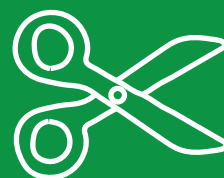


Towards Zero Waste



A handbook

for sustainable consumption and reuse

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Dear reader,

Although finding solutions to the **climate crisis** and the broader environmental crisis should not solely be the responsibility of individuals or even local communities, but primarily, of decision-makers at a national and international level (whom we should strive to influence as citizens or activists), there is still much that each of us can do to **reduce our environmental impact**. This manual explores **lifestyle changes** that defy consumerism norms and pave the way to **sustainable choices**.

Who are we?

This guide was written by **activists from three organizations** in Croatia, Greece, and Serbia, which have significant experience in **promoting reuse and sustainable consumption**. This isn't about preachy lectures; it's about **sharing experiences and insights** that empower you to make a difference. We celebrate our differences and champion **reuse practices** as a way of life.

We dedicate this journey to workers in the reuse sector, leaders of future sustainable jobs, activists, communities interested in **exploring this practice**, and individuals seeking to **contribute** and **obtain skills** for the future of reuse.

This manual is also dedicated to all those who have mastered reuse and **resource efficiency**, whether in the present or past, out of necessity or as activists, recognising their contribution to the **well-being** of the people and the planet (or not).

Your involvement is key to making this movement **impactful** and **long-lasting!**

Navigating This Handbook

Let's spill the tea on why recycling is not enough. Unveil the myths, explore alternatives, and understand the impact of refuse and reuse. This isn't about guilt trips; it's about making **informed choices** that resonate with your **values**.

This manual is structured to challenge beliefs, promote **environmental awareness**, and educate. In each month, we focus on a specific topic related to reuse and **sustainable consumption**. In the second part, you will find a calendar with **challenges** for introducing new **eco-friendlier practices** into your life. Don't worry; these challenges are like gentle nudges, not overwhelming burdens. They are designed to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of sustainable living.

The present publication focuses on providing knowledge, ideas, and challenges that will help you realize just how much of a difference a single person can make. Every month in this handbook presents an opportunity to explore topics such as zero-waste shopping and clothing swaps. Each challenge is a step towards challenging the status quo, with benefits for our environment, society, and economy. It's not about perfection; it's about making a tangible impact and contributing to systemic change.



January

The 4 weeks of Zero Waste Challenge

How many times have you committed to realistic and not-so-realistic "New Year's resolutions", burdening yourself (and your social media feed) with goals, benchmarks, and a good dose of self-inflicted (and consumerism-inflicted) pressure?

Chill out: it's not what we are suggesting you do again, and again.

Instead, how about a less demanding, more rewarding (good for people and the planet) sort of challenge that is tailored to your lifestyle? An old Italian saying goes like this: "If you don't do something at the beginning of the year, chances are you won't do it throughout the year, too". When we apply this principle to waste, it sounds pretty awesome.

So, here is your four-week zero-waste challenge!

Week 1 - Track your waste: During this challenge, your goal is to observe the type of waste you produce daily. Keep the packaging from every item on your weekly shopping list, whether it is recyclable or not. At the end of the week, sort your packaging waste. Is it recyclable? Can it be reused (i.e. glass jars)? Is it non-recyclable? Will it end up in residual waste? Then you can set your goals for reducing your residual waste. Next time you make your shopping list, consider replacing a few items that come in non-environmentally friendly packaging with greener alternatives. Little by little, you will notice that you will generate less waste each time you shop.

Ready to level up this challenge? Add your unplanned weekly purchases and observe the waste management properties of those items as well. You will be surprised at how easy it is to track environmentally unfriendly items once you start paying attention.

Week 2 - Map your spots: Which groceries or other packaged items do you usually buy, that could also be purchased in bulk/package-free? Which shops or market stalls in your area offer package-free items?

Ready to level up this challenge? If no shops are offering package-free solutions, discuss the possibility of bringing your own packaging for certain items with local sellers. Cookies sold by the piece are usually an easy start!

Week 3 - Share your findings with others: Once you discover zero-waste spots or manage to transform not-really-zero-waste spots into potential ones, it would be a shame not to spread the word! Use online maps to create a zero-waste map for your town or neighborhood.

Ready to level up this challenge? Don't forget to add which types of packaging (produce bags, mason jars, egg boxes, bottles, other) one should bring from home. It's not about reinventing the wheel! Not too long ago, it was common to buy groceries package-free, i.e. in jars or produce bags that people would bring from homes or in bulk. Besides fruits and vegetables, legumes, pasta, rice, biscuits, and many other solid foods were sold in bulk.

Week 4 - Changing habits: Start small, dream big. What can you plan/do differently next month? And how about the whole year? Setting more and more challenges, repeating this process every few months, or adding more items to your to-replace list will not only help you live more sustainably but may also help you lower your budget as package-free can also be a lot cheaper!



February

Devices, people, and the planet

The rapidly increasing rate at which we replace old electrical and electronic devices with newer models is linked to significant environmental and social harms, particularly in less affluent nations. These countries not only supply much of the raw materials needed for production but also contribute a large portion of the labor force in manufacturing these devices, and often become the final dumping grounds for electronic waste. Their production requires rare and non-renewable minerals and frequently involves hazardous substances.

Consumer surveys in Europe indicate a general sentiment that modern electrical and electronic appliances do not last as long as their predecessors. Additionally, there is a strong preference for products that are more durable and easier to repair. Currently, the European Union is taking steps to mitigate this issue by developing legislation aimed at improving the reparability and extending the longevity of products available in the market. As we anticipate the effects of this eagerly awaited legislation, we can take immediate action by refusing unnecessary purchases, carefully choosing the products we truly need, and opting to repair rather than discard our devices.

What can I do as a consumer/product owner?

Step 1 - Do I really need it?

Often, we are tempted to buy devices that we don't **actually** need. Therefore, before buying a shiny new TV set, robot vacuum, cordless drill, or yet another tablet or laptop, ask yourself: do I truly need it, and for how long will I be using it?

Step 2 - If I do need to buy, which product should I choose?

Choosing repairable and long-lasting products makes a big difference but is not always easy. Repairability and durability usually come with a higher price. Though higher quality products often save us money (as they may outlive several generations of very cheap products), a higher price doesn't necessarily guarantee high quality or repairability.

