



Modern Sustainability

*How to be zero waste
in a culture created to be
disposable*

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Introduction.



Sustainability is the new black it seems, which is fine with me, because I think people doing positive things for the planet and actively trying to reduce and improve their impact is the best trend ever. Way better than skinny jeans and fidget spinners.

The way we choose to spend our dollars has a powerful impact on the way the future of our planet is shaped. Giving an entity our money encourages them to continue the practices that made that product possible. Also, large corporations have an extreme amount of power when it comes to the legislation that gets passed in our country because they contribute so heavily to political campaigns. If we make sure that the companies we give our money to have values that align with our own then they will also support candidates and laws that align with our values as well.

Watch out for greenwashing

Greenwashed goods will often be packaged in earth tones and use trendy fonts on their packaging, boasting terms like all natural, simple, or earth. Many wooden toys for example are made with toxic chemicals. Not all products that are put forward as being more sustainable options are frauds, but we live in a time when the consumer must do their homework to avoid being duped. All of these products do have one thing in common however: they want you to buy them. The truth is, although being careful and mindful regarding purchases is incredibly powerful, another

powerful move humans in developed countries can make towards sustainability is simply to consume less. Much, much less.

So. Much. Plastic.

Between the years of 1950 and 2017, 8300 million metric tonnes of plastic were created, half of that being produced in just the thirteen most recent years. 42 percent of that plastic was used for packaging, and only 9 percent of all plastics are ever recycled. A new type of rock was recently found on the beaches of Hawaii, an amalgam of sediment, organic debris, volcanic rock and melted plastic. Scientists suggested the stone be named “plastiglomerate”. Will the defining trait of humans during this time period be their use of plastics? Is this how history will remember us?

Shifting our habits

I have been studying natural health for over 15 years and growing food for more than ten. Since becoming a mother over a decade ago, the effort to live life the healthiest possible way and keep chemicals out of our home has been a large focus for me. A couple of Januaries ago I was discussing goals with my family, and we all made a commitment to try to completely move away from plastic. In today's world, this is extremely difficult! Attempting to avoid all plastics made my family hyper aware of how much plastic and unnecessary waste was a part of our lives, and honestly, in my extended family and circle of friends, our family is seen as a bit hippyish, so I would imagine that the amount of waste the majority of people make is actually much more.

I put together this guide to save people the trouble of having to research every little thing and to encourage people along on their path to zero waste. It is full of tips we have gleaned from years of trying to live more sustainably. The massive industrialization of almost every single item available for our purchase, the practice that corporations have of prioritizing profits above all else, and the previously overlooked way that this industrialization has impacted every living thing on the planet is sobering and completely overwhelming. I dream of a day when I can buy whatever I want with the confidence that it was produced in a safe and ethical way. Unfortunately, that day is not today. Consumers must practice hyper vigilance.

My family did not make all the changes overnight, we have been working on them for a decade, and we are still not perfect. Not by a long shot. As you make changes and shifts, be gentle with yourself, pick one thing at a time. Do the best you can within your abilities, time limits, and budget allowances, because if everyone waited until they could do everything perfectly to do anything at all, humanity would never make progress. Allow yourself grace and remember that by making conscious choices, connecting with our local communities, and becoming more self-sufficient, we can create a much better future for ourselves, the planet, and

everything that lives on it. A life full of disposable items might feel convenient, but when the planet isn't fit for life (a reality that is closer than most people realize) convenience won't matter, not at all.

Food.



The industrial food industry is a mess, and in its current incarnation is responsible for a large chunk of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, pollution of rivers and streams, and air pollution. Animals are treated horrifically and fruits, vegetables, and grains are grown with massive amounts of chemicals. Also, getting away from packaged food entirely is what is best for our bodies and the planet.

Grow Something

Desiring the healthiest possible food for my family was what got me into growing my own. Growing our own food also helps to eliminate excess waste and there is no fuel being used to move the food from place to place and no packaging being used. I understand not everyone is a gardener though, it honestly brings me joy, (as an encouragement: I wouldn't have thought I was a gardener either before I actually started growing food, and I still have garden fails every year) but I understand it's not everyone's thing.

