in reference to industrial practices. I did not look up the definition and ignored what it entailed for industries, but somehow, the idea clicked for me. It gave me a quantitative way to think about my efforts. We did not know whether we could eliminate every piece of trash, but striving for zero would provide a target to get as close to it as possible, to scrutinize our waste stream and address even the smallest items. We had reached a turning point.

TESTING THE EXTREMES OF ZERO WASTE

I examined what was left in our trash and recycling cans as a directive for our next steps. In the waste bin, I found packaging of meat, fish, cheese, bread, butter, ice cream, and toilet paper. In the recycling, I found papers, tomato cans, empty wine bottles, mustard jars, and soy milk cartons. I set out to eliminate them all.

I started presenting mason jars at the store's meat counter, generating looks, questions, and remarks from onlookers and employees. Explaining to the person behind the counter "I don't have a trash can" became my standby tactic. The pillowcase I brought to the bakery to collect my weekly order of bread drew remarks at first but was quickly accepted as the usual routine. With a new farmer's market opening, I tried my hand at canning, turning fresh tomatoes into a winter stash of canned goods. I found a winery that would refill our bottles with table red, I learned how to make paper from the handouts my kids brought home from school, and I tackled every bit of junk mail landing in our mailbox. There weren't books at the library on waste reduction, so I opened myself to suggestions and googled my way to substitutes for the items for which I couldn't find package-free solutions. I learned how to knead bread, blend mustard, incubate yogurt, craft cheese, strain soy milk, churn butter, and melt lip balm.

One day a well-meaning guest showed up on my doorstep with a prepackaged dessert. It was then that I realized we would never achieve our Zero Waste goal without the help of our friends and family. I understood that Zero Waste starts outside the home, mostly at the store when buying in bulk and opting for reusables over single-use items, but it also starts with asking friends not to bring waste into my home when they come for a visit, and rejecting unneeded freebies. We added "refuse" to the sustainability mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle, rot," and I started a blog to share the logistics of our lifestyle, with a mission to let our friends and family know that our efforts were real and our Zero Waste objectives serious. I prayed for no more unwanted cake boxes, party favors, or junk mail, and I started a consulting business to spread my ideas

and help others simplify.

We soon winnowed our recyclables to the occasional mail, school handout, and empty wine bottle. I contemplated moving toward the goal of Zero Recycling, and as we left for our annual trip to France, I daydreamed that my family might take Zero Waste to the next level when we got back and cancel our curbside recycling service.

FINDING BALANCE

Seeing all the trash at the airport and on the flight quickly brought me back to reality. I'd been living in a bubble. The world was as wasteful as ever. Spending a couple of months at my mom's, however, in a "normal" home, gave me the break needed to relax and let go of judgments and frustrations. I was also able to take a step back for a broader look at my frantic attempt to go Zero Waste. I saw clearly that many of my practices had become socially restrictive and time-consuming, and thus unsustainable. Making butter was costly, considering the amount needed to bake cookies weekly, and making cheese was high maintenance and unnecessary, considering that I could buy it from the counter. I realized that I had taken Zero Waste too far. I had foraged moss to use in lieu of toilet paper, for God's sake!

After all, it seemed that we would be more likely to stick with Zero Waste if we took it easy on ourselves and found some balance. Zero Waste was a lifestyle choice, and if we were going to be in it for the long haul, we had to make it workable and convenient to the realities of our lives. Simplification was once again in order.

Upon my return home, I decided to concentrate on letting go of extremes without compromising the gains we'd made on waste reduction. I reevaluated my tendency to fetch faraway bulk by finding satisfaction in available local supply instead. I also stopped making ice cream and instead refilled a jar at the local Baskin-Robbins. We accepted wine from visitors and gave up the idea of Zero Recycling. I stopped making butter and settled for composting the store-bought wrappers. Butter was (and still is) the only food we would buy in packaging. Within a month, Zero Waste became easy, fun, simple, and stress free.

Scott, who all along had a nagging fear that my passion for farmer's markets, greener alternatives, and organic bulk, in order to reduce packaging waste, was an overall drain on our finances, took the time to analyze our household costs. He compared expenses between our old (2005) and new (2010) lifestyles, reviewing past bank statements and taking into account that our two boys were eating significantly more (being five years older). What he found was better than either of us had dared hope: we were saving almost 40 percent on annual household costs! In his analytical mind, that number along with the amount of time that he knew we were saving—from living a simple lifestyle and taking fewer trips to stores—eliminated his fear.