A little research before buying goes a long way: peruse online reviews, delve into technical specs, and investigate the availability and cost of spare parts or repair services for the item in question. **Certain technical characteristics make devices particularly susceptible to failure.** Batteries for instance always have a limited lifespan and are most likely to be the first part to fail. In recent years, the market has shifted toward battery-powered (cordless) devices, even when this feature is not essential for their purpose. Try to avoid this feature if it is not necessary for the intended use! For example, batteries

are often the first component to fail due to their finite life expectancy. The current market trend leans towards battery-operated (cordless) devices. It's best to steer clear of such features unless they're crucial for the device's function or intended use! Take a hair trimmer, for example; decide whether a cordless model truly enhances your experience. If you do opt for cordless – battery operated devices, choose devices using standard, easily replaceable batteries (for small devices these could be AAA or AA batteries), and use rechargeable ones to promote sustainability.

Step 3 - Repair or replace?

Devices can become obsolete even before they stop working, such as laptops and cell phones that cannot run new software or old TV sets that cannot decode digital TV signals. Sometimes, products have inherent **design flaws** that cause them to fail prematurely or make them difficult to repair. This may be an intentional feature called **planned obsolescence**: a strategy where items are designed with a limited useful life so they will need to be replaced sooner. Other times, items are so poorly made and inexpensive that repairing them doesn't make economic sense.

Despite these challenges, if it's feasible and the cost of repair isn't excessive, repairing is often the most sensible option! Simple electrical devices like lamps, chandeliers, and small appliances such as coffee grinders, mixers, blenders, and irons can often be fixed to extend their use for many years, sometimes even decades, especially if they are made with high-quality materials.

When it comes to larger appliances that consume more energy—like refrigerators, washing machines, and dishwashers—the decision can be trickier. Even if an older appliance may be repaired it might be more eco-friendly and cost-effective in the long run to replace it with a new, energy-efficient model. However, this should only be considered if the newer appliance's increased energy efficiency will offset the environmental impact of disposing of the old one and manufacturing the new one. As a rough guideline, you might consider repairing large appliances if they are less than 20 years old.

Should you choose to purchase a new appliance, **prioritize high energy efficiency** to save on energy costs and reduce environmental impact over the appliance's lifespan and of course consider buying used and refurbished equipment.



March

Clothes swap parties

The textile and fashion industries rank as significant sources of pollution, impacting the environment both locally and globally. **The lifecycle of our garments has a significant impact on the environment and profound implications on our soil, water, and atmosphere:** from manufacture to distribution, to daily care, and ultimately disposal. **This is a matter that deserves greater concern than it typically receives.**

A major factor is the fashion industry's dependency on synthetic fibers like **polyester, nylon, acrylic, and polyvinyl chloride (PVC)**. There are estimates that synthetic fibers will represent 73% of total fiber production (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021)¹. Approximately 60% of synthetic fabrics are derived from fossil fuels. Once they end up in landfills, they won't decay or decompose. Among the 150 billion new garments produced annually, a staggering 25% go unworn. Discarded clothing is often sent to the Global South, where it can undermine local textile businesses and economies. Without a swift, radical, and considerable slowdown, the fast fashion industry's relentless drive for inexpensive fashion will result in unsustainable volumes of waste and toxic microfibers, emitting more carbon than the planet can handle.

Fortunately, obtaining clothing that avoids contributing to ecological harm or the exploitation of labor is increasingly feasible and convenient. Some suggestions include:

- a) Exploring second-hand stores and flea markets for pre-loved items.
- b) Visiting and hosting clothes swap parties. Invite friends, colleagues, and family or scale it up by organizing community swaps for the general public or specific vulnerable groups such as the LGBTQ+ community, refugees, survivors, etc.
- c) Repurposing old/used/worn-out clothes using the myriad of tutorials available online.
- d) Simply decluttering and minimizing the range and quantity of clothing in our wardrobes.

These practices can help mitigate the environmental and social impacts of our fashion choices.

A tweak in our approach towards clothing is not only beneficial for our wallets but also provides enjoyment and satisfaction in various ways. To lessen the ecological footprint of your wardrobe, consider adopting a series of choices and goals:

To reduce your wardrobe's impact, you could start with a set of decisions and benchmarks:

- ✔ Commit to not purchasing any new clothing for a full season.

- ✔ Choose a second-hand ensemble for your next important event.
- ✔ Host a swap party at your home or a local park with your friends and relatives.
- ✔ Set a personal challenge to avoid buying new apparel until a designated day, week, or month—aiming for the longest duration possible!

Fossil fuels are hydrocarbon-containing materials, such as coal, oil, and natural gas, formed naturally within the Earth's crust from the natural decay of ancient flora and fauna. These resources are harnessed and combusted to serve as energy. The burning of fossil fuels not only emits greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming but also generates local air pollutants that heighten the risk of health issues like stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and various respiratory diseases .



April

Up-cycling and repurposing

Through upcycling, we transform “old” items, giving them a second life by repurposing them into something “new”. In other words, **upcycling is all about salvaging old materials or items re-purposing them in a creative way, thereby extending their lifespan.**

The possibilities for upcycling are endless (clothes and household items are the most popular examples).

If you have visited an urban garden at least once, you have surely been amused by:

- ✔ old car tires upcycled into planters,
- ✔ old shoes transformed into pots,
- ✔ benches crafted from standard wooden pallets.

We all have that friend (or aunt) who is into upcycling and can spend hours showing us their latest creations. Upcycling is not only good for the planet; it's also fun and can boost our creativity and expression. Through upcycling, we can share our skills with others and learn from them as well.

Upcycling is also a way to **express dissatisfaction** with the current state of society and the environment. For any item to be sold, a chain of events must unfold, and you can probably guess some of them. From the extraction of raw materials like cellulose, coal, and natural gases needed to produce certain materials, such as plastic, to the energy required to manufacture a product, the fuel needed for transportation, and the various levels of consumption that malls, shops, and online platforms entail - the journey of an item from its source to our home is far from harmless. Many times, the item itself is not a basic necessity.

We must not forget the human factors, in addition to the environmental ones. Workers producing these goods often endure poor working conditions and receive low wages. Issues like these range from workers' exploitation to modern-day slavery, and they don't only occur in distant countries but in our own as well.

If you want to get started with upcycling, numerous **resources** are available. Online platforms offer tutorials and inspirational photos, ranging from clothes to furniture and even art pieces made from scraps. Moreover, just by looking around, you will surely find a myriad of once-discarded items that you can resourcefully turn into something else with a bit of imagination and the right supplies.