Support Local Farmers

The next best thing people can do is seek out and buy from farmers using regenerative agricultural methods. These are methods intended to protect and nurture soil life. Animal products should come from animals that are pastured and rotationally grazed. Many farmers using these methods are proud enough of their farms that they may even let you come check it out, and if they do, by all means, jump at the opportunity. Take the kids, see where food actually comes from.

Farmers markets are an excellent way to connect with and support local farmers. Even if it means taking a bit of a drive to get to the closest one, the benefits to personal health and

the planet will be worth it to work it into the routine. Recruit a friend to come to, split fuel costs and make it more fun.

There are more farm subscription services popping up all the time, from weekly veggie boxes to orchard CSA's, to shares of a dairy cow. CSA stands for community supported agriculture and it usually works like this: the customer buys a share at the beginning of the season and is then given weekly offerings. Some CSA's even ask/allow customers to come to the farm for work days, which can be instructive and fun.

There are options that do not require full buy in as well. In my area, for example, there is a group of farmers that work together to offer beef, chicken, pork, lamb, goat, cheese, and honey. Each week a newsletter is sent out with offerings and customers can text or email their order to be picked up at a particular location on a certain day and time. Most people in my area do not even know it is an option. I can almost guarantee that with a little digging, it is possible to find local farmers offering a wide array of food. When these types of enterprises are supported it enables them to grow and encourages others to take up similar work.

Buying direct from a farmer is mutually advantageous for many reasons, one being financial. When the middleman (the supermarket) is removed from the equation dollars go farther and those dollars go directly to the farmer that grew the food. Try the website EatWild.com to find local farmers near you.

Avoid Convenience Food

Fast food and ultra processed and packaged food is a major problem in our country because it increases demand for industrially farmed food. It also increases waste. Getting back into the kitchen will be better for our families health, the environment, and personal finances. I found the keys for me are meal plans and food prep. Before I meal-planned I would wonder all day about what I was going to make for dinner and it felt stressful. Now, I have a plan, one that can be flexible, if we were to get invited somewhere for dinner for example.

On Tuesdays I clean out the fridge and take stock of the pantry. I make a meal plan for the week and a shopping list. I take into account what is in the garden or what will be available at farmers market. If signed up for a CSA it might make sense to meal plan the day it gets picked up, planning meals around what was in the box that week. I food shop Wednesdays and meal prep Thursdays. This usually consists of making ahead a few snacks that can be eaten at home or taken to go (hard boiled eggs, almond butter balls, cut vegetables and dip, oatmeal bars, or bacon liver pate for example), and pre-chopping any fruit or veg I will need. I also prep a make ahead breakfast that I can use for a couple of days, like an egg bake or baked oatmeal. Friday I make a large meal that can be utilized for eating that night and leftovers, like a roast or a roast chicken. Then the next night we will have some of the leftovers in a salad or a casserole. The next day I will cook the bones

using the broth as a base for soup or to add nutrients to rice. Meal planning also saves me money because it helps me to make sure I am using all the leftovers. Before I meal-planned I often had food go bad in the fridge because I would forget about it. That never happens now.

Connect With Community

Another fun way to mitigate never ending cooking is to team up with a friend or two (or three) and share meals once a week, or one friend can make enough for both families and drop it off, rotating weeks. Try arranging weekly potlucks with several other friends in which everyone brings a large side dish to share. Consider meeting at a park when the weather is nice to spare the host the pressure of trying to make their home perfect for company. It will also encourage kids to play outside instead of indulging in electronics.

If feeling nervous about reaching out to others to see if they would like to share meals is an issue please consider this: a recent survey of 20,000 Americans revealed that 47% of people lack connection and do not feel they have deep meaningful interaction on a daily basis. Don't be limited to people in the same age group either. If there is a retired couple down the street that is friendly, or a young married couple with no children, or if you are a young single, don't hesitate to reach out. There is no reason humans should be limited to only having relationships with people in the exact season of life as they are, in fact, people in a different season can provide us with much wisdom and different energies. If once a week seems like too much, try once a month, or even just a one off. If it is possible to form a regular group of different people, rotate households!