Today, we are at peace with Zero Waste. The four of us have adopted practices into our daily routines, and we can fully enjoy all the lifestyle has to offer, well beyond the obvious ecological "feel good" aspects. With the implementation of Zero Waste alternatives, we have noticed undeniable life improvements: notable health benefits, along with considerable financial and time savings. We learned that Zero Waste does not deprive; on the contrary, through Zero Waste, I have found a sense of meaning and purpose. My life has been transformed—it's based on experiences rather than stuff, based on embracing change rather than hiding in denial.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Our country's environment, economy, and health are in crisis. Natural resources are running out, the economy is volatile, our general health is declining, and our standard of living is at a record low. What can one person do in the face of these monumental problems? The overwhelming reality of these facts can feel paralyzing, but we must remember that individual action matters and that change is our hands.

Natural resources are running out, but we buy petroleum-based products. The economy is weak, but we

indulge in foreign products. Our general health is declining, but we fuel our bodies with processed foods and bring toxic products into our homes. What we consume directly affects our environment, our economy, and our health, by supporting specific manufacturing practices and creating a demand to make more. In other words, shopping is voting and the decisions that we make every day have an impact. We have the choice to either hurt or heal our society.

Many of us do not need to be convinced to adopt a green lifestyle, yet we yearn to find simple ways to do more, beyond recycling. . . . We found that Zero Waste offers an immediate way to feel empowered by meeting the challenges that we face head-on.

Zero Waste Home will take you beyond the typical eco-friendly alternatives covered well in other publications. This book will encourage you to declutter and recycle less, not just for a better environment but also for a better you. It offers practical, tested solutions to live richer and healthier lives using the sustainable, waste-free resources available to us today, while following a simple system in order: refusing (what we do not need), reducing (what we do need), reusing (what we consume), recycling (what we cannot refuse, reduce, or reuse), and rotting (composting) the rest.

Over the last years, I've learned that everyone has a different take on our lifestyle. Some think that it is too extreme because we do not buy junk food, for example. Others say that it is not extreme enough because we buy toilet paper or eat meat once a week or occasionally fly. What matters to us is not what people think but how good we feel about what we do. It is not the preconceived restrictions but the infinite possibilities that we have discovered in Zero Waste that make it a subject worth elaborating. And I am excited at the prospect of sharing what we have learned to help others better their lives.

This is not a book about achieving absolute Zero Waste. Considering the manufacturing practices in place, it is evident that absolute Zero Waste is not possible today. Zero Waste is an idealistic goal, a carrot to get as close as possible. Not everyone who reads this book will be able to implement all that I mention or be able to go as far as reducing his/her yearly household waste output to the size of a quart jar, as my family has. Based on my blog readers' feedback, geographic and demographic disparities come into play in determining how close to Zero Waste one can get. But how much waste one generates is not important. What matters is understanding the effect of our purchasing power on the environment and acting accordingly. Everyone can adopt the changes that are possible in their life. And any small change toward sustainability will have a positive effect on our planet and society.

I understand that given my viewpoint, many will call into question my decision to publish a printed book. But should valuable information be made available only to those who read electronic ones? At this point in time, a printed book is the best way for me to reach a maximum of readers. I believe it is my moral obligation to spread the word about Zero Waste as much as possible, to make every attempt to change our patterns of overconsumption, and to encourage companies to account for the products and choices that impact our health and use our finite resources. I've thought long and hard about this decision. And my cost-benefit analysis has led me to believe that inspiring one person to reduce their daily trash output is well worth the environmental cost of one book. I think it would be hypocritical for me not to print it, considering that I am an ardent patron of the library myself, and I would encourage you to donate the book to your library or pass it along to a friend when you no longer need it.

This is not a scientific book. Statistics and hard data are not my expertise. Numerous authors have done a great job at analyzing the underlying evidence to demonstrate the dire need for our society to adopt Zero Waste. In Garbology, Edward Humes exposes the ugly truth behind our waste problem, and in Slow Death by Rubber Duck, Rick Smith and Bruce Lourie raise awareness about toxicity in common household items.

This book is different. This is a practical guide based on my experience.

It's my goal and ambition to offer readers the tried-and-true ways that have helped me to get as close to Zero Waste in the home as possible. I share with you what's worked and what's failed miserably! Some may dabble and others may decide to take it to the extreme. Whatever the case, my hope is that you'll find some useful alternatives regardless of personal or geographical circumstances.

The home should be a sanctuary. We—mothers, fathers, and citizens—have the right, if not the duty, and certainly the power, to bring positive change to the world through our daily decisions and actions.

A brighter future starts at home! Welcome to Zero Waste Home.

Most helpful customer reviews

58 of 62 people found the following review helpful.