While a sewing machine is not a must-have, it will significantly make your **DIY** journey more rewarding and purposeful. Gather a bunch of tools, some old items, and let the upcycling begin!



May

substances associated with health conditions such as **heart diseases, infertility, and cancer.**

What is the alternative?

Contrary to disposable products, there are healthier, environmentally friendly options, such as **reusable period products** made out of materials like cotton or silicone. The most popular alternatives are **menstrual cups/discs, period underwear, or cotton menstrual pads.** You can use just one alternative or combine them depending on your needs.

Challenge: If you menstruate, consider giving reusable period products a chance. It will be less wasteful and economically sustainable. On the other hand, if you do not menstruate, become an ally and advocate of reusable products that are more affordable and less polluting to the environment.

Toxic-free, plastic-free, waste-free periods

Half of the world's population menstruates at some period of their lives. Despite this, conversations around menstruation can still make people feel uncomfortable and ashamed. Not only do we avoid **talking about periods**, but we also discuss **period products even less.** This adds to the veil of mystery around menstruation and anything related to it. Meanwhile big multinational producers continue to introduce harmful single-use products to the market, perpetuating shame and stigma around menstruation through expensive ads and commercials.

These ads are typically the only acceptable public representation of menstruation. However they are often misleading as they perpetuate stereotypes and omit crucial information. As a result, the producers behind these commercials have a disproportionately large influence on shaping the public discourse surrounding periods. It's important to remember that their primary concern is profit, not your health. Get informed!

How many of you have ever wondered what period products are made of and how they affect our bodies and the environment? If you haven't thought about it, no worries; you're not alone. Taboos prevent open discussions about such topics, but we can change that!

Hard facts - What are period products made of?

- ✔ Single-use menstrual pads: conventional ones are usually composed of **90% plastic.** Polyethylene, the most frequently used plastic, is typically blended with other materials distributed across different layers, including bleached wood pulp and sodium polyacrylate, with an inner layer of polypropylene, adhesives, and various fragrances.
- ✔ Tampons: designed for single-use, and primarily composed of absorbent materials (**over 90%**), usually **rayon, cotton, polyester,** or a mixture of these fibers. These materials are usually bleached and there is a thin layer of plastic within the absorbent part. Their strings are also made of plastic **polypropylene or polyethylene fibers.**

Health impacts

As you can see, most mainstream single-use menstrual products (pads and tampons) as well as their packaging **contain plastic** and other **synthetic materials** (rayon, adhesives, artificial fragrances), **toxic chemicals** (phthalates, bisphenol-A, and petrochemical additives), **environmental pollutants** and **endocrine disrupting**



June

Reusable packaging

The packaging industry rapidly grew during the 20th century, undoubtedly offering many benefits for food preservation. However, the environmental impact and the heavy resource use for the production and disposal of packaging have become significant issues closely tied to plastic pollution and waste.

There are many ways to introduce reusable packaging into your daily routine. Some are easy quick solutions that we can all try to fit into our daily lives, while others require a shift in the systems and business practices around us. Surprisingly, some are practices that we have already been doing for years without realizing their environmental benefits!

Let's start simply by using reusable containers to prevent waste:

When it comes to your morning coffee, **why not use a reusable coffee cup?** Ask a local café that supports sustainable practices to fill it with your favorite beverage and enjoy your drink while you contribute to a greener planet. Plus, some cafes offer discounts for customers who bring their own cups!

Opt to carry a **refillable water bottle** with you in your daily life or on vacations. Not only are you reducing plastic waste and helping protect our oceans and wildlife, but your drink stays refreshing for hours, even during the summer!

Follow our **January Zero Waste challenge** and start bringing your **own containers** when grocery shopping.

Reuse packaging to store items around the house. For example, use glass jars for storing your sauces, jams, or even leftovers and who does not remember biscuit tin boxes used to store sewing supplies or other small objects in their parents' or grandparents' homes?

However, regardless of the value of those daily practices, to achieve a wider impact in reducing packaging waste, a change in terms of policies and regulations is needed. One example of such a change is the expansion of **Deposit Return Systems (DRS)** in more packaging categories and increasing the focus and targets on re-fillables. DRS are schemes where the consumer pays a deposit fee when purchasing a product packaging (e.g. a beverage bottle), upon return of the bottle the deposit fee is then returned. **The used packaging is then returned to the producer of the product for sanitization and refilling (reuse)** or for recycling, as the case may be.

In Europe, DRS systems are now becoming increasingly popular, but **in the Balkans, this has been a common practice for beer bottles for decades.** DRS systems are already starting to develop and expand into new products, most often beverages, to include more glass bottles

and even plastic bottles and aluminum cans.

Beyond DRS systems **new businesses are embracing reuse too.** In many cities across Europe a new type of business is emerging: companies that provide reusable takeaway containers. These can be picked up from and returned to restaurants across a city or they can even be collected at your door!

According to Eurostat², in 2021, the EU generated an estimated 188.7 kg of packaging waste per inhabitant (varying from 73.8 kg per inhabitant in Croatia to 246.1 kg per inhabitant in Ireland).



July

Plastic-Free Living

It has been a little over a century since Leo Baekeland pioneered the **first fully synthetic plastic in 1907**. Back in the day, this might have seemed like a breakthrough due to the cost-effectiveness of plastic production, economic growth, and job creation.

However, the material's durability quickly led to its accumulation in landfills and it has found its way to all cracks and crevices in objects and living beings all around the globe. **Since then, every piece of plastic created still exists in some form today.**

A study from 2017, published in Science Advances³, reveals that, at that time, more than **9.1 billion tons of plastic** had been produced since large-scale production began in the mid-20th century. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a swirling mass of plastic debris, is estimated to be twice the size of the state of Texas in the USA. We do not have precise data on the impact of plastic on life all over the planet but we know beyond doubt that **it is ever-growing, in the air we breathe and the food we eat.**

The average person ingests **between 78,000 and 211,000 microplastics per year**, and that is considered an underestimation⁴. Microplastics consist of decomposed plastic waste, synthetic fibers, and other specks of plastic that can be found in hygiene products, clothes, etc., as well as **water bottles and single-use packaging.**

Keeping track of the vast numbers of microplastics polluting natural elements and ecosystems is challenging. In 2021, Japanese scientists from Kyushu University⁵ estimated that there are **24.4 trillion microplastics in the world's upper oceans** (the top layer of the ocean)- which is equivalent to **30 billion half-liter water bottles**, and this number keeps rising!