Food Waste

It is estimated that 1.3 billion tons of food get wasted worldwide every year, and the United States is the number one culprit. This is roughly one third of all food produced! In developing nations a majority of the food waste happens post harvest, and in more developed nations the food waste happens at the retail or consumer level. Nearly half of all fruits and vegetables go to waste. When food goes to waste it represents wasted human capital, land, resources, fuel, and more. What can be done?

As I mentioned before, meal planning is an extremely helpful way to make sure food doesn't go bad in the fridge. If the vegetables look a little rough try putting them into a soup or a smoothie. Fruit that is getting overripe can also be used in a smoothie, smashed or cut up and mixed with oats to make overnight oats or baked into bars. Overripe fruit and veg is also great in the juicer. Make sure to compost fruit and vegetable scraps to turn them into beautiful dirt for the garden.

Another way to help minimize food waste is to be willing to buy produce that is less than perfect looking. Also, when planning to use a cut of meat, dairy products or eggs quickly after purchase, don't be afraid to buy something that is close to its sell by date.

Apple peels can be used to make apple cider vinegar, and lemon, orange and grapefruit peels can be added to vinegar and water to make homemade cleaners.

Bulk Buying

Sometimes the most difficult things to find from a local farmer are grains, seeds, nuts, nut butters, and oils. Try to find a store in your area to buy these items in bulk. The prices will be cheaper than items that are pre-packaged, and plastic packaging can be avoided. Bring reusable bulk bags or jars and simply have the store weigh them before shopping.

If there is not a bulk store nearby, ask the local supermarket to start a bulk section. In the interim, look into a subscription service, like Azure Standard, which allows people to order items on their website and then pick them up at a predetermined time and place. Because of Azure Standards' business model of not having stores, they are able to offer high quality, organic food at a competitive because they are not paying for buildings.

Eating Out

Eating out can be done in a sustainable way with a little forethought and self-discipline. Many of the large chain restaurants have played a large role in our current environmental disaster, so it is important to wean off of restaurants that serve food that was farmed industrially. Let restaurants know that factory farmed animals or fruits and vegetables that have been sprayed with pesticides are unacceptable. If there is a new local restaurant that is serving organic produce and locally raised grass-fed meats, by all means give them a try. It might cost a few extra dollars, but I think as a society we need to reframe the idea of quality food being "too expensive" and instead think of it as valuable. Cheap food is not really cheap, because it is purchased and consumed at a high cost to our environment and to our health. Keep in mind that paying a bit more for quality food on the front end will save an untold amount of money when it comes to paying for problems with health. Also remember that many food products are cheap because they are given subsidies by the government, if we are to subsidize anything shouldn't the practices be ones that are beneficial to human health and environment instead of ones that are not?

Bring reusable cutlery and straw, if a straw is important. Ask for the beverage in a mug or a glass instead of a disposable cup. If taking a beverage to go, bring a reusable cup. Many establishments will even give a small

discount (5 or 10 cents) if the customer provides a cup. Don't get takeout from places that do not have compostable packaging.

I know this is a difficult one for people because we have become so dependent on fast food to keep up with a fast-paced lifestyle. Maybe this fast-paced lifestyle needs an adjustment? Is it truly serving us?

Running children around for evening activities is often a catalyst for convenience foods. When considering extracurricular activities for children, we should think about their long-term trajectory and if it is something our child even cares about. I have seen many families lives become consumed by children's sports, for example, when the children themselves do not seemingly enjoy the sports. If we must have the activities, plan and freeze meals ahead of time (cook a double recipe and freeze half for an easy dinner) or make a picnic for the family. Employ older children to help with this. If they want to be carted around to activities, surely they can pitch in to make some sandwiches or put together a salad. The idea that childhood should be pure recreation is offensive and dangerous to young people, they are capable of doing real things and should be required to. It allows them to feel they are part of a team, builds their self esteem, and teaches them valuable life skills they will need in a few short years when they are living on their own. Many parents encourage activities because they believe it fosters confidence and self esteem in their child, and while this can be true, the self esteem cultivated through having a close connection with parents and having them be a mentor should not be underestimated.