Zero Waste Home

By Heather

I must admit, I bought this book having never read the blog, or hearing a word about the author. My husband randomly asked me the other day how we have so much trash, and Amazon recommended the book to me based on browsing history, which I took as a sign and ordered it. It is a very informative book, and as quick a read as you choose for it to be. The sections are laid out very well so you can pick and choose what you'd like to read. I read all of the book except for the section on children which I skimmed quickly. I was actually pleasantly surprised by how many things mentioned in the book we already do, considering the comment on our trash situation. I know that our biggest waste is paper towels and this was very lightly addressed, but she did give some options for homemade reusable options which I fully intend to look into. I loved how open she was on their previous lifestyle and made it abundantly clear that the past doesn't matter, you shouldn't dwell on that, just do anything you can do to reduce your carbon footprint for the future which I appreciated. The author is very humble and open about their both good and bad experiences being "green." Not living in California or another super progressive city does have its limitations on ability to do some of the options mentioned. For example, I regularly purchase bulk items whenever possible, but in our area the only bulk items offered are nuts/flours/snacks/grains. Not soap, shampoo, or cooking oils or coffee. I completely agree with the philosophy that recycling should not be our best option. The most helpful part of the book is the resources information, compiled for ease of access. The resources included options for you to mail back items that are otherwise trash in most counties, websites and phone numbers to remove you from junk mailing lists, how to find bulk shopping in your area or even a website to find milk packaged in glass bottles in you area. The resources list is perhaps the most helpful to me in that it is one area, while it is all info you could find online, she did the legwork for you, so you have no excuse to not try to make a change.

I think this is a great book for anyone looking to make their routine a little more environmentally friendly. There is an in depth section on different types of composting options which would help anyone get started to figure out the best set up for them. The author makes it clear that she doesn't expect anyone to do more than they are comfortable with or that seriously interferes with life, which is nice. She also makes it clear that doing what she has done, which is further than most people will probably take the concept, is hard. I highly recommend the book for a casual read, I think I will send it to my mom, who could definitely use a little green in her routine. The only thing worth mentioning, and why I rated it four stars rather than five, is that aside from the resources, most of this is not new information to me, so for many people who would be looking at this book I would assume it is mostly a rehash of things we already know. Compost what you can, rid your home of chemicals, stop throwing away plastic, stop wasting your money on things you will throw away in a month or two because they are junk, stop buying things from companies you don't believe in, etc. With that being said, I am going to go online now look into some of the resources the author mentioned that I

didn't know about.

37 of 38 people found the following review helpful.

Even if you never get to the point of "zero" waste, this book can help you pare down.

By MLSchoenfeld

Bea Johnson had been living the type of life that we're all supposed to envy: huge house, fancy parties, "Barbie-like platinum blonde hair," botox injections... She was Looking Good.

But she realized that a lot of the zest was gone from her life. The author was uniquely positioned to conduct an experiment. She had the luxury of choice. She chose to change her environment, by putting household items into storage and renting an apartment while she searched for her pared-down dream home, going back to the simplicity of her frugal childhood on a farm. Judge her if you wish, but the author has done all the research and experimentation to point the way for the rest of us who wish to live more sustainably.

Ms. Johnson doesn't just recycle - she avoids even having to recycle. We have all heard the slogan, reduce, reuse, recycle. But the author does it one better. She adds: refuse. Yes, we are to refuse anything that comes with a big disposal burden. Extreme? Probably. But at times I have found myself deciding not to buy something because of the packaging itself, so maybe I'm not so very different after all.

Ms. Johnson admits to foraging for moss to use in place of toilet paper, but then decided that it was best to buy the kind of toilet paper that comes with individual rolls wrapped in paper - instead of plastic. When she had a couple of broken drinking glasses, she actually took the time to research online and called her local recycler, to be sure that the broken shards could be accepted at the recycling plant.

She not only brings her own shopping bags, she brings her own containers (BYOC) for bulk items and even bakery and deli items. From experience, she explains that it's best to act as if it's completely ordinary to hand the deli people your glass jar for the cheese or lunch meat you're buying. Her bakery is trained to put her weekly bread allotment into a pillowcase, which gets washed of course.

By going to an extreme, she has learned a lot and is willing to share it with us. You might decide that some of these ideas are simply too outlandish to employ realistically in your own life. You might live in an apartment and find it impossible to compost. You might decide that the effort of reducing your own household waste any further is too much trouble.

Or you might find a few new ideas that fit right into your life.

I already live a conservative lifestyle. I shop the bulk section and cook from scratch. I get most of my clothes from resale shops. It takes us three months to fill a trash bag with things that cannot be recycled or composted. We have dumb phones and a TV antenna on the roof, but that doesn't mean we aren't incredibly tech savvy. We just choose not to afford many modern conveniences.

This book actually had a few things to teach me. One of the ideas that leapt off the pages at me was the idea of letting the containers in my pantry limit the amount of bulk items I stock at any given time. Why keep five kinds of rice and six kinds of beans in stock at all times? By planning the menu more carefully and being more disciplined about using the food that was currently in the pantry, I could reduce the volume considerably.

Not everyone can go to the Farmer's Market every single week, followed by the bulk store for anything else. But I can base my habits on this idea and visit each once per month. Instead of one jar for grain, maybe three

or four. Less than I'm stocking now!