Persistent pollution, chemical emissions, and resource depletion are among the significant concerns associated with plastic production and disposal. As we navigate the plastic landscape, recognizing the perils of each type empowers us to make informed choices and advocate for a more sustainable future.

What can you do?

Swap single-use plastics for reusable alternatives such as stainless steel or glass water bottles, wooden utensils, and cloth bags that can be recycled or composted avoiding plastic waste.

Reclaim your power as a consumer. Choose products with minimal packaging, and when faced with options, **choose items that prioritize sustainability.** Look for companies embracing eco-friendly practices and support their initiatives.

Don't get discouraged if you do not succeed in getting rid of all the single-use plastics in a few days. Changing your everyday habits always requires a period of adaptation. You need to learn how to do things in a new way and find solutions that work for you. It will take some time to get accustomed, but once you get into the swing, things should not be harder than they were before.

The Six Rs of Sustainability

Refuse, reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, and rot (compost): The mantra of the six Rs isn't just a slogan; it's a blueprint for a sustainable lifestyle. **Refuse** single-use plastics whenever possible, **reduce** your overall consumption, and **rethink** your choices to minimize environmental impact. **Reuse** items whenever possible, **repair** instead of replacing and ensure that what you discard is recyclable. **Composting organic waste** is another way to contribute to a more sustainable and plastic-free living.



August

Beyond Cleanup: Be mindful of your waste

Imagine walking barefoot on a beautiful sandy beach. Only instead of feeling the sand and water under your feet, you are feeling bits of plastic bottles, sandwich wrappers and other trash. Or imagine going on a hike in a beautiful natural park and instead of marveling at the beauty of the scenery around, you see the leftovers of a picnic that some inconsiderate person left behind.

During each summer, many take vacations in their own countries or abroad. According to The World Counts **every second, 45 people arrive at some destination, resulting in over 1.4 billion tourists in 2023**⁶. The consequences of high volumes of tourists depend on a variety of factors, such as large tourist concentrations that exceeds the capacity of local infrastructure and **generate copious amounts of solid and liquid waste**. According to the United Nations Environment Program, by 2050, tourism-related waste may increase by up to 251%⁷. **The environmental impact is undeniable** and extends beyond visible waste. Tourism contributes more than 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with transportation accounting for a staggering 90%⁸. **Projections for 2030 indicate a troubling 25% increase in CO2 emissions from tourism compared to 2016.**

How can you help decrease the environmental cost of tourism, you ask? We don't propose to stop going on holidays of course, but there are things you can do to make sure you minimize your impact on the environment.

From exploring environmentally sustainable ways to travel and accommodation to avoiding buying mass-produced souvenirs and opting to support local businesses instead, or carrying your own water bottle with you instead of relying on single-use ones, there is so much you can do to reduce the environmental impact of traveling to a new destination.

Learning and respecting the local rules for waste management, continuing to practice recycling on your vacation, and, of course, not littering the beautiful places you visit are also very easy and show respect to the place hosts you while you enjoy yourself.

Participating in cleanups

Unfortunately, tourists, or even visitors from your own area, are likely to leave some trash behind at lovely local spots, tarnishing their natural beauty. That's where you can step in and make a difference! By participating in environmental cleanups, you are not just picking up litter; rather you have an opportunity to

connect with other active citizens who care about our planet. Find a group near you on social media or through local environmental organizations. Why not start your own group? Grab a couple of friends, pick a spot, and just start. You'll be amazed at how a small act can inspire others and create a wave of environmental awareness. Plus, it's a great way to enjoy the outdoors and ensure that our favorite spots stay pristine for everyone to enjoy.



September

Food Waste

In regards to food waste, it is not only unconsumed food that is disposed of. It also entails a waste of water, labor, energy, land, money, and transport. Moreover, food waste often ends up in landfills, where it is left to rot, releasing methane, a gas that greatly contributes to the greenhouse effect.

It is estimated that **almost half of all fruits and vegetables produced are wasted** (that's 3.7 trillion apples)⁹, and **25% of the world's freshwater supply is used to grow food that won't be eaten**¹⁰. Moreover, **17% of the total global food production may be wasted**¹¹ (11% by households, 5% by food service, and 2% by retail stores) as well!

That's why it is important to know that reducing food waste is **one of the most effective changes in our behavior to address climate change**. The good news is that avoiding food waste starts in our shopping cart, tote bag, fridge, and plate, giving us complete control over it. We discard food for many reasons - preferences, safe consumption concerns, social norms like serving large amounts of food to guests or at parties (or even classist attitudes and beliefs rooted in stigma around frugality).

Food waste prevention is not that hard, but it does require **adjusting your routines, buying, and storage habits**. At an individual level, reducing food waste involves being more conscious, planning ahead, and politely declining food you know you will not consume.

How to prevent food waste?

- ✔ Stick to your shopping list
- ✔ Read food labels before buying
- ✔ Clean and organize your refrigerator
- ✔ Adjust the thermometer in the refrigerator (less than 5 degrees)
- ✔ Measure the portion size per person
- ✔ Use leftovers to prepare a new meal
- ✔ Share the leftovers with your guests

On a community level, food waste prevention requires some community organizing, a whole lot of education, social media work, some advocacy skills, a good dose of creativity, and maybe even boycotting. There are numerous movements to join or get inspiration from!

Examples include:

Food Not Bombs: a movement that recovers food that would otherwise be discarded, and shares free vegan and vegetarian meals with the hungry in over 1,000 cities in 65 countries in protest to war, poverty, and destruction of the environment. You can find them at foodnotbombs.net.

Community fridges: spaces that bring people together to eat, connect, learn new skills, and reduce food waste. Run by community groups in shared spaces such as schools, community centers, and shops, these movements save fresh food that would otherwise be wasted from supermarkets, local food businesses, producers, households, and gardens. People can also donate!

Community pantries: During the COVID-19 quarantine, a Filipino entrepreneur engaged farmers and local vegetable vendors in putting together a small food bank for their community, putting up a sign inviting people to "give according to their ability, take according to their need"¹². The initiative created a "snowball effect", with citizens participating and inspiring people from other countries to do the same.

"Use by" means that you should not eat food with this label, even if it looks and smells right. If a portion of food is about to expire, you can freeze it. "Best before" refers to the quality of the food - it tastes best until a certain period, but it is safe for consumption even after that.



October

Zero Waste Events

Whether you have organized dozens of events, or you just have some great ideas and are looking for ways how to make them waste-free, we believe that you will want to put into practice at least some of the tricks and tips we have collected for you!