Compost to Close the Loop

Putting compostable materials into plastic bags and then burying them in landfills while pouring petroleum based fertilizers on soil to grow food is just a broken way of doing things. It does not make sense and it only benefits those who sell oil and make chemical fertilizers. The massive amount of material going into landfills every year needs to be composted and turned into nutrient rich soil amendment. Composting is an easy way to turn discarded food items and other organic forms of waste into nutrient rich fertilizer for the farm or garden. An added benefit of composting is that it keeps this waste out of the landfill.

Make sure when composting that a balance is created between brown (drier) and green (juicier) materials. If the compost has a bad smell and is attracting fruit flies it needs more brown materials.

There are many different approaches to composting, often the one chosen is decided by how much dedicated space can be allocated. I use a three bin system, so when one fills up, which takes four or five months, I move on to the next one, and then in a year or so I am back where I started, by which time the compost is broken down and ready to be used. This way it never really has to be turned. Another option is one bin or barrel which can be turned. More compact still is a worm farm, one of

one of these can even be kept on a patio or a corner of the kitchen.

If you are interested in composting to reduce waste but do not garden and have no use for the compost itself, look into a local organization that will collect scraps to be turned into compost like Compost Now. This is a fairly new organization and is not yet in all areas, but it may be possible to find someone who is doing this locally, or to donate scraps directly to a farm or community garden project. This will significantly decrease the waste contributed to landfills and rebuild soil in the process.

Why Is Food So Important?

The food that goes into our bodies has an enormous impact on the health of our bodies and the planet. We have become increasingly dependent on industrial agriculture, processed food manufacturers, and restaurants to feed us and it has had major negative impacts.

The agricultural chemical Glyphosate (sold under the trade name Round Up) is so pervasive in our environment that it is actually being found in the rainwater. Which is disturbing in any light but made even more so because its manufacturer, Bayer/Monsanto, is currently on the hook for more than 2 Billion dollars in lawsuits with literally thousands more in the pipeline for continuing to peddle their product even after they were allegedly aware it was carcinogenic. It is poised to be the next big tobacco.

As far as our health goes, diabetes, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and obesity are on the rise. These health issues, and many more, are impacting the next generation, our children, at alarming levels: 30% of American children are considered obese, up to 17% have NAFLD, and type 2 diabetes, which was formerly known as adult onset diabetes because it was virtually unheard of in people under 30, is becoming more common in children.

It may take some reorganizing of priorities and restructuring of life to find the time to return to homegrown food and home cooked meals, but what could possibly be more important than our health and the health of the next generation?



Social Events.



A little over a decade ago I lived in a small rural community in Northern California and I was surprised when I showed up to a potluck and everyone got out their own cutlery. It was just something everyone did. I didn't know, and thus my family and I got to sheepishly eat with our hands.

What if everyone brought their own cutlery to gatherings and we just didn't use disposable cutlery? It seemed weird to me then, but now, it seems like what should be done. Don't be surprised if it feels a little strange at first on the path to zero waste. If you feel a bit like an outlier. Don't let this stop your progress! The number of items that just get tossed into the garbage daily in our country is inexcusable. We may have become accustomed to it, but that doesn't make it ok. I was born in the eighties, so I was raised on processed food and disposable everything. As a child, I never gave it a second thought, it was just life and it seemed normal to me. As an adult, I can see how flawed this was. It is ok to push back against a system that does not make sense. So if no one in your circle is bringing reusable items to a party yet, do not be afraid to be the first. Bring reusables and give them as gifts to friends and family to help get them on board. Changemakers are often thought of as a bit eccentric, until everyone comes over to their way of thinking.

Parties

A party, especially a child's party, can be an absolute sustainability nightmare. Disposable everything, gift bags filled with plastic trinkets that will be headed to the landfill within the month, presents full of plastic and packaged in more plastic... but we can change this!