I always hate having to throw away a plastic bag when and if I buy something from the deli. Why not hand them washable plastic containers? (Safer than breakable glass.) It's worth a try. Bring the empty spice bottle to the bulk spice section to refill, instead of having to throw away the tiny spice bag. It simply requires having the bottle weighed before adding the spice.

See? Simple changes can be painless if you're committed to reducing the amount of stuff that gets used once and thrown away.

Give this book a read if you're curious about simplifying and reducing waste in your wardrobe, your hygiene routine, and your home office. This book is full of DIY treasures including a pancake batter recipe, formulas for cleaning supplies, how to make kohl to enhance your eyes, how to use sugar instead of wax for silky legs, and instructions for making a mason bee house.

Yes you can get these ideas off the internet too, but they're all in one place in this book. Rather than buy books, I try to borrow them from the library. Why store a book that I will not access regularly? With this book, it's a tough call. There are so many inspiring ideas, I'm sure I'll check this one out again in the future.

67 of 74 people found the following review helpful.

Sprouting Practical Solutions to Global Crises

By Critical Cosmologist

This book is practical, beautifully written and deeply felt. There are wonderful tips, but I especially enjoyed the text's humanity. Bea is uncompromising and she does not flinch from exposing herself (although i follow her blog religiously, I did not know she used to own a SUV, had botox, 'upgraded' her wedding rings, etc.). Rather than 'judging' her, I feel relieved--because it permits me to accept my foibles and culpability instead of disavowing and repressing my waste-generation. I feel optimistic by the sight (and site) of this book. Totally galvanizing and useful. Love its connection to politics, family and everyday life; love that I don't feel alone or crazy in desiring idealistic transformation away from commodification, privatization, consumerism, etc. The tone is not didactic but stern and loving simultaneously. A more intimate companion to her stupendously fabulous blog. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Now, when is the cookbook coming out?

See all 234 customer reviews...

ZERO WASTE HOME: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SIMPLIFYING YOUR LIFE PDF

Yeah, reviewing a publication **Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life** could add your close friends lists. This is among the formulas for you to be successful. As recognized, success does not indicate that you have terrific things. Recognizing as well as recognizing greater than other will offer each success. Next to, the message and also perception of this Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life can be taken as well as selected to act.

Review

“Bea Johnson’s book has allowed me to get even closer to Zero Waste than I was before I picked it up. Read it today. It will transform the way you view waste.” (Ed Begley, Jr.)

“Zero Waste Home is an amazing story of personal transformation. It compels us to recognize that our heedlessly wasteful ways are not gateways to prosperity and convenience, but barriers to a good life and a healthy planet. Bea Johnson has produced an invaluable resource.” (Edward Humes, author of Garbology)

“Waste not, want not isn't about penny pinching. It's about gratitude and loving our lives. Bea Johnson doesn't just teach us to save the planet. She teaches us to save ourselves.” (Colin Beavan, author of No Impact Man)

“If you want inspiration and practical information... [Zero Waste Home] is powerful.” (Natural Child World magazine)

“Clear, authentic, knowledgeable, helpful and a great read. Zero Waste Home will make a difference.” (Paul Hawken, author of Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution)

About the Author
Bea Johnson has been shattering preconceptions attached to a lifestyle of environmental consciousness through her Zero Waste lifestyle. She regularly opens her home to educational tours and the media, and she has appeared in segments on the Today show, NBC and CBS news, Global TV BC (Canada), and a mini Yahoo! documentary. Bea and her family have also been featured in print publications, including People, Sunset, the San Francisco Chronicle, as well as The Huffington Post, MSNBC, USA TODAY, Mother Nature Network, among others. They live in Mill Valley, California.

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Zero Waste Home Introduction

Not so long ago, things were different: I owned a three-thousand-square-foot home, two cars, four tables, and twenty-six chairs. I filled a sixty-four-gallon can of trash weekly.

Today, the less I own, the richer I feel. And I don't have to take out the trash!

It all changed a few years ago. The big house did not burn down, nor did I become a Buddhist monk.

Here is my story.

I grew up in the Provence region of France, in a cookie-cutter home on a cul-de-sac: a far cry from my

father's childhood on a small farm, or my mother's upbringing on a French military base in Germany. But my dad was dedicated to making the most of his suburban tract of land. In the warm months, he would spend all his free time working the garden, true to his farming roots, laboring over growing veggies and quenching the soil with his sweat. In the winter, his attention would move to the garage, where drawers full of screws, bolts, and parts lined the walls. Deconstructing, repairing, and reusing were his hobbies. He was (and still is) the kind of person who does not hesitate to stop on the side of the road after spotting a discarded vacuum cleaner, radio, television, or washing machine. If the item looks repairable to him, he throws it in the back of his car, brings it home, takes it apart, puts it back together, and somehow makes it work. He can even repair burned-out lightbulbs! My dad is talented, but his abilities are not unusual for the region. People in the French countryside possess a certain kind of craftiness that allows them to extend the life of their belongings. When I was a child, my dad took the drum out of an old washing machine and turned it into a snail trap, for example, and I remember using the washer's empty shell as a (rather tiny and hot) playhouse.