When setting up your event, there are a few things to consider:

- ✔ How can you **reduce the amount of waste, or how can you completely avoid it?** (yes, you read that correctly!).
- ✔ Zero waste sometimes means extra effort: make sure that everything is covered when it comes to the logistics (think of who will do the shopping, inform the community, set up the location, and perform the clean up!).
- ✔ What will be easy and what will be more challenging? Focus time and effort to the slightly more time-consuming tasks, such as looking for specific products.
- ✔ How will you **inform the visitors** of your event, is there anything they should bring from home, or something they should pay attention to?
- ✔ How educated is your target group about this issue? How much effort will you need to make your message heard by different groups? Think of "new-comers" to zero waste vs climate activists!

We have compiled some tips related to different aspects of your potential activity or event.

Food

- ✔ Invite participants to bring their cup and/or refillable bottle,
- ✔ If your event is funded, you can also provide all participants with a reusable mug or bottle (made out of ceramics, glass, or metal),
- ✔ Prefer finger food over meals you would need plates and cutlery for, or (in case that's not possible),
- ✔ Opt for venues where you can bring your own plates and cutlery, and wash them on the spot (participants could take part in the wash-up, too)
- ✔ Think of meals that can be served on edible or compostable plates, such as cabbage leaves, corn kernels, or other
- ✔ Shop at green markets or stores where you can buy products in bulk.
- ✔ Prefer venues, whenever possible, where tap water is drinkable or bring jars of water filled in the nearest drinkable water source.

Waste

- ✔ Design spots for separate waste collection, making sure that they are properly labeled according to the recycling options available in your area, visible, and accessible.
- ✔ Find out if anyone on your team or the participants could take the organic waste home to compost it.
- ✔ Make sure to serve portions of reasonable, average size or invite participants to help themselves: in this way, you'll avoid food being left on plates, as at this stage it is too late to be donated
- ✔ Research your options to donate untouched, unspoiled food, and keep the contacts of the people you want to deliver the food to after the event handy. The sooner you donate the food, the lesser the chances will be that it will spoil: day centers and shelters serving homeless people and other groups at risk gladly accept donations of food, while in many cities you will find groups dedicated to food donations, as well as community fridges.

Hygiene

- ✔ If in nature, do not hire mobile WCs, as they are extremely polluting: team up with locals, instead, ask them to let you use their toilet, for a good cause!
- ✔ Explore the possibilities of compost toilets, and invite some experienced compost toilet builders if you have the chance to - and if there will be a community making use of them in the future.
- ✔ Prefer detergents that you can buy by bringing your own packaging, or make your detergents by yourself, prefer loofah sponges over industrial ones, and make cleaning rags out of old clothing items

Mobility

- ✔ Pick a location that is well served with public transportation, and/or reachable by bike;
- ✔ Inform your participants about the public transportation lines that can take them to the event, as well as the schedule,
- ✔ Encourage participants to share rides by creating a dedicated chat.

After your event, gather your team, and evaluate how it went, so that you can put these outcomes into practice next time.

If you happen to generate some waste, as the world where you try and organize your event is far from being a Zero Waste friendly one, don't get overstressed: as Anne-Marie Bonneau, one of the most know Zero Waste chefs, said: **"We don't need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly"**.



November

Right to repair

In the 21st century, the practice of repair has been replaced by a culture of **disposability**. Over the past few decades, shoes, clothes, furniture, appliances, and many other items that were routinely repaired are being replaced more and more frequently. Many factors contribute to this shift of practices, like rapid technological advancements, the availability of cheap fast fashion, and obstacles in repairability such as lack of repair technicians, spare parts, or basic repairing skills.

We have already discussed repairs as a way to reduce the waste we generate and extend the lifespan of our belongings. A lot of repairs necessitate using the skills of a specialized **repair professional**. However, there are many simple fixes that we can learn to perform on our own using simple materials and equipment.

Learning to repair can encompass everything from learning to darn a hole in a sock to replacing a faulty hard disk on a desktop computer, reupholstering furniture, or repairing your car.

Developing **basic repair skills** is not that hard! There are many ways to learn to repair and an endless variety of repair skills you can develop, such as sewing and repairing shoes and watches, furniture, appliances and electronics, or other items you have at home such as broken ceramics.

Ways you can learn to repair

Today, it is very easy to **acquire quite impressive repair skills by using online resources** that may even be completely free: there are tons of instructions and video **tutorials** available on the internet for a great variety of objects! Just go through your belongings, pick out an item that needs a quick fix, and look up ways to do that online: a lot of repairs may require specialized equipment; however, small repairs often only require locally available, and cheap materials and this is a great way to start practicing repair skills!

If repairs seem useful or enjoyable to you can then look for **DIY workshops** or longer courses in your area to gain more expertise and learn how to operate more sophisticated equipment or perform more advanced techniques, such as sewing, woodworking classes, etc. Going down this path may introduce you to discover a fulfilling hobby or even open up a career opportunity that is both good for the planet and the local economy!

Learn-to-repair events: It is possible that in your community, there are organizations that occasionally or frequently organize workshops or learn-to-repair events on a subject you may be interested in. Usually, these events will be free and based on volunteer work, or have a small fee to cover the materials you will be using and the instructor's time.

Libraries of tools: places where members of a certain community (such as apartment building, neighborhood, town, etc.) can borrow different types of tools, instead of buying them. Many tools and pieces of specialized equipment used for repairs may not be needed often (drills, ladders, saws, gardening tools) or needed seasonally. It is unnecessary, expensive and unsustainable for every household to own them all. All of these libraries of tools are the perfect alternative for equipment that is hardly used. If you live in an area where no Library of tools is available, you can try and set up a similar system with your friends, relatives, neighbors, or community. A simple social media page or group chat can help you start a community for sharing all the tools you might need for repairs and you might get some good advice, a helping hand or even make new friends to share your love of repairs with!



December

Sustainable Consumption

In a culture that encourages **consumerism**, we are often encouraged to not give much thought to our buying habits or their big impact on our environment and society. In this handbook, we have talked a lot about reuse, repair, and waste prevention. Now, to help us set new challenges for the new year to come, let's explore our **consumption habits** and how we can affect change through sustainable consumption!

Questioning whether we need this shiny new thing, avoiding single-use products and excessive packaging, using reusable containers, swapping books or clothes, borrowing an item we will only use once, repairing our small appliance, and informing ourselves on brand practices, are all actions that help us buy new things only when it is truly necessary and purposeful. There are a **few more questions** though that will make our buying habits even more environmentally sustainable: questions regarding the environmental impact of a product, its energy characteristics and repairability, whether a product is designed, produced, and disposed of sustainably, and whether there are more sustainable alternatives.