First, head to a thrift store, it may take more than one, and find a set of dishes that would be good for parties. We have some that are unbreakable, good for children's parties, and actual dishes that feel a bit more grown up for adult gatherings. Don't forget about cups or glasses, and extra flatware. We keep our party stuff in a labeled tote in storage and pull it out when we need it. An alternative to keeping extra dishes is that everyone is asked to bring their own. Also in the party tote, some string lights, a fabric birthday banner, cloth napkins, cutlery, vases for flowers, placemats, and tablecloths.

For party favors we like to give something handmade: homemade playdough in a jar, a packet of seeds from our garden, a plant start, a small sewing kit, homemade treats, or a needle felted toy fitting with the theme of the party. Pinterest is jam packed with great ideas for homemade party favors. Remember that party favors, although they have become the norm, are not actually mandatory for having a party. We can release ourselves from this expectation if sourcing or making sustainable party favors is not something that brings us joy, or if we are in a season that does not allow time for such things.

If it is a birthday, we specify to guests that if they would like to bring a gift we would really appreciate something homemade or second hand. We make the cake or birthday treat ourselves, and the same with all the food.

If you feel overwhelmed by how much food there is to make and feel pulled to lean on convenience food, tell a like-minded friend or family member what the plan doing and enlist their help, offer to help them throw the same kind of party in the future. In days of old, we relied more heavily on community, which is probably why we feel so overwhelmed these days. Working together towards a shared vision for a better way of life will build strong bonds. Ask for help!

Another fun idea is to turn a party into a service project. Imagine the good that could be accomplished if a group of people got together and everyone planted a small tree or brought an item to donate to a specific charity? Maybe there is an abandoned lot in the neighborhood that could be cleaned, cleared, and beautified. Maybe a particular neighbor who is ill, elderly, or has had a new baby needs support, like some chores or yard work. Many hands make light work, and of course, there could still be cake at the end!



Gift Giving.



For gifts, go with homemade or buy local or second hand. Experiences can also be excellent and memorable gifts.

Homemade

Some homemade gift ideas: Vanilla extract, lotion, dried herbs, tea, a homemade apron or piece of clothing, a needle felted gift, like some animals or play-food for a child, garden grown food, saved seeds, homemade paper (seeds in this are fun too!), hand preserved food, beeswax wraps (made with fabric from the thrift store), a coupon for a homemade meal delivered to them or free childcare, or a coupon consisting of anything that may be laborious or difficult for them to do but that you are skilled in: photography, woodworking, handyman services, garden design, hand drawn portrait, watercolor, etc. (the gift of time is a special and underrated one), a piece of nature art like pressed flowers, (this can be personalized by picking out a nature element to represent every member of their family). A photo in a thrifted frame is a great gift.

Also, try to think about things that are easily accessible. Is there a fruit tree in the yard? Homemade preserves and a warm fresh loaf of bread make a lovely housewarming gift. Something you have access to in excess can be transformed into a fun homemade gift.

Another idea is to gift someone something we are skilled at, like handyman skills, organization, personal training, or carpentry. I have gifted people help and design ideas for their gardens or meal plans and nutrition consultations because these are what I am good at. What are you good at? Can you share it with someone?

Experiences

I like to gift events too, tickets to a concert or to a local museum, a hike in which a picnic is provided as part of the gift could also be fun. I give my girls each a golden ticket at Christmas every year in which they can turn in at any point throughout the year for a special outing, to the park or a skating rink for example. Get creative and think about what would make the person happy. A season pass to a museum, botanical garden, or other local attraction makes a wonderful gift.

By thinking creatively you can give someone the opportunity to have some work done for them or to be taught a skill that you are not able to impart yourself. For example, for that friend who has expressed interest in foraging, find someone who is an expert and pay them to lead a hike to teach about local edibles. A family member told you they want to learn to draw? Find a local artist to give them a drawing lesson.

Buy Local

Consider looking into local artisans as well, reach out to friends or on social media and ask: does anyone sew or make children's toys or furniture? Surely a friend, or a friend of a friend, has some crafty skills, if you feel that making things is just not your bag or you truly are too busy. Buying from local makers creates resilience within communities and builds relationships. Also, if someone makes something for you in which you are happy with make sure to tell your circle of friends about them and shout out to them on Facebook or Instagram to let others know about this person's craft.