Through my young eyes, my home was a modern version of *Little House on the Prairie*, a TV series I watched religiously in reruns as a kid. Though we lived in the suburbs, and my two brothers and I were not as helpful as the Ingalls brood (my older brother even had a phobia of the dish sponge), my dad was the handy type and my mom the accomplished homemaker on a tight budget. She prepared three-course meals for lunch and dinner. Just like Laura Ingalls's mom, my mom's week was organized around church, cooking, baking, cleaning, ironing, sewing, knitting, and seasonal canning. On Thursdays, she scouted the farmer's market for deals on fabric and yarn. After school, I would help her mark sewing patterns and watch her turn cloth into elaborate garments. In my bedroom, I emulated her ways and created clothes for my two Barbie dolls out of old nylons and gauze (the latter came from my parents' visits to the blood bank.) At twelve, I sewed my first outfit, and at thirteen, knitted my first sweater.

Apart from the occasional fraternal fights, we had what seemed a happy family life. But what my brothers and I hadn't perceived were the deep rifts between my parents that would ultimately turn their marriage into a sad divorce battle. At eighteen, ready to take a break from psychological and financial hardship, I set off to California for a yearlong au pair contract. Little did I know then that during that year I would fall in love with the man of my dreams, the man I would later marry, Scott. He was not the surfer type whom young French girls fantasize about, but he was a compassionate person who provided me with much-needed emotional stability. We traveled the world together and lived abroad, but when I became pregnant, my yearnings to try the American soccer-mom lifestyle (as seen on TV) brought us back to the United States.

MY AMERICAN DREAM: PLEASANT HILL

Our sons, Max and, soon after, Léo, were born into the trappings of my American dream: a three-thousand-square-foot contemporary home, on a cul-de-sac, complete with high ceilings, family and living rooms, walk-in closets, a three-car garage, and a koi fishpond in Pleasant Hill, a remote suburb of San Francisco. We owned an SUV, a huge television, and a dog. We stocked two large refrigerators and filled an industrial-size washing machine and dryer several times a week. That's not to say that clutter ever crammed our house or that I bought everything new. The thriftiness that I inherited from my parents led me to shop thrift stores for clothes, toys, and furnishings. Nevertheless, on the side of the house, an oversize garbage can collected leftover house paint and mountains of weekly refuse. And yet we felt good about our environmental footprint because we recycled.

Over the course of seven years, Scott climbed the corporate ladder, making a very comfortable living that covered semiannual international vacations, lavish parties, a rich diet of expensive meats, membership to a private pool, weekly shopping trips at Target, and shelves of things you use only once and then throw away. We had no financial worries, as life rolled by effortlessly and afforded my Barbie-like platinum-blond hair, artificial tan, injected lips, and Botoxed forehead. I'd even experimented with hair extensions, acrylic nails, and "European wraps" (rolls of Saran wrap tightly wound around my body while I rode a stationary bike).

We were healthy and had great friends. We seemed to have it all.

Yet things were not quite right. I was thirty-two, and deep down I was terrified at the thought that my life had settled and set. Our life had become sedentary. In our bedroom community, with large avenues and strip malls, we spent too much time in the car and not enough on foot. Scott and I missed the active life and roaming the streets of the capitals we had lived in abroad. We missed walking to cafés and bakeries.

A MOVE TOWARD SIMPLICITY

We decided to relocate across the bay to Mill Valley, a village boasting an active European-style downtown; we sold our house, moved into a temporary apartment with just the necessities, and stored the rest, with the mind-set that we would eventually find a home to accommodate my Moorish decorating style and a whole lot of matching furnishings.

What we found during this transitional period is that with less stuff, we had time to do things we enjoyed doing. Since we no longer spent every weekend mowing our lawn and caring for our huge house and its contents, we now spent our time together as a family, biking, hiking, picnicking, and discovering our new coastal region. It was liberating. Scott finally understood the truth behind his father's words: "I wish that I didn't spend so much time caring for my lawn." As I reflected on the numerous dining sets I had acquired to furnish the kitchen nook, the dining room, and the two backyard patios in our old home, I also recalled a remark made by my good friend Eric: "How many sitting areas does one home need?"

I came to realize that most of the things in storage were not missed, that we had spent innumerable hours and untold resources outfitting a house with the unnecessary. Shopping for the previous home had become a (worthless) pastime, a pretext to go out and be busy in our bedroom community. It became clear to me that much of what we now stored had served no real purpose, except to fill large rooms. We had placed too much importance on "stuff," and we recognized that moving toward simplicity would provide us with a fuller and more meaningful life.

