

KARLA HOOPER - EARTH GIRL

# LOW WASTE LIVING MADE EASY

## E-BOOK

July 2019

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**Note:** This e-Reference Book is full of links. To open a link in a new browser window simply press the Control (PC) or Command (Mac) Key whilst clicking on the blue link.

**Disclaimer:** The purpose of this document is to share knowledge from my own experiences over my life. I am sharing this information to empower other people with simple solutions for leaving a lighter footprint on the Earth. Please ensure you tune into your own body to find what is right for you. This can be done via your intuition, by using a [pendulum](#), or [muscle testing](#).

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# INTRODUCTION

## My Story

I haven't been raised a tree huggin hippy, in fact quite the opposite. When I first moved out of home I ate everything from packaging, never thought about waste and generally was not aware about the affect my actions had on the planet.

My awakening journey started at University. I studied a Bachelor of Science in Health and Environment, a Minor in Environmental Issues and went on to do honours in Environmental Science. During my 4.5 years of studies, my eyes were opened more and more to health and environmental issues humans and the Earth are facing. I was overwhelmed, but I also noticed that not many people were talking about the solutions... I decided to dedicate my life to that.

My journey to living more sustainably on the Earth has been long and slow, weaved with an unwavering commitment and dedication. Slowly but surely I found simple, effective and convenient solutions to lessen my environmental footprint, whilst also improving my health.

Via a varied working background, mixed with life experience, experiments and observation, my path led me to focusing on Waste Reduction. Through a series of events, I identified it was the glue that ties everything together. By focusing on reducing waste, I simultaneously improved my health AND the environments = winning!

You can read more about my story [HERE](#).

## Why Waste?

Our modern day addiction to packaged goods is like a disease to humans AND the environment. We are polluting our bodies and the Earth to a point that is not sustainable. The balance is out and something has to give.

Plastics and synthetics are created from non-renewable resources. Supply and demand are what drive the market - the more we consume the more raw resources need to be

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supplied. Every piece of plastic that has ever been created still exists. Wildlife are hugely suffering from our throwaway lifestyles and the pollution that goes with it.

Our society is afforded great convenience by allowing us to place waste items in a bin and to not have to think about it again. But there is no away. Scratch a tiny bit under the surface and it's easy to identify the waste industry is facing *many* problems.

Landfills are filling up and no one wants a new one to start in their backyard, yet we are consuming at an insatiable rate and it has to go somewhere. For recycling to truly work, items need to be processed in separated material categories. We need waste to be seen as a resource, worthy of a closed loop system.

No organisation is currently able to take responsibility for the problem - a group human effort is required. The **ONLY** thing that is in our control is to ***take personal responsibility for our own actions and actively strive to reduce our waste consumption***. Even if the world's population were to stop using single use items tomorrow, we'd still have *years* of cleaning up to do - a holistic approach is required.

By taking responsibility for our daily actions we have the power to heal and transform the situation. Our daily actions COUNT and we can be our own superheroes - not just for us, but for ALL future generations. This is worth our attention, energy and commitment.

Understandably, most of the general population are not aware of the extent of the problem. Many believe being a person who knows what to put in the right bin is enough. But actually, it's not. The solution is to focus on waste reduction and knowing how to responsibly dispose of waste that cannot be avoided.

The fact that you have invested time and energy into learning more about reducing waste gives me extreme optimism and hope for the future. Thank you.

## **What is Low Waste Living?**

Low Waste Living is focusing on the goal of reducing the amount of waste (including recycling) used on a daily basis via lifestyle and behaviour change.

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Low Waste Living isn't anything new - it's how our ancestors have historically lived. Our modern day challenge is finding a balance between old and new way living.

Ironically, the hardest part of this journey has been to uncover the natural, simple, effective and convenient solutions... the ones that used to be common knowledge, but were lost with the rise of conventional corporations.

But we don't all have to reinvent the wheel. I hope to help shortcut your journey, by sharing knowledge and, hopefully, inspiring change within your life.