Social enterprises are organizations that leverage business principles to promote environmental protection and social welfare by reinvesting a significant part of their profits into their objectives and creating an equitable future. By supporting their sustainable business practices, you support social and environmental responsibility.

The right to repair

Many items are no longer made to be repaired, like fast fashion items of low quality where the repair would cost more than the worth of the cheap synthetic fabrics or electrical and electronic equipment (remember planned obsolescence?). Nowadays many electronics and electrical appliances with novel, desirable, and attractive features are placed in the market constantly but the design of most such products purposefully does not promote or even allow repairability. So they are in reality designed to fail and be replaced by new ones every few years. This is especially true for products that cannot be easily disassembled for repair, like phones with non-removable batteries and products with short guarantee periods. Complexity of a product design means repairs may only be performed by the brand that sells a product. Moreover, brands place software restrictions on devices or software products may make updating software on old devices difficult.

For the reasons above the **"Right to Repair" movement** was born. The right-to-repair movement emerged as people reacted to the increasing difficulty of repairing their own devices due to restrictions on access to re-

pair information, tools, and spare parts. Think about your phone or your blender – when they malfunction, why not be able to fix them cheaply and easily? It's all about breaking free from the **throwaway culture**, reducing waste, and telling big companies, that repairability is something we demand. As **Ifixit** wrote in their repair manifesto, keep in mind that "If you can't fix it, you don't own it".

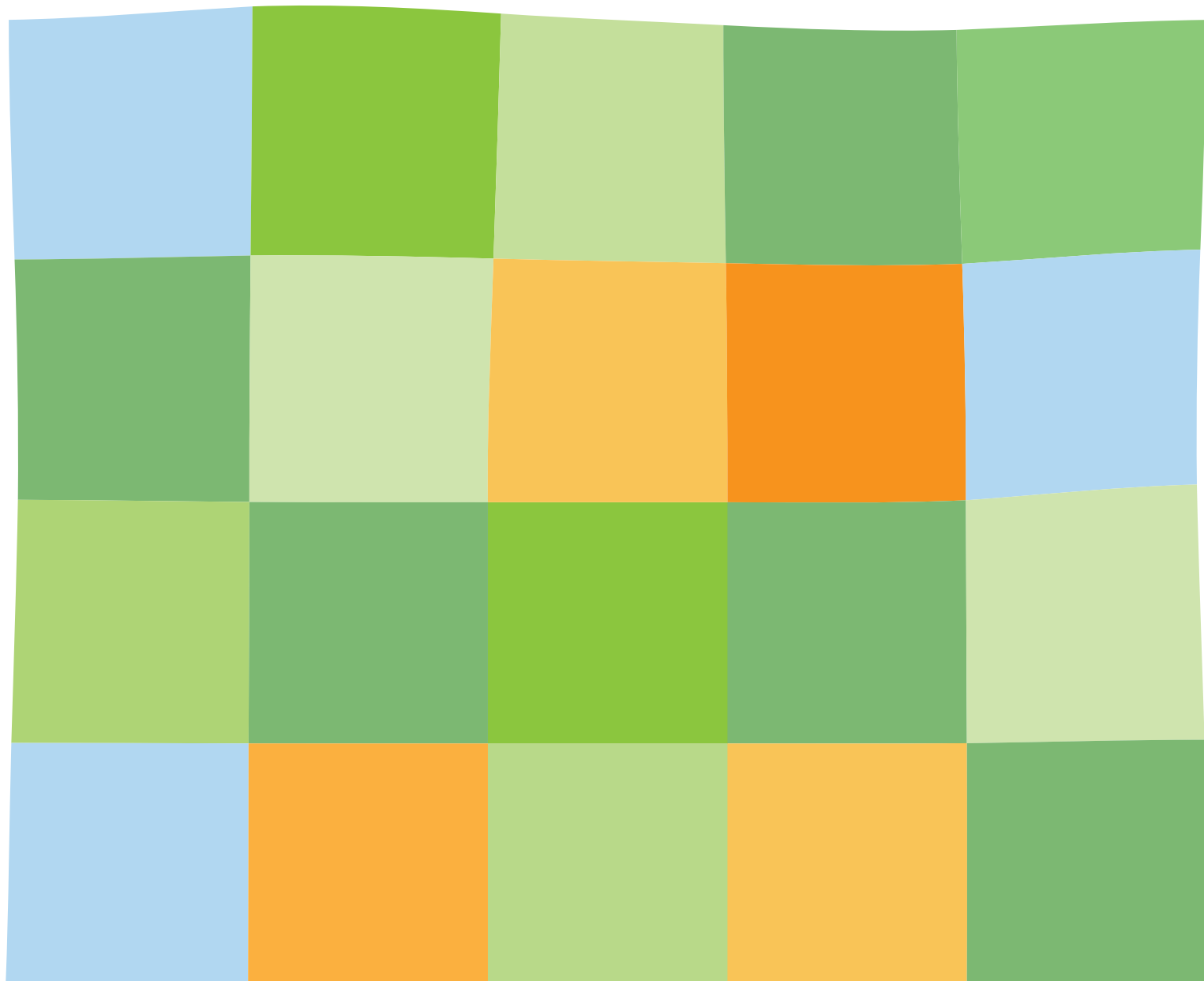
Questions to ask before buying:

- ✔ Do I really need this? Can I get a reusable or secondhand item instead? Can I borrow instead of buying?
- ✔ Can it be bought without packaging or in reusable packaging?
- ✔ When I no longer need this how will it be disposed of? Is it recyclable? Is it actually being recycled?
- ✔ Is it toxic-free? Does it conform to environmental standards?
- ✔ Is it produced locally or far away?
- ✔ Is it energy efficient?
- ✔ Does it have a long guarantee? What is the expected life cycle?
- ✔ Is it repairable? Are spare parts and repair technicians available? Is it designed to fail?
- ✔ Is the brand focused on sustainability and environmental standards?
- ✔ Is there a more sustainable alternative?

If the answer to most of the questions asked is no, there is a better choice out there for you!

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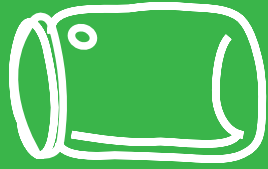
Calendar



Zero Waste Challenge

January

Let the journey begin!



