

Waste NOT, WANT not

Becoming a zero waster doesn't happen overnight, it's a journey for most.

WITH NEARLY 800 000 POSTS ON INSTAGRAM TAGGED #ZEROWASTE, THE MOVEMENT HAS BEGUN TO GAIN MOMENTUM AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN INFLUENCERS AND CONSUMERS ALIKE. NOW IT'S MAKING ITS WAY INTO OUR SHOPS, MARKETS, KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS.

WORDS: ADÉL STRYDOM (@treadbrightly)

The commonalities among pictures tagged #zerowaste aren't always immediately apparent. A cocktail sports a glass straw. An outstretched hand holds a loaf of sourdough bread. A pantry is stocked with a motley of glass jars containing pasta, rice, beans, grains and nuts. A kitchen counter still life features fresh vegetables, some peeping out from soft cotton bags.

But in all of these images there's an absence of something we've become so accustomed to we forget to notice its existence: plastic.

The zero waste movement is an effort to reduce the excessive amounts of waste we produce. According to the World Bank, South Africa creates nearly 20 000 tonnes of waste annually, making us the 15th highest producer in the world. Our landfills are overflowing with materials that can never decompose.

While we often soothe our consciences by recycling – and because cardboard, glass and tin are widely recycled – we don't always realise how complex a material plastic is. Candice Mostert from Waste Ed in Cape Town explains that there are

different types and compositions of plastic, and most recycling plants only process certain types. "The rest often gets dumped," she admits.

For zero wasters, the best solution isn't to try and puzzle out the opaque nature of plastics and recycling, but rather to refuse these materials altogether. This goes for anything from straws, shopping bags and coffee cups to plastic toothbrushes, takeaway containers and shampoo bottles.

With plastic so ingrained in our lives, it might seem an impossible feat. It's difficult to imagine a kitchen without a plastic bag

for the food scraps or a picnic without those packets of baby carrots and pots of hummus for dipping. How do you get to a point where your rubbish bin is completely empty at the end of the week?

Refuse the Straw is perhaps the easiest place to start. More and more restaurants in South Africa have pledged to take part in this movement. Clarke's in Cape Town sells reusable bamboo straws for those who can't live without, while Afro-Boer in Pretoria are quickly phasing out plastics completely. "Waiters are asking customers to consider using a spoon for milkshakes and to drink

smoothies and juices straight from the glass. The waiters simply aren't taking straws to the tables any more," explains Michelle Cronje, owner of the restaurant.

Rethink the Bag (rethinkthebag.org) is another local movement asking South Africans to be more mindful of plastic. Hayley McLellan, environmental campaigner for the Two Oceans Aquarium, has been driving this movement since 2007 and a decade later some South Africans are finally convinced. "Perhaps our biggest achievement so far has been working with Bargain Books. In 2016, their Centurion branch decided to ban plastic shopping bags for a month. They've had such good feedback they decided to go plastic-shopping-bag-free in all 70 of their stores throughout South Africa."

Hayley is thankful that, finally, she's not "flapping around in the dark alone any more". "More and more schools and retailers are coming on board. Children, especially, are realising that the environment is their support system and that it's under threat," says the activist.

With the bags taken care of, the inside of our trolleys still need a lot of work. Paul Rubin and Sherene Kingma were becoming frustrated with the amount of unnecessary packaging they encountered at the shops as well as the lack of plastic-free shopping options in Cape Town. They decided to do something about it.

TRAVEL SOUTH AFRICA



Nude Foods (nudefoods.co.za), at 5 Constitution Street in Cape Town, is the country's first plastic-free grocery shop. Patrons either bring their own containers or buy glass jars at the store. Everything is sold by weight, so you can stock up your pantry with rice, beans, nuts, seeds, legumes, flour and spices without taking home a single piece of plastic. They even sell unpacked soap bars and bamboo toothbrushes.

While plastic-free stores are still catching on in the rest of the country, Food Lover's Market is a good national option for reducing at least some of your plastic footprint. Buy or make your own mesh or cotton bags and weigh the loose fruit and veg, as well as the pantry items from the bulk section, in these. Faithful to Nature stocks all of your waste-free lifestyle goodies with their reusable bags, straws, cups and bottles.