Ultimately, adopting a Low Waste Lifestyle involves behaviour change - and you can ask any smoker how easy that is! It's important not to expect to change your lifestyle overnight, but instead to start implementing small achievable changes gradually. Start with the low hanging fruit - things that are easy lifestyle swaps. There's a list of swaps within this document to help get you started.

So, on that note, let's jump in. Your journey started the moment you became interested in knowing more - simply for that, you should feel proud. You are one of the renegade change makers of the world, someone who can hold their head high, knowing you are forming part of the solution to the world's issues, instead of contributing to the problem.

You are now part of Team Earth... go forth and conquer!

Karla xx

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## WASTE REDUCTION

Low Waste Living starts with Waste Reduction.

The first step of waste reduction is awareness of what is currently going into your rubbish and recycling bin. Once you're aware of what's going in, you can start coming up with strategies to reduce the content.

Four things that should always be kept in mind when it comes to waste is **Refuse** (say no where possible), **Reduce** (do you really need it?), **Reuse** (can it be transformed or repurposed for another use?), **Rot** (can it be composted?).

Landfill and Recycling should remain the last options, not the first.

## WASTE BINS

A large percentage of what goes into Waste Bins is organic waste. This could be food scraps, green waste, or any material that was once living. The best way to get these out of the bin and turn them into a resource is to compost the waste. This can be done via a worm farm, compost pile, bokashi bin, or there may be a community organic waste collection facility in your area.

### Reducing Organic Waste

Organic waste is anything that was once living, it includes: food scraps, green waste, hair, paper, cardboard etc.

#### Animals

If you have pets or farm animals, it may be an option to feed food scraps to them. Dogs are great at eating cooked leftovers (although I don't give my dogs cooked bones), chickens love fruit and vegetable scraps and pigs will eat just about anything. You'll need to do your own research about what is appropriate to be fed to your animals dependent upon the type you have.

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## Worm Farm

Worm farms are a wonderful addition to any household. There are a variety of ways to incorporate worm farms into your life. In the past I have made my own from 2 polystyrene boxes obtained from the grocery store, you can use an old bathtub, an old fridge or a purchased worm farm. A simple google search will provide instructions on how to make your own.

## Composting

If you think about how nature composts naturally, it's achieved with fallen leaves, branches and fruit from plants/trees, and manure from animals - just think about what's rotting on the ground in a forest. I use this as the basis for my home composting. Because I have Clydesdale horses, I pile up their manure, any old hay/leaves & add any other scraps I don't like to put in my worm farm (citrus peels and onion). I then simply let nature do its thing and let it rot down. In summer we wet the pile down and put a tarpaulin over the top to help the process. We tend not to do this in winter.

I certainly don't confess to being the world's best or most knowledgeable composter, so please seek someone out who is passionate about this topic to learn from.

## Bokashi

I've personally never used a [Bokashi Bin](#) but I know they're a great option for dealing with organic waste for people living in units that don't have a backyard and can't have a worm farm. Bokashi Bins can also compost meat waste.

## Community Organic Waste Facilities

[Share Waste](#) is a website that identifies community composting facilities. You could also see if there's a community garden near you that takes excess organic waste for their worm farm/compost heap.

## Meat Waste

Meat waste is normally not appropriate to include in your worm farm or compost heap - although a really well functioning hot compost system can process whole animal carcasses

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- but I'm far from experienced in that from my personal experiences (it's just good to know it's possible).

A great way to deal with meat scraps is to feed any leftover meat to dogs (if you don't have one, simply freeze your scraps and then take them to a friend with a dog next time you're visiting. Bones can be used in homemade broths, where you slow cook the bones for hours. Once they're softened they can be ground up and fed to appropriate animals.

## **Reducing Non Organic Waste**

To keep non organic waste out of landfill you should question:

- Is there are sustainable alternative for items you regularly use that end up in your general waste?
- Can it be reused for a different purpose?
- Can it be given a new lease of life by upcycling it with a coat of paint or some simple repairs?
- Can it be recycled?