When you come up with an idea that you know someone would really appreciate but is out of your budget, consider reaching out to their community to see if people would like to chip in. Many people would love the opportunity to contribute to a meaningful gift for someone and appreciate having the guesswork removed for them.

ETSY is great, and should not be overlooked, but I love the idea of buying from someone local because it fosters real life human connection and there is less of a footprint involving the distance an item travels and the packaging that may be involved to get it to the recipient. Yes, it takes a little more time than an Amazon gift card. But if giving a gift implies you care about the relationship with this person, why not put some special thought into it?

No More Wrapping Paper

Never buy wrapping paper again. It is so wasteful, and there are many alternatives. One of my favorite things to do is to find a pretty piece of fabric at the thrift store and write down a recipe for beeswax food wraps on a notecard or send a text message with the recipe to the person later. That way they can use the fabric

to make their own food wraps if they would like. A reusable tote bag which can hold a gift and then have a second life as a shopping bag is a good option. My daughters love playing dress up so a thrifted lace tablecloth or a previously loved scarf make wonderful gift wrap that then gets a second life in their pretend play. I have also used thrifted fabric to wrap their presents and they in turn use the fabric for their little sewing projects. Baskets are also a beautiful way to package a gift, and they will most likely be reused. Most thrift stores I go to have a whole shelf full of them.

Clothing.



The textile industry is one of the most prolific polluters of our time. Not only is the manufacture of them harmful, with many of the toxic chemicals used polluting our waterways, but a shocking 85% of textile waste created in the United States is unable to decay due to the unnatural fibers used. Not to mention the massive human welfare issues. Breaking the fast fashion habit might seem difficult, but it is actually totally doable.

Thrift

Whenever we are shopping for a new season (and I have 5 growing daughters who live life to the fullest on and off our farm, so even though we utilize hand me downs we do need clothes regularly) we always start with thrift shops and consignment stores. What I love about second hand clothes is that they have already proven themselves to be durable by lasting through one owner, also they have most likely already held up to being washed. Have you ever purchased an

adorable, but cheap, piece of clothing only to find that it was completely deformed by its first trip through the washing machine? Chances are a piece of thrift store clothing, if taken care of properly, (we wash our colored clothing in cold water and we dry on medium or line dry, this makes clothing have a longer life) will maintain its shape. There are also cute ways to mend minor tears or spots of wear in clothing, like a sewn on patch or a piece of needle felting. Embroidery can be a fun way to put new life into a piece, and visible mending seems to be trending these days.

Buy Quality

Always opt for quality. A good pair of rubber boots, if cared for properly, can last for a decade. Cheap rubber boots will most likely need to be replaced annually. When I buy something new for myself or someone in my family, I always buy good quality, cheap things that do not last. They are not meant to.

Mend

Don't forget, if it is a piece of clothing you love that has a tear, rip, or broken zipper that you don't know how to fix, or it has become too large or too small due to a change in your size, find someone who does clothing alterations and they may be able to help you. Our society has become too quick to throw things away, many items can be fixed! A seamstress also comes in very handy when you find thrifted clothing you love that needs a few tweaks. Having a relationship with someone like this ensures you have liked their work, and you will also get a good idea of what is possible vs impossible in the alteration process.

Find It a New Home/Purpose

When a piece of clothing has reached the end of its life in your possession, try to find a new home for it. Getting rid of maternity and baby clothes? Ask around your circle to see if anyone would like them. If the unwanted/unneeded clothing is in good shape, it may be possible to sell it. If it is worn and outdated, try a thrift store or charity shop. If it is stained or torn, and cannot be rescued, consider using it as gift wrap, for rags, quilting, giving it to a child to practice sewing, or repurposing it in some way. If the fibers of the clothing are natural and not synthetic, it can also be composted. Just another reason to opt for natural fibers in clothing! Polyesters contain, you guessed it, plastic. Avoid them if possible.