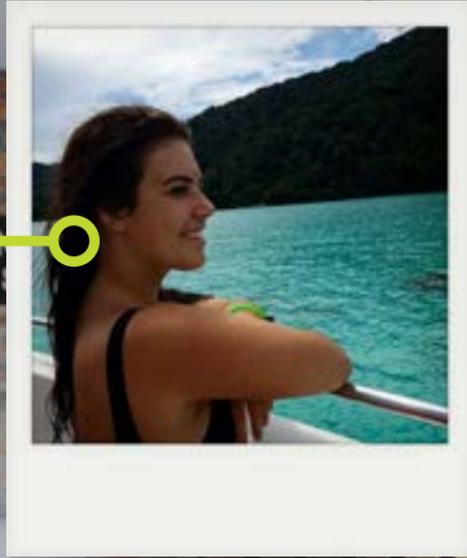
Once you start noticing how many items you consume are wrapped in plastic, you might feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Don't be. While a true zero waster wants to send nothing to landfill, it's a journey for most. Today you have your own travel mug for your inflight coffee. Next time you might bring your own fruit and decline the packet of chips. You don't have to do it all at once, but it's time to start doing something.

Zero waste influencers

Get more ideas for reducing your trash from South Africa's top zero waste bloggers and Instagrammers.

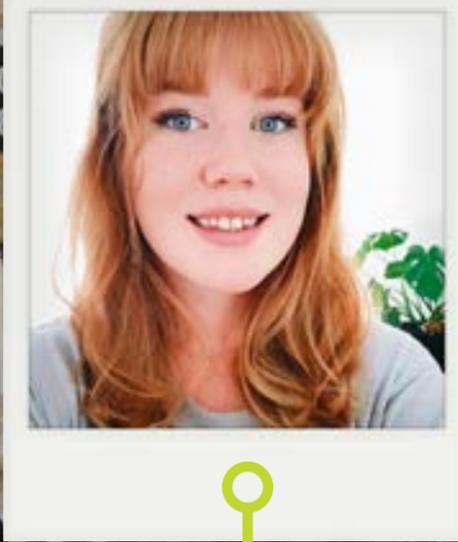
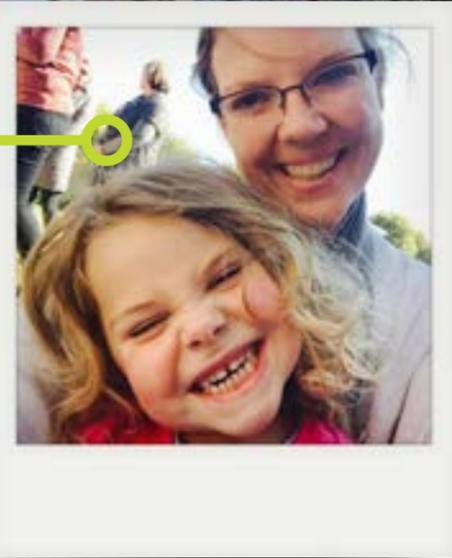
Khaya Alexander @wastelessafrica

Zero waste one-liner: Reducing my waste to the smallest quantity and not sending anything to landfill.
Best part: Saving Earth's depleting resources, not contributing to the destruction of the ocean and, as a bonus, you save money.



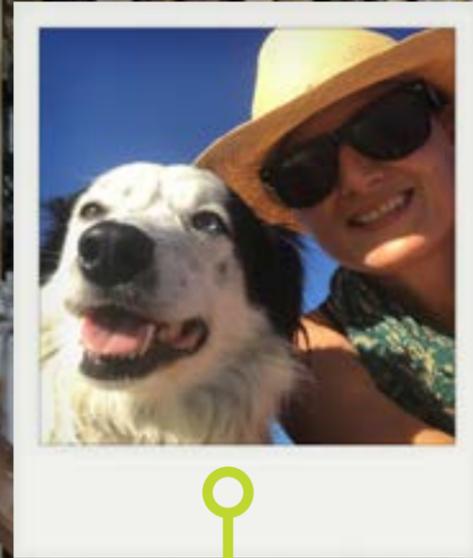
Colette Plaska www.unpacked.co.za

Zero waste one-liner: Aspire to send absolutely nothing down the drain or to the landfill.
Hardest part: Joburg is fast-paced. People don't have much time and are after convenience. Everything is plastic or covered in plastic and Styrofoam.



Shannon Goodman @journeytozero_

Zero waste one-liner: I would rather outlive my trash than have it outlive me, so I try my hardest to not produce any in the first place.
Strangest reaction received: I get strange looks from waiters when half a pizza disappears suddenly after having packed it into a reusable container I've brought from home.



Alex Radlinger @zerowastejourneycapetown

Zero waste one-liner: To tread lightly on our beautiful planet and live in sync with nature by reducing waste to landfill as much as possible.
Best part: I feel by living greener we're also living healthier (unprocessed food, non-toxic detergents and so on), doing what's best for the generations to come (humans and animals). And I've met lovely inspiring local zero wasters on my journey so far.

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