In some cases, the items only destiny is to be landfilled. When this is the case it is worth feeling grateful that we have such a system for disposing of waste.

Sometimes it can take awhile to find a sustainable alternative. In my case, I don't currently have a waste free way of obtaining stockfeed. My horses go through a round bale of hay a month and I'm yet to find a sustainable alternative to the wrapping, however when I find a better way, I'll adopt that practice instead.

## **RECYCLING BINS**

There is no unified system for dealing with co-mingled recycling bin contents in Australia. That means the rules for what can go in your Kerbside Recycling Bin are dependent on what processing plant (MRF - Materials Recovery Facility) your bin content is taken to. You should be able to find out this information from your local government.

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Reducing the content of your recycling bin really comes down to behaviour change and choosing to shop in a more sustainable manner that focuses on reusable alternatives where you're able. This is discussed in the next section of 'Low Waste Living'.

While you're gradually changing your lifestyle to reduce your waste, it's important to get educated on what is appropriate to go into your kerbside bin. Contamination is a huge issue in the recycling industry, which happens when people put the wrong thing in the wrong bin. A really common contaminant is dirty nappies... ewwww! Imagine if it was your job to deal with shitty nappies, off food, syringes etc coming along the conveyor belt... no thanks!! Hats off to those workers.

## **LIFESTYLE**

### **Minimalist Living**

Clutter in our lives is often relative to feeling cluttered within our heads. Decluttering is a huge process to go through, but so worth it for the end result of freedom. Clutter can easily hold us hostage via emotional attachment and/or overwhelm. Decluttering is something that takes time and commitment, but the more you do, the freer you will become. This is often a parallel process of 'doing the inner work'.

An added bonus of decluttering is making some cash on the side by selling your goods secondhand, or they can be donated to an op shop, or given away to people who will appreciate them. Check if you have a local '[Buy Nothing](#)' Facebook Group. It's a fabulous resource for rehoming goods and building community with people who live nearby.

Minimalist living revolves around everything in your life having a purpose and use. I highly recommend Marie Condo's book 'The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up' - it has some great suggestions to help get your life in order.

## **SAYING NO**

Probably the number one strategy for reducing waste is getting comfortable with saying no to unnecessary items that try to enter your life.

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I've discovered that unwanted presents have held me hostage by feeling the need to keep them out of guilt or obligation - bummer that! I'm now in the habit of announcing to friends and family to please not buy me anything or give me cards.

A true gift should be given without any expectations, with this in mind, if I'm given a gift that I don't want/need, I have no issues rehoming it to someone who will love it.

Junkmail can be eliminated by simply putting a note on your letterbox, or letting your postal agent know at your local postal box. This also eliminates the desire to impulse buy from catalogues.

Don't be afraid to say no to sales people. If they are entering your space, you have the right to graciously (and quickly) refuse what they are offering, guilt free.

Say no to traditions and customs that are not environmentally friendly by finding solutions that provide the same outcome sustainably. For example, if your family are used to using disposable plates and cutlery at gatherings, introduce a 3 bucket wash system (rinse, wash, rinse) where people bring reusable items and wash their own items as they go - similar convenience but with a sustainable outcome. Another example is to adorn your christmas tree (if you use one) with natural reusable ornaments that will last a lifetime.

Don't go shopping on an empty stomach! It'll make it hard to say no... fill your body's fuel tank up first to be safe.

## **SHOPPING**

We vote with our money and it is a powerful tool and energy - use it wisely. It is hard to avoid waste when buying new items as nearly everything comes in branded packaging. The best option is to buy secondhand where you're able to.

It's also impossible to avoid packaging when shopping online. I try to shop from places that are known to ship goods in natural packaging that I can compost or reuse afterwards. If I'm not sure what type of packaging they'll be using, I include a note at the checkout to request no plastic packaging if possible.