It took a year and 250 open houses to finally find the right home: a 1,475-square-foot cottage built in 1921, with no lawn, a stone's throw away from the downtown that we were originally told had no listings in our price range. Home prices were twice as much per square foot in Mill Valley as in Pleasant Hill, and the sale of our previous home afforded us half the house. But it was our dream to live within walking distance of hiking trails, libraries, schools, and cafés, and we were ready to downsize.

When we first moved in, our garage and basement were packed with furniture from our old life, but we slowly sold off what would not fit into the new small house. What we did not truly use, need, and love had to go. This would become our motto for decluttering. Did we really use, need, and love the bike trailer, kayak, Rollerblades, snowboards, tae kwon do gear, boxing and sparring gloves, bike racks, Razor scooters, basketball hoop, bocce balls, tennis rackets, snorkels, camping gear, skateboards, baseball bat and mitt, soccer net, badminton set, golf clubs, and fishing poles? Scott had some initial trouble letting go. He loved sporting activities, and he had worked hard to acquire all that equipment. But, ultimately, he realized that it was better to make decisions about what he truly enjoyed and focus on fewer activities rather than let golf clubs gather dust. And so, within a couple of years, we parted with 80 percent of our belongings.

FROM SIMPLICITY TO TRASH REDUCTION

As we simplified, I found guidance in Elaine St. James's books on simplicity and revisited Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House collection. These books inspired us to further evaluate our daily activities. We disconnected the television and canceled catalog and magazine subscriptions. Without TV and shopping taking up so much of our time, we now had time to educate ourselves on the environmental issues that had been on our periphery. We read books such as Natural Capitalism, Cradle to Cradle, and In Defense of Food, and through Netflix we watched documentaries such as Earth and Home that depicted homeless polar bears

and confused fish. We learned about the far-reaching implications of unhealthy diets and irresponsible consumption. We started to understand for the first time not only how profoundly endangered our planet is but also how our careless everyday decisions were making matters worse for our world and the world we'd leave behind for our kids.

We were using the car extensively, packing lunches in disposable plastic bags, drinking bottled water, dispensing paper towels and tissues (liberally), and using countless toxic products to clean the house and care for our bodies. The numerous trash cans I had filled with grocery bags in Pleasant Hill and the frozen dinners I had nuked in plastic also came back to mind. I realized that as we enjoyed all the trappings of the American dream, what thoughtless citizens and consumers we had become. How did we get so disconnected from the impact of our actions? Or were we ever connected? What were we teaching our boys, Max and Léo? On the one hand, what we learned brought tears to our eyes and made us angry for having been in the dark so long. On the other hand, it gave us the strength and resolve to drastically change our consumption habits and lifestyle, for the sake of our kids' future.

Scott felt strongly about putting his theories into practice, and although the economy was in recession, he quit his job to start a sustainability consulting company. We took the kids out of the private school we could no longer afford, and I tackled the greening of our home.

With the newfound knowledge that recycling was not the answer to our environmental crisis and that plastics were devastating our oceans, we switched from disposable to reusable water bottles and shopping bags. All it took was remembering to bring them along when needed. Easy. I then started shopping at health food stores and realized that the selection of local and organic produce was worth the extra dollar and that wasteful packaging could be avoided altogether by shopping the bulk section. So I adopted laundry mesh bags for produce and sewed cloth bags out of an old sheet to transport bulk. I designed them in a way that would eliminate the need for disposable ties. As I accrued a collection of empty bottles and storage jars, I slowly reduced our consumption of packaged goods, and soon had a pantry stocked with bulk. You might even say that I became addicted to shopping in bulk, driving far distances within the Bay Area, searching for suppliers. I sewed a dozen kitchen towels from the same old sheet and with the purchase of microfiber cloths broke our paper towel habit. Scott started a compost pile in the backyard, and I enrolled in botany classes to learn about uses for the wild plants we spotted on our local hikes.

As I had come to obsess about our kitchen's trash, I had overlooked the bathroom but soon proceeded to try waste-free alternatives there, too. For six months, I washed my hair with baking soda and rinsed with apple cider vinegar but when Scott could no longer stand the "smell of vinaigrette" in bed, I resorted to refilling glass bottles with bulk shampoo and conditioner instead. The high I used to get shopping in Pleasant Hill was replaced by the high of learning new ways to green our home and save money to survive the belt-tightening due to Scott's new start-up.

Max and Léo were doing their parts, too, riding their bikes to school, competing for shorter showers, and turning off light fixtures. But one day, as I chaperoned Léo's class on a school field trip to the local health food store, which included a stop in the bulk food aisle, I watched him stumble on his teacher's question "Why is it green to buy in bulk?" At that moment, it dawned on me: we had not yet informed the kids of our waste-reducing efforts. Provided daily with a homemade cookie, they hadn't noticed the lack of processed ones. That night, I pointed out the whys and hows of our atypical pantry and talked to them about other changes that they had already unconsciously adopted. With the kids now aware, and the whole family actively on board, we could aim at "Zero Waste."