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Week 1: Track your waste

- Gather and sort all the packaging waste from your grocery list into recyclable, reusable, and non-recyclable items. Set goals for reducing your waste footprint!
- Want to level up this challenge? Include any unplanned purchases made throughout the week and monitor the waste they produce.

Week 2: Map your spots

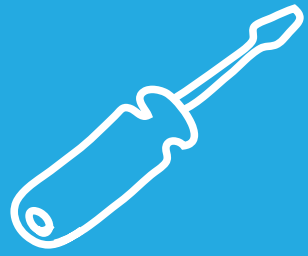
- Identify products that you can purchase in bulk or without packaging, and seek out stores that offer these package-free choices.
- Want to level up this challenge? If there are no package-free options in your area, ask local vendors to let you bring your own containers for certain items. Opt for farmers' markets for your produce and consistently use your own bags to avoid the conventional plastic bags.

Week 3: Share your findings with others

- Create a "zero-waste" online map and spread the word about your discoveries.
- Want to level up this challenge? Don't forget to add which types of packaging (produce bags, mason jars, egg boxes, bottles, other) one should bring from home.

Week 4: Changing habits

- Start small, dream big! Plan sustainable lifestyle changes for the coming months and beyond.
- Want to level up this challenge? Expand your list of items to phase out and replace with more sustainable alternatives or introduce additional challenges for the forthcoming months.



Zero Waste Challenge February

Let's talk about repairs!

Step 1: Assess necessity

- Start by asking a question - do you really need a new device? Evaluate its potential lifecycle and reject "throwaway" culture. Prioritize long-term utility over short-lived trends.

Step 2: Choose durability

- When a purchase is necessary, which option should you choose? Conduct thorough research and read online reviews. Ensure there's access to spare parts and repair services for the product you're considering.

Step 3: Embrace repair

- Is it better to hire a professional or attempt a DIY fix? Investigate if damaged items can be fixed. Seek out professional repair services, explore online how-to guides, or ask friends, family, and neighbors with technical expertise for advice.

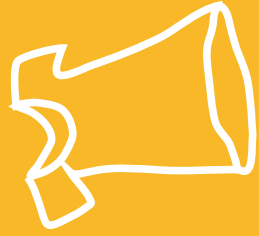
Step 4: Mindfully upgrade

- Reflect on the environmental impact of a new device. Deliberately balance the upgrade's potential advantages (like energy efficiency) against the environmental cost of waste.
- If you decide to purchase something new, prioritize items that offer durability, repairability, and high energy efficiency. These products may have a lower total cost of ownership in the long run.

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Zero Waste Challenge March

Give second fashion
a chance!



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Week 1: Fossil fashion awareness

- Reflect on your current wardrobe choices. Consider you garments' lifecycle and how each piece contributes to environmental challenges.
- Want to level up this challenge? Embark on a "Buy Nothing New Year" challenge. You can even apply the principle to other products beyond just clothing.

Week 2: Second-hand revelations

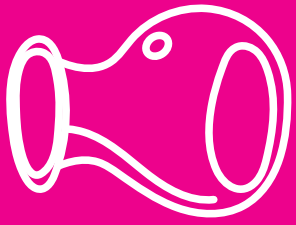
- Designate a day this week to wear only second-hand clothes. Visit local thrift or vintage stores with friends instead of your usual retail outlets.
- Want to level up this challenge? Coordinate a second-hand clothing day with friends or colleagues, to strengthen your shared commitment to sustainable fashion.

Week 3: The art of buying nothing new

- Define rules and versatile swap methods for various products such as clothes, books and furniture. Incorporate these strategies into your routine.
- Want to level up this challenge? Involve your community by sharing your guidelines and encouraging others to join you.

Week 4: Host a swap parties

- Organize or join a clothes swap party. Plan the event, invite friends, and establish guidelines for a successful swap.
- Want to level up this challenge? Consider organizing community swaps which could also cater to specific vulnerable or marginalized groups such as the LGBTQ+ community, refugees, survivors, etc.



Zero Waste Challenge

April

Get creative with what you have!

Step 1: Try out paper upcycling

→ Reimagine the potential of paper. Dive into the art of paper upcycling, whether it's breathing new life into old books, creating unique paper crafts, or exploring advanced techniques such as papier-mâché.

Step 2: Simple crafty creations

→ Grab a few discarded overlooked materials, like tin cans or empty juice cartons. Transform tin cans into charming plant pots or create a stylish wallet from juice packaging.

Step 3: Sow the seeds of repurposing

→ Take to a sewing machine and repurpose old clothes into trendy accessories or functional items. Unleash your creativity with fabric and thread, and showcase your sewing skills by giving worn-out garments a fresh look.

Step 4: Furniture Makeover

→ Refresh your living space by upcycling old furniture. Whether it's a forgotten chair or a table, take on the challenge of giving furniture a facelift.

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Zero Waste Challenge

May

Break Free from Toxins and Waste!

Week 1: Plastic unveiled

- Examine the period products you currently use, noting the materials they're made of, and consider their environmental consequences.
- Want to level up this challenge? Look into sustainable alternatives, such as reusable menstrual cups and discs, cloth pads or period underwear.

Week 2: Detox your period

- Begin eliminating single-use period products from your routine by trying out environmentally friendly alternatives.
- Want to level up this challenge? Share your experience. Encourage friends to switch to sustainable options.

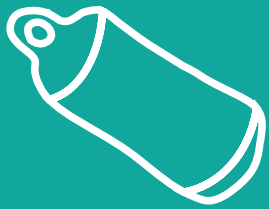
Week 3: Empowerment through education

- Educate yourself on the environmental and health impacts of mainstream period products and reflect on the need for transparency regarding their composition.
- Want to level up this challenge? Educate others. Start conversations with a wider audience to break the stigma surrounding menstruation.

Week 4: Sustainable cycles ahead

- Plan a plastic-free period. Commit to using only reusable or compostable products.
- Want to level up this challenge? Find, try, and promote local businesses that create eco-friendly menstrual pads.

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Zero Waste Challenge

June

Say no to single use packaging!

Step 1: Carry a reusable coffee cup

→ Ask local cafés to fill your reusable cup with your favorite beverage and enjoy your drink while you contribute to a cleaner planet. Plus, many cafes offer discounts for customers who bring their own cups!

Step 2: Get a refillable water bottle

→ Not only are you reducing plastic waste and helping protect our oceans and wildlife, but your drink stays refreshing for hours even during the summer!