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Where relevant I like to buy natural. Microfibres are wreaking havoc within our waterways and oceans, many of which make their way there via us washing our clothes. I've recently started to learn about, and take notice of, clothing fibres and it's alarming how much of the materials we wear/use are made from synthetic plastics. Using natural fabrics is not only better for the environment, but is also much healthier for our bodies health and wellbeing.

Beware of impulse shopping as an emotional crutch. MANY people have an addiction to shopping to help fulfill an empty emotional space within them... in fact, our society has been conditioned to live this way. Be aware of what purpose the shopping is playing and don't be afraid to invest in 'doing the inner work'. Impulse shopping can be cured with awareness and commitment.

### **Secondhand Shopping**

There are many options for secondhand shopping such as op shops, tip shops, online (Gumtree/Facebook Marketplace/Amazon/EBay etc).

I personally LOVE secondhand shopping. Hunting in op shops, tip shops and any form of second hand shop is my idea of heaven. I love the thrill of finding something I love, that I know can't be found in a standard shop. Once you've got used to secondhand shopping, it becomes so BORING to shop in a shopping centre full of new things.

A huge bonus of buying secondhand is the non-emotional attachment that often occurs due to not paying a high price. Many people hold on to new items, simply because it cost them a lot of money and so they can't let it go. Buying second hand allows for an easy come easy go attitude - if you get it home and change your mind, it's easy to rehome again because little was invested originally.

### **Buying New**

If I do buy new I like to buy quality items that will hopefully last my lifetime and have the option of buying replacement parts if needed. This can be tricky sometimes as many corporations have specifically designed products to have a limited lifespan so you'll buy a replacement in a short space of time. This type of throwaway society is not healthy and the more ethical suppliers we can support with our dollars the better.

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I also love to support local (particularly artisan) as much as possible and am happy to pay extra to support small businesses. When you live in a small town it gives you an appreciation of how important this practice is - if you don't use it, you lose it. Shopping local supports someone's dream, dedication and commitment - and helps create thriving communities. It also helps you to reduce postage packaging if you're tempted to shop online for a cheaper price instead.

## **FREEBIES**

I love freebies!.. When it's something I love! But it's super important NOT to accept freebies if they're something you have no use for - ie conference giveaways, free toys with kids meals etc.

There are numerous ways to gracefully receive free goods. Many of my friends know how much I love secondhand so they offer me first dibs on items they no longer want.

Taking goods from roadside collections is a wonderful way to help reduce what goes to landfill. When I worked at a Tip Shop, the items collected from the roadside collection were taken to a different section of the landfill and could not be recovered for reuse - since this time I've promoted picking up items from kerbside collections. Many people throw out really quality gear, or items that can easily be up-cycled or repurposed.

Keep an eye out for freebies on local for sale pages (online or in print). You can even advertise for items you are looking for.

## **UPCYCLED/REPURPOSED/REUSED**

If you haven't heard of chalk paint yet - get onto it! A simple coat of paint can transform many sad looking pieces of furniture and turn them into loved pieces or art. All you have to do is give the original item a clean and quick scuff with some sandpaper and then paint.

Many items can be repurposed in the garden, especially for growing plants out of. Get onto [Pinterest](#) and you'll have no shortage of inspiration.

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Consider partnering with local business who produce a waste product that you're looking for ie containers, wooden pallets etc.

## **LOW WASTE LIVING**

Low Waste Living doesn't mean your lifestyle will never produce throwaway waste or recycling again, but it does mean that your everyday living routine can be waste free.

As a general rule, Low Waste Living requires you to make things from scratch, which is why solutions need to be easy, effective and convenient, as time is your most valuable resource. Getting set up with the right tools & equipment will help with your success.

## **GETTING ORGANISED**

The first step of the Low Waste journey for me has been to get organised. To avoid waste, you have to think ahead, be prepared and have systems in place that work for you. I thrive off being organised and it's an ongoing evolutionary process to find the right system.