When searching for alternatives, I had run into the term in reference to industrial practices. I did not look up

the definition and ignored what it entailed for industries, but somehow, the idea clicked for me. It gave me a quantitative way to think about my efforts. We did not know whether we could eliminate every piece of trash, but striving for zero would provide a target to get as close to it as possible, to scrutinize our waste stream and address even the smallest items. We had reached a turning point.

TESTING THE EXTREMES OF ZERO WASTE

I examined what was left in our trash and recycling cans as a directive for our next steps. In the waste bin, I found packaging of meat, fish, cheese, bread, butter, ice cream, and toilet paper. In the recycling, I found papers, tomato cans, empty wine bottles, mustard jars, and soy milk cartons. I set out to eliminate them all.

I started presenting mason jars at the store's meat counter, generating looks, questions, and remarks from onlookers and employees. Explaining to the person behind the counter "I don't have a trash can" became my standby tactic. The pillowcase I brought to the bakery to collect my weekly order of bread drew remarks at first but was quickly accepted as the usual routine. With a new farmer's market opening, I tried my hand at canning, turning fresh tomatoes into a winter stash of canned goods. I found a winery that would refill our bottles with table red, I learned how to make paper from the handouts my kids brought home from school, and I tackled every bit of junk mail landing in our mailbox. There weren't books at the library on waste reduction, so I opened myself to suggestions and googled my way to substitutes for the items for which I couldn't find package-free solutions. I learned how to knead bread, blend mustard, incubate yogurt, craft cheese, strain soy milk, churn butter, and melt lip balm.

One day a well-meaning guest showed up on my doorstep with a prepackaged dessert. It was then that I realized we would never achieve our Zero Waste goal without the help of our friends and family. I understood that Zero Waste starts outside the home, mostly at the store when buying in bulk and opting for reusables over single-use items, but it also starts with asking friends not to bring waste into my home when they come for a visit, and rejecting unneeded freebies. We added "refuse" to the sustainability mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle, rot," and I started a blog to share the logistics of our lifestyle, with a mission to let our friends and family know that our efforts were real and our Zero Waste objectives serious. I prayed for no more unwanted cake boxes, party favors, or junk mail, and I started a consulting business to spread my ideas and help others simplify.

We soon winnowed our recyclables to the occasional mail, school handout, and empty wine bottle. I contemplated moving toward the goal of Zero Recycling, and as we left for our annual trip to France, I daydreamed that my family might take Zero Waste to the next level when we got back and cancel our curbside recycling service.

FINDING BALANCE

Seeing all the trash at the airport and on the flight quickly brought me back to reality. I'd been living in a bubble. The world was as wasteful as ever. Spending a couple of months at my mom's, however, in a "normal" home, gave me the break needed to relax and let go of judgments and frustrations. I was also able to take a step back for a broader look at my frantic attempt to go Zero Waste. I saw clearly that many of my practices had become socially restrictive and time-consuming, and thus unsustainable. Making butter was costly, considering the amount needed to bake cookies weekly, and making cheese was high maintenance and unnecessary, considering that I could buy it from the counter. I realized that I had taken Zero Waste too far. I had foraged moss to use in lieu of toilet paper, for God's sake!

After all, it seemed that we would be more likely to stick with Zero Waste if we took it easy on ourselves and found some balance. Zero Waste was a lifestyle choice, and if we were going to be in it for the long haul, we had to make it workable and convenient to the realities of our lives. Simplification was once again in order.

Upon my return home, I decided to concentrate on letting go of extremes without compromising the gains

we'd made on waste reduction. I reevaluated my tendency to fetch faraway bulk by finding satisfaction in available local supply instead. I also stopped making ice cream and instead refilled a jar at the local Baskin-Robbins. We accepted wine from visitors and gave up the idea of Zero Recycling. I stopped making butter and settled for composting the store-bought wrappers. Butter was (and still is) the only food we would buy in packaging. Within a month, Zero Waste became easy, fun, simple, and stress free.

Scott, who all along had a nagging fear that my passion for farmer's markets, greener alternatives, and organic bulk, in order to reduce packaging waste, was an overall drain on our finances, took the time to analyze our household costs. He compared expenses between our old (2005) and new (2010) lifestyles, reviewing past bank statements and taking into account that our two boys were eating significantly more (being five years older). What he found was better than either of us had dared hope: we were saving almost 40 percent on annual household costs! In his analytical mind, that number along with the amount of time that he knew we were saving—from living a simple lifestyle and taking fewer trips to stores—eliminated his fear.