Step 3: Go package-free using your own containers

→ Follow our January Zero Waste challenge and start bringing your containers when grocery shopping.

Step 4: Repurpose packaging for storage

→ Use glass jars for storing your sauces, jams, or even leftovers, and biscuit tin boxes used to store sewing supplies or other small objects like they used to do in the past.

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Zero Waste Challenge July

Plastic-free is better!

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Step 1: Ditch single-use bottles

- Beyond investing in a reusable water bottle, opt for beverages in glass or aluminum packaging.

Step 2: Skip the plastic straw

- Carry a reusable straw or go straw-free. Many alternatives to single use are available, like bamboo and stainless steel straws.

3. Step 3: Bring your containers for takeout

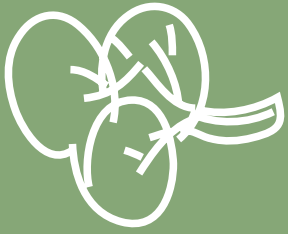
- Bring your reusable containers for takeout. Support local businesses adopting eco-friendly packaging.

Step 4: Participate in the international "Plastic Bag Free Day"

- Take a stand against plastic bags on July 3rd. Say no to single-use plastic bags and spread awareness.

Step 5: Embrace responsible recycling on European Recycling Day

- Pledge to recycle responsibly on July 17th. Familiarize yourself with your local recycling guidelines and educate others.



Zero Waste Challenge

August

Sustainable journeys!

Step 1: Travel sustainably

→ Before your trip, research and choose transportation and accommodations that are eco-friendly, like train or bus, if possible. Try to avoid flights when you can to prevent greenhouse gas emissions and to carpool when driving. Share your choices and how they contribute to environmental conservation.

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Step 2: Zero-Waste Travel Challenge

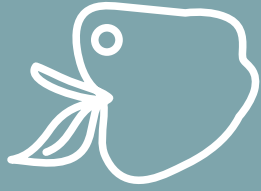
→ Commit to a zero-waste day during your trip. Bring along reusable items like a water bottle, a reusable bag, and other sustainable travel accessories, if possible. to avoid single-use plastics. Document the eco-friendly items you used and note what you can do better next time.

Step 3: Local is best

→ Explore the local culture, eat at local spots, use local transport, and buy authentic local souvenirs instead of mass-produced items. Share your experiences to inspire others to appreciate and support local traditions.

Step 4 Clean-ups at home

→ Find a local clean-up group or take initiative in creating one in your own community. Participate in events in areas frequented by visitors, such as local parks, beaches, or historical sites. Document the whole cleanup process, including before and after photos and use your social media platform to encourage and inspire people to join!



Zero Waste Challenge

September

Don't let food rot!

Step 1: Mindful shopping

- Stick to your shopping list to avoid impulse purchases.
- Read food labels before buying, and understand the difference between "Use by" and "Best before".

Step 2: Meal planning

- Clean and organize your refrigerator regularly, adjusting the temperature to less than 5 degrees Celsius to make the best use of groceries.
- Portion Control: Measure portion sizes per person to reduce leftovers.

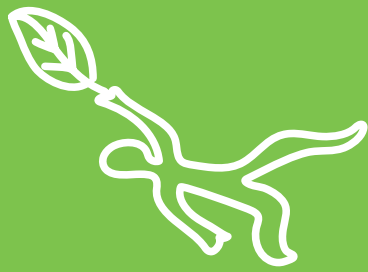
Step 3: A culture of creating & sharing

- Creative Cooking: Use leftovers to prepare new meals, preventing them from ending up in the bin.
- Share extra food with guests or neighbors to avoid disposal.

Step 4: Give back to the community

- Join a Movement: Participate in initiatives like Food Not Bombs, recovering discarded food to share free meals in protest of societal issues.
- Community Pantries: Inspired by the Filipino movement, create community pantries to address local needs and reduce food waste.

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Zero Waste Challenge

October

Events without waste

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Step 1: Zero-Waste planning

- Contemplate event logistics to reduce the waste you will produce.
- Want to level up this challenge: Assign responsibilities for shopping, setup, and cleanup.

Step 2: Sustainable Food

- Provide locally sourced snacks and meals package free and use reusable plates, cups and tableware.
- Want to level up this challenge: Encourage participants to bring their own cups and refillable bottles.

Step 3: Waste Management

- Set up separate waste collection points with proper labeling.
- Research and plan options for untouched food donation after the event.

Step 4: Eco-Friendly Hygiene & Mobility

- Opt for environmentally friendly sanitary and cleaning supplies.
- Encourage public transport, biking and carpooling as environmentally friendly ways to access the event.



Zero Waste Challenge

November

Learning repair skills!

Step 1: Repairing Skills Challenge

- Identify an item in need of repair (e.g., a torn sock, or broken appliance) and find online tutorials or guides to fix it, or attend a repair workshop or event to enhance your repair knowledge for more challenging projects!

Step 2: Online Resources Challenge

- Explore in-depth repair techniques and videos to broaden your skills. See whether your friends and neighbors have items that can be fixed.

Step 3: Skill Courses Challenge

- Seek local classes or courses that focus on specific repair skills, such as sewing, woodworking, or electronics.

Step 4: Organize a Learn to Repair Event

- Check if there are any repair events in your area. You can even consider connecting with others to try to organize them on your own. Share your skills and encourage others to learn!

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Zero Waste Challenge

December

Consider sustainability,
buy responsibly!

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Step 1: Assess your consumption habits

- Reflect on the lessons learned about reuse, repair, and waste prevention.
- Question the necessity of new purchases in a consumer-driven culture.
- Build new sustainable habits, avoid single-use products or excessive packaging.

Step 2: Mindful buying

- Avoid impulsive purchases. Instead prioritize sustainable shopping routines, such as regularly using reusable containers to reduce packaging waste. Stay informed about brand practices, including their approach to societal and environmental impact, labor rights. Boycott those with harmful practices.
- Think of swapping, borrowing, or repairing items before you choose to buy.

Step 3: The Right to repair

- Make buying choices based on research of their repair properties. Explore the concept of planned obsolescence and the "Right to Repair" movement. Advocate for products designed for durability and reparability.

Step 4: Questions before buying

- Ask essential questions like - "Do I need this? Can I get a reusable or secondhand item instead? Can I borrow instead of buying?"
- Consider the overall sustainability, environmental impact, energy characteristics, and reparability, when comparing various options. Practice conscious consumption.

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