Zero waste – Home and Away

Bring on the sunny days and easing of lockdown restrictions! I’m sure I wasn’t the only person who took down their 2020 calendar at some point last year, as there was nothing to plan. But now at last, after what seems like endless months stuck at home we can start to get out and about a bit more. We might also be thinking about getting our homes spruced up ready for visitors next month!

Both of these things are very exciting but how can we make them as eco and sustainable as possible? It’s not about going out and buying loads of new things but there are a few simple switches you can make, which will make a considerable difference to the single-use plastics you have in your home and in your rubbish bin!

So, let’s tackle the home first..

Is your home ready for a good old clean? Well, a really quick and easy way to avoid adding more plastic bottles to your cupboards is to head to your local refill shop, and have your empties refilled with effective, plant-based cleaning liquids, and bring a guilt-free sparkle to your home! Alternatively, you can’t go far wrong with a few tablespoons of bicarbonate of soda, some white vinegar and lemon juice for clean surfaces, unblocked drains and even sparkly windows. You can find some simple recipes for different cleaning jobs on my website [www.cupboardlove.shop](http://www.cupboardlove.shop)

And what are the alternatives for actually wiping down surfaces or washing- up? Those handy but nasty green sponges are made from plastic, breed bacteria and leach micro plastics into the water system each time they’re used, and unfortunately kitchen roll isn’t recyclable. So, instead look for wooden washing up brushes with replaceable heads, reusable and washable cloths (these could be cut up old towels or t-shirts), natural loofah pads and even those metal scourers are a better option – and they last much longer too! Cotton cloths and loofahs can simply be composted at home or in with your garden waste bin at the end of their useful life.

Now what about easy entertaining? Treat your guests to homemade crisps and dips and avoid the packets and small, single-use tubs – it’s really easy to make hummus for example, and you don’t even need to soak dried chickpeas! Blitz a tin of chickpeas (or whatever white bean you fancy) with garlic, tahini, olive oil, lemon juice, a pinch of salt and a sprinkle of cumin seeds. You can make it the texture you like and keep it fresh in the fridge. On a side note - you might still be a die-hard cling-film user but I recently came across this terrifying fact - a staggering 1.2 billion metres of the stuff, roughly 740,000 miles of it is used by every home in the UK every single year! That’s enough stretchy, slow-to-break-down cling film to wrap its way around the entire circumference of the earth 30 times over! It is not recyclable, breaks down into nurdles (small plastic pellets) over hundreds of years and, if it finds its way into the oceans is often mistakenly eaten by marine life.

So please consider using a reusable alternative, maybe a beeswax (or vegan wax) wrap, a washable silicone/cotton bowl cover or simply an upturned plate. You will find the wraps and bowl covers really easy to use and, especially with the wax wraps, if you look after them and don’t over wash them, they will last you a decent length of time. You could even have a go at making them yourself, it’s really quite straightforward and satisfying!

These wax wraps can also be handy when you’re heading out of the house… wrap your sandwiches, crudités, cheese and even fruit in them, instead of using single-use cling-film. Foil can be recycled but it’s still single-use, better to use a reusable sandwich wrap which is machine washable and can be used over and over again. Making picnics and snacks from scratch will be healthier and avoid all the unnecessary packaging!

It goes without saying that taking hot drinks and a reusable water bottle from home will save you money, and avoid all the takeaway cups and single-use plastic bottles. A top tip I came across recently is to freeze small bits of fruit in an ice tray, then add 1 or 2 cubes to your water bottle before you head out, for cool and non-sugary flavoured water!

There is the famous quote by Chief Seattle - prominent chief of several native American tribes which says, ‘Take only memories, Leave only footprints’. Sadly, it would seem some people continue to ignore this sentiment, and you’ve probably noticed a build-up of rubbish while out on your daily walks, which is so depressing. So, I would add ‘Pick up one piece of litter.’ A family or community litter pick is a productive way of getting outdoors, and it feels good to see an improvement in your local area, especially since we live in such a beautiful part of the World.

It can sometimes feel like the problems we are facing with plastic pollution are too huge to tackle, but it has to be a collective responsibility to look after our planet and the natural world. And I believe that every single small action can be part of the change for good.

So enjoy a happy and sustainable Summer!