Today, we are at peace with Zero Waste. The four of us have adopted practices into our daily routines, and we can fully enjoy all the lifestyle has to offer, well beyond the obvious ecological “feel good” aspects. With the implementation of Zero Waste alternatives, we have noticed undeniable life improvements: notable health benefits, along with considerable financial and time savings. We learned that Zero Waste does not deprive; on the contrary, through Zero Waste, I have found a sense of meaning and purpose. My life has been transformed—it's based on experiences rather than stuff, based on embracing change rather than hiding in denial.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Our country's environment, economy, and health are in crisis. Natural resources are running out, the economy is volatile, our general health is declining, and our standard of living is at a record low. What can one person do in the face of these monumental problems? The overwhelming reality of these facts can feel paralyzing, but we must remember that individual action matters and that change is our hands.

Natural resources are running out, but we buy petroleum-based products. The economy is weak, but we indulge in foreign products. Our general health is declining, but we fuel our bodies with processed foods and bring toxic products into our homes. What we consume directly affects our environment, our economy, and our health, by supporting specific manufacturing practices and creating a demand to make more. In other words, shopping is voting and the decisions that we make every day have an impact. We have the choice to either hurt or heal our society.

Many of us do not need to be convinced to adopt a green lifestyle, yet we yearn to find simple ways to do more, beyond recycling. . . . We found that Zero Waste offers an immediate way to feel empowered by meeting the challenges that we face head-on.

Zero Waste Home will take you beyond the typical eco-friendly alternatives covered well in other publications. This book will encourage you to declutter and recycle less, not just for a better environment but also for a better you. It offers practical, tested solutions to live richer and healthier lives using the sustainable, waste-free resources available to us today, while following a simple system in order: refusing (what we do not need), reducing (what we do need), reusing (what we consume), recycling (what we cannot refuse, reduce, or reuse), and rotting (composting) the rest.

Over the last years, I've learned that everyone has a different take on our lifestyle. Some think that it is too extreme because we do not buy junk food, for example. Others say that it is not extreme enough because we buy toilet paper or eat meat once a week or occasionally fly. What matters to us is not what people think but how good we feel about what we do. It is not the preconceived restrictions but the infinite possibilities that

we have discovered in Zero Waste that make it a subject worth elaborating. And I am excited at the prospect of sharing what we have learned to help others better their lives.

This is not a book about achieving absolute Zero Waste. Considering the manufacturing practices in place, it is evident that absolute Zero Waste is not possible today. Zero Waste is an idealistic goal, a carrot to get as close as possible. Not everyone who reads this book will be able to implement all that I mention or be able to go as far as reducing his/her yearly household waste output to the size of a quart jar, as my family has. Based on my blog readers' feedback, geographic and demographic disparities come into play in determining how close to Zero Waste one can get. But how much waste one generates is not important. What matters is understanding the effect of our purchasing power on the environment and acting accordingly. Everyone can adopt the changes that are possible in their life. And any small change toward sustainability will have a positive effect on our planet and society.

I understand that given my viewpoint, many will call into question my decision to publish a printed book. But should valuable information be made available only to those who read electronic ones? At this point in time, a printed book is the best way for me to reach a maximum of readers. I believe it is my moral obligation to spread the word about Zero Waste as much as possible, to make every attempt to change our patterns of overconsumption, and to encourage companies to account for the products and choices that impact our health and use our finite resources. I've thought long and hard about this decision. And my cost-benefit analysis has led me to believe that inspiring one person to reduce their daily trash output is well worth the environmental cost of one book. I think it would be hypocritical for me not to print it, considering that I am an ardent patron of the library myself, and I would encourage you to donate the book to your library or pass it along to a friend when you no longer need it.

This is not a scientific book. Statistics and hard data are not my expertise. Numerous authors have done a great job at analyzing the underlying evidence to demonstrate the dire need for our society to adopt Zero Waste. In *Garbology*, Edward Humes exposes the ugly truth behind our waste problem, and in *Slow Death* by Rubber Duck, Rick Smith and Bruce Lourie raise awareness about toxicity in common household items. This book is different. This is a practical guide based on my experience.

It's my goal and ambition to offer readers the tried-and-true ways that have helped me to get as close to Zero Waste in the home as possible. I share with you what's worked and what's failed miserably! Some may dabble and others may decide to take it to the extreme. Whatever the case, my hope is that you'll find some useful alternatives regardless of personal or geographical circumstances.

The home should be a sanctuary. We—mothers, fathers, and citizens—have the right, if not the duty, and certainly the power, to bring positive change to the world through our daily decisions and actions.

A brighter future starts at home! Welcome to Zero Waste Home.

So, merely be here, discover the publication *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life* now and also review that swiftly. Be the initial to review this e-book *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life* by downloading in the link. We have a few other books to check out in this site. So, you could discover them likewise effortlessly. Well, now we have done to supply you the very best e-book to read today, this *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life* is truly proper for you. Never ever neglect that you require this e-book *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life* to make far better life. On-line publication **Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide To Simplifying Your Life** will really provide simple of everything to review as well as take the perks.