You may have to try a few things before you find what works best for you.

### **General Life Organisation**

If you're anything like me, sometimes you stumble across the perfect recipe, make it to death, think you'll never forget how to make it, stop making it for a while and then go to make it months/years down the track and have no idea how you used to do it... I'm pretty sure this is common for many people!

To overcome losing valuable information, I'm writing what I've called a 'Life Bible' - it's a one stop shop to document all the aspects of my life, including recipes, notes, tutorials etc. Following are some of the ways I get organised manually and electronically.

#### Manual System

My favourite manual system has been using index cards within a categorised box.



I have 2 boxes - 1 for experiments and 1 for tried and tested recipes/notes.

Having a system that works for you to note down experiments and recipes is a key to success.

If you are in the habit of using a notepad to write in, check out the [Bullet Journal System](#). This was a game changer when I first found it, and is a great way of getting your notepad organised.

### Electronic System

As well as my manual written system, I also use an electronic system for keeping track of my life. I'm currently in the process of writing an 'Earth Girl Life Bible' which is my one stop shop for notes/recipes on my lifestyle. I'm writing it in [Scrivener](#) = game changer!

I'm a big fan of using cloud based apps so I'm able to make notes on my phone or computer, depending on where I am when I want to make a new note. I love the notes app on my iphone, which sync with my computer and various Google Apps, including Google Keep, Chrome, Google Drive and Gmail.

### **Want List**

Create a 'Want List' that you can add to as you find lifestyle items that you desire. You can then use this list to stay focused when you're shopping, especially at a secondhand store.

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## Life Audit

I'm still developing my Life Audit, it's a work in progress. It's a spreadsheet that tracks products, ingredients, prices etc appropriate for my lifestyle. It's like a life inventory. This will help me to record how much and how often I use different products and will allow me to do an annual order for bulk ingredients. It's also a great all round tool for tracking various aspects of my life.

## EQUIPMENT TO HELP WITH LOW WASTE LIVING

Following is a list of equipment I use to help me achieve a Low Waste Lifestyle:

### Thermomix

This is a wonderful tool that helps making food from whole ingredients simple and convenient. I've had my [Thermomix](#) since 2008 and I wouldn't be without it.

### Bullet Blender

I use a bullet blender for making smoothies, sauces and salad dressings. I like the fact you can make it in the container and then put it directly in the fridge, or take it with you to drink on the go.

### Slow Cooker or Dream Pot

I have a [Dream Pot](#), which I use as a slow cooker, only it doesn't use any electricity. Other than making food, slow cookers are great for other homemade tasks, such as soap making - I use a slow cooker specifically and exclusively for this purpose.

### Water Filtration System

If you're used to drinking bottled water from the shop, and don't want to use tap water, it's a good idea to invest in a water filter. The type you choose will depend on factors like cost, whether you own your house or are renting, and what you feel is important to filter out.

My first preference would always be to drink rain water.

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As we currently rent and there is not a rainwater tank installed, we use a ceramic countertop water filter system. I got the ceramic container secondhand and use a [Southern Cross Water Filter](#), which is the only one I've found that removes fluoride.

I hope to buy a countertop water distiller in the future - to use for drinking (I'll remineralise it via sunshine) and other homemade personal care and cleaning products.

## **Soda Stream**

If you enjoy fizzy drinks, a [Soda Stream](#) is a great way to make your own. You can use it to carbonate your water and then add natural flavourings to create your desired drink. You can take the cartridges back for exchange and refill.

## **Jars**

Refillable jars are a huge part of my lifestyle. I quite like having uniform jars on display in my kitchen and did purchase some wholesale to get me started many years ago (prior to the house we currently live in, I've always had my pantry on display using open bookshelves).