Speaking of natural fibers, cotton is natural, but also produced using massive amounts of pesticides. It is considered one of the dirtiest drops in the world. Opt for organic cotton.

Shop New Mindfully

If new is a must, buy clothing from companies using fabrics that are produced sustainably and that treat their employees the way you would like to be treated. Good On You is a website that has rated thousands of clothing brands on the basis of their environmental standards, humaneness towards animals, and labor practices.

Books, Movies, Music.



Libraries

There is no reason to buy a book that will only be read one time. Even for a book club many libraries will have or be willing to purchase multiple copies of a book. If you would like to buy it, try looking for a used copy. How many books and movies are sitting in your home right now, collecting dust? The library is an invaluable resource. Use it! Many libraries even offer online reservation services now so the desired media can be located on the library website and requested, they will pull it off the shelf and have it ready for pick up. What an incredible timesaver!

Audiobooks

Another service my family loves is Librivox. There are thousands of books available that have entered the public domain (think all the old classics), it is an audio service and it is completely free. There is no app necessary for this service, the stories can be listened directly on their website. My library also offers a free audiobook service and there are many paid ones that offer subscriptions.

Buy it Used or Borrow From a Friend

Buy it used first. Enjoying media digitally is becoming more and more popular too. We hardly ever buy movies or physical copies of music anymore, opting for the digital version. I do still like the feeling of a book in my hands, but I very rarely buy a new book, I prefer buying used or reading borrowed instead. Buying new media is a last resort for me.

Magazines

Many beautiful specialty magazines exist now. Instead of getting a subscription just for yourself, see if a friend or two with a similar interest might want to share the subscription as well, that way it will at least get shared and read more than once. Again, it is always worth checking with a local librarian to investigate if the magazine would be something the library would be willing to subscribe to.

Holidays.



Holidays are full of consumption and waste in this country. They began as religious celebrations or ways to commemorate special moments in history. They were days to show reverence, but holidays have been aggressively consumerised. Here is what the year looks like in a store: New Years stuff, Valentines Day stuff, Saint Patricks Day stuff, Easter stuff, Fourth of July stuff, Summer stuff, back to school stuff, Halloween stuff, Thanksgiving stuff, Black Friday stuff, Christmas stuff. Goodness. This is obviously entirely too much stuff! Most children, and many adults, do not even know the real history or original traditions. Why do we have these celebrations? Why are they important? People rush out to buy the newest trendy toy before it sells out at Christmas, like this is proof of their love for their children. People buy 14,000 pumpkins to decorate their home entryways and most likely throw them all in the garbage, only to buy canned pumpkin for their Thanksgiving pies.

Every year, it all gets a little more ridiculous. It is also a fairly recent epidemic that has grown in tandem with the growing number of households in which both parents work.

When I was growing up there wasn't specific decor for every holiday. Christmas decorations are really all I remember. But holidays have become increasingly gift and decor oriented, which leads to an epidemic amount of waste. When will it stop?

Halloween

We have started telling our kids, just because everyone is doing it doesn't make it a good idea. Halloween is a great example of this. The candy sales rack up an estimated 9 billion dollars. Kids walk around in mostly disposable costumes involving some sort of plastic to get treats wrapped in plastic. Our mistrust of one another makes people feel strange about accepting a homemade treat or a piece of fruit in lieu of an individually wrapped ball of sugar or corn syrup. Sugar suppresses the immune system, actually inhibiting it from working. So, kids are walking around exchanging germs with countless people (imagine every dirty little kid hand that goes into a bowl of candy, try not to get completely grossed out when you think about where those hands have most likely been), imbibing treats that will bring their immune systems down. This is a perfect storm for illness. Most school teachers and pediatricians admit there is an uptick in illness after Halloween. The sugar is terrible for our children's bodies and teeth, it has been proven to be a highly addictive chemical. This holiday generates massive amounts of waste. Why are we doing this? Who does it benefit? Retailers. Candy manufacturers. Almost 2 billion dollars of candy is sold in preparation for this holiday!

We talked to our kids about it. We said, you can dress up, make a costume or we can check the thrift store. We can invite friends over to carve pumpkins and bob for apples and eat homemade treats. We don't have to participate in these customs that are harmful to our planets and our bodies. And you know what? They get it. We homeschool, so it is arguably easier for us to convince our children of these things than if they went to school and listened to everyone talk about their massive candy hauls, but being independent critical thinkers is an important trait we want to instill in them. When the customs of your community do not serve you or the planet, do not be afraid to make your own.

Christmas

We also cut way down on Christmas. This year we will be giving extended friends and family homemade or thrifted gifts. We encourage them to make gifts or buy used gifts for our children. Our children are not exposed to a lot of advertising so it isn't difficult to keep them from buying into the plastic toy of the month trends. In a few years time, children will not usually even be able to remember the gifts they received, especially the ones that were just "filler". Get them one or two things they will be really excited about, that speak to who they are and their interests, and skip all the other junk. Gifting them experiences is a lovely way to create lasting memories. Refer back to the gift giving section for more ideas.

Valentines Day

For Valentines Day I write my children each a letter, one that speaks to my love for them and how they bring joy to my life. I recall a memorable moment I had with them in the previous years. We also usually use it as an opportunity to get them new underwear, (one of the few things we buy new). My husband brings them something they can plant, he got them all miniature rose bushes one year and violas another, for example. We make a special treat together and usually have something a little fancier than usual for Dinner. We all go around the table and tell each family member something that we love about them.

St. Patricks Day

On Saint Patricks day we make corn beef and cabbage and talk about Saint Patrick. We look in the yard and try to find four leaf clovers.

Easter

For Easter we have baskets we reuse every year. I usually put some gardening things in them like a pair of gloves, a watering can, a plant or a shovel. I always include seeds. I might put in a little handmade animal, a pair of pajamas, and a homemade treat. We skip the candy and plastic eggs. We make lots of dyed eggs and every year we switch them up a little. Last year we made homemade dyes and added botanical prints and they turned out beautifully!

Fourth of July

For the 4th we usually go to a fireworks display and grill out. Fireworks in general are not very sustainable, but if we all went to local displays and skipped the at home fireworks this could decrease waste immensely. We have a specific dessert I make every year only on the 4th. We don't buy brand new red white and blue outfits or home décor.

Summer Vacation

In the Summer we don't buy a plastic pool or a bunch of plastic toys to play with outside. We swim in rivers and lakes (oceans if we travel), and some years we have gotten a membership to a local pool or aquatic center. We might buy one sturdy toy that will last year after year, like a ladder ball game, a wooden croquet set, a swing to hang from a tree, or a new hammock. Sometimes we add a new kid friendly structure to the farm: a sunflower ring, playhouse, fort, or bean teepee. We pass down whatever swimsuits and life jackets we can, everyone doesn't automatically get a new suit.

Back to School

We don't have a typical back to school because we homeschool, but we do participate in co-ops and have materials we need. If we need backpacks and lunch pails we shop used first. We prefer colored pencils and crayons to markers because so often the markers just get the lids left off and thrown away and they are made of plastic. We shop used for whatever curriculum we will need, only buying new when we can't find an alternative, and also use the library quite a bit for resources. Ebay is an excellent place to find used educational resources and I have had luck with homeschooling pages on Facebook as well.

Thanksgiving

My favorite holiday is Thanksgiving because it focuses on just that. Thanksgiving. Giving thanks. Gratitude has been proven to be wired to happiness and contentment in the brain. We make traditional recipes. Spend time with people we love. Make homemade centerpieces from leaves and Fall foliage and Winter squash we grew. We talk about what we are grateful for (we actually do this every morning but in more depth on Thanksgiving) we have a nice slow day. It is lovely. We take what we love about Thanksgiving and extend that to all holidays. Intentional time with loved ones. A relaxed pace. (If your holidays are hurried because of rushing here and there or too much travel consider eliminating this. We used to travel a massive amount to spend time with far away family and seeing them was wonderful, but the luxury of slow holiday mornings are priceless.) Good food. A nice leisurely walk on