

## Zero Waste – How I made it happen with my family of 5

My big trigger came 2 years ago, when a friend of mine sent me a link to a YouTube video called “Bea Johnson's Zero Waste lifestyle on CCTV America”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y583QTbetsQ>

I suddenly came to the realisation, that you CAN have a sustainable lifestyle in a super nice house without becoming a hippie. When I saw the video, I loved how everything was tidy, decluttered and easily manageable for this working mum. It totally resonated with me.

I then read Bea Johnson's book “Zero Waste Home” to see how she was doing it. I am working 80%, I have 3 young daughters and was wondering, whether I could do it too.

I decided to take action and...baby steps! Like any journey you embark on, you want it to be a success and you have to allow time and not be harsh with yourself, don't hope for a revolution to happen overnight or you will get disappointed, have a sense of failure and will eventually give up. So, baby steps are critical to set yourself up for success.

My first step was to **observe what went to our bins** (kitchen, bathroom, study). Why do we create so much waste? What goes in my trash? What could stop going to the landfill? And everything slowly unfolded from here. You have to know that we started from the very bottom of the environmental ladder, our general waste bin was full every week; yes, every week and could barely close. I smile when it's bin day and I see so many of my neighbours' bins with the lid not closing; that was us not that long ago...

I started recycling more, buying less, buying what I really needed, cooking with the right proportions.

My husband then got a **worm farm** in order to start composting our fruits & veggies scraps, tea bags, coffee mould, eggs shells and egg boxes. He would take the extra scraps to our local community garden.

I started buying items in bulk going to **The Source Bulk Foods**.

<https://thesourcebulkfoods.com.au/> I bring my mesh bags that I get filled with dry elements: Flour, pasta, cereals, tea, nuts, salt, pepper, washing powder, dishwasher powder, Epsom salt, etc.

And for the wet elements, they refill my bottles of olive oil (always have a spare one), jar of honey but also my bottle of shampoo and liquid for the dishes.

My recycling as a result started decreasing considerably as I stopped buying packaged food as much as I could.

My next step was changing the way I was shopping at the market. I started bringing my **Tupperware boxes**, asking the merchants to do the tare and fill them with mince meat, chicken fillets, fish, etc. I make sure every time, they use thongs to fill my boxes and not plastic bags, as some of them use a plastic bag as a glove and that defeats the whole purpose. As for the fruits and veggies, I bring my own bags. When I buy flowers, I ask for them to be wrapped in Kraft paper only, no plastic. The elastics of the bunch of flowers, I would store in a jar and then bring back to work perhaps twice a year. I get a glass jar refilled with bocconcini, another one with shredded parmesan. It is easier than it looks and it becomes quickly a habit. The merchants are happy to help and promote the market as becoming more sustainable. I also get my bottles of wine refilled. My wine merchant comes to my house for free to pick up the empties and drop off the filled ones. It saves me time!

Dry-cleaning: I would store the safety pins and coat hangers and bring them back on my next visit. I have asked them to put in my profile to not cover my clothes in plastic. So that's less trash as well.

In terms of home cleaning, I use baking soda powder and white vinegar together with **Enjo sponges** <https://www.enjo.com.au/> You can re-use them indefinitely. It allows me to not buy chemicals anymore. Less items to put on my shopping list, less money to spend, less items

cluttering my cupboards. It makes your house safer as well for little ones, not risking any chemical poisoning.

In our bathroom, we do not have a bin anymore. Our tissues are a sheet cut into small squares that we wash, our toothbrushes are made of bamboo which you can compost. I am also making my own toothpaste, deodorant and moisturizer following the blog of Laurel Singer "Trash is for Tossers". We get our toilet paper plastic free delivered by **Who Gives A Crap**

<https://au.whogivesacrap.org> That's another environment friendly action that I am doing as it saves me time and simplifies my life.

Another step and a critical one was to take all soft plastic to Coles and Woolworths in a **RedCycle** bin, usually located at the entrance. They melt all the soft plastics and make plastic furniture out of them: bins, benches, tables. <http://www.redcycle.net.au/>

The kids as young as they are (10, 7 and nearly 5) have become familiar with the philosophy of the 5 "R": refuse what you don't need, reduce what you need, re-use what you have, recycle and rot. When our oldest daughter wants to get some school lunch from the bakery, she automatically brings her mesh bag. If she wants something that's wrapped in plastic, she'll ask if they have any in the back that are not wrapped in plastic yet. Our kids have started making funny comments about people they see on the street carrying plastic bags. My youngest daughter (4) told her creche carer the other day she couldn't put her dirty clothes in a plastic bag, that her mum would get angry (!). Children are great with awareness.

The zero-waste lifestyle has also allowed me to improve my health and levels of energy a lot, by not eating packaged industrial dishes from the supermarket anymore. Instead, I cook every night. It doesn't have to be complicated, just tasty and not too time consuming or the effort doesn't last.

After 18 months of doing one baby step after another, we take our recycling bin out only every 2 weeks and as for our red bin, it would take us 12 months to fill it in completely! I am now working on decreasing our recycling even further.