## **LOW WASTE KIT**

Before walking out the door, make sure you are prepared for the day and what it will entail. My standard 'leave the house' kit contains reusable:

- Water Bottle (filled with water from home)
- Shopping & Produce Bags
- Storage Containers for any leftovers
- Coffee Cup
- Plate and Cutlery Set
- Reusable Straws
- Napkin and/or Handkerchief

If I'm out and eating takeaway food (eg from a bakery or deli) I ask the person serving me to please use my own plate to serve food. I do this at events too. I do make sacrifices for options and purposely only choose from items that aren't wrapped in packaging.

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## LOW WASTE REPLACEMENTS

Plastic Wrap	Containers or Beeswax Wraps
Tissues	Handkerchief or cut up rags
Toilet Paper	Washable Rags (flannelette)
Sanitary Items	Washable Pads and Luna Cup
Pegs	Marine Grade Stainless Steel Pegs
Plastic Bags	Reusable Fruit and Veg Bags, Natural Fibre Shopping Bags
Gift Wrapping	Fabric scraps, a pillow case, beeswax wrap
Tooth Floss	Silk Floss with container refills
Tea Bags	Loose leaf tea using a strainer or pot
Coffee Pods	Plunger coffee

### Sustainable Alternatives

Sewing Cotton	<a href="http://www.sewforgood.com.au">www.sewforgood.com.au</a>
Office Supplies	<a href="https://www.buyecogreen.com.au/">https://www.buyecogreen.com.au/</a>

## WHERE TO SHOP FOR LOW WASTE PRODUCTS

### Online

If you need to develop your Low Waste Kit and want to buy new items I recommend looking on [Etsy](https://www.etsy.com/) for artisan goods, or google for 'zero waste shopping' near you.

### In Person

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This will be dependent on where you live. Most bulk food stores sell some sustainable products to support the lifestyle - if not, simply ask them where the best place is to shop locally, or do a google search.

Also check out any local markets with artisan sellers.

## **FOOD SHOPPING**

Avoiding packaged foods means you ideally want to make things from scratch, using whole food ingredients OR taking in reusable containers to shops to get ready made food.

Fruit, vegetables and herbs can be grown from home OR purchased from the shops. Buy loose items and carry them in reusable produce bags. There may also be a local growers within your area you can buy from or barter with.

### **Pantry Items**

If you have access to one, shopping at a bulk food store where you can take in your own containers is the most convenient solution. If this is not an option where you live, you can search for a bulk food buying coop in your area, or [start one](#) with a like minded group of friends.

Bulk food stores allow you to fill your own containers or reusable bags with pantry goods, which you can return time and time again for refilling.

### **Meat**

Shopping at a butcher shop allows you to take your own container in for filling. If they don't know how to do it, simply ask them to tare your container first (that way you're only paying for the meat).

### **Bread**

You can purchase loaves of bread from a bakery and ask them to slice it directly into your own bag. A pillow case is perfect for this OR [Onya](#) have created a wonderful reusable bread bag which also keeps your bread fresh in the freezer.

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## Dairy

Look for milk and yoghurt sold in glass containers, buy from a local producer or look for a company that provides refills.

Cheese can be bought from the deli section and placed in your reusable container.

## LOW WASTE LIVING SUPPORT

There are many Zero Waste Bloggers on the internet for you to obtain inspiration and to learn from, many have also written hardcopy books. Simply do a google search and find the people you resonate with best. There are also some great online support groups. Do a search for 'Zero Waste' in Facebook and see what comes up.

## WINDING UP AND THANK YOU

The most important thing is to know is that this type of lifestyle *is possible*. Don't try to achieve it overnight but rather aim to make changes slowly over time, that become new habits that last a lifetime.

Thank you so much for joining me on this journey. I hope this is just the start of the conversation.

## GOT A QUESTION?

Great, because I'd love to help if I can. Please submit your questions here: <https://www.karlahooper.com/qa/> I share answers via the Earth Girl Email Newsletter, which you can sign up for on the same page.

OK, that's all for now. It's such a pleasure to be changing the world together.

Until next time,

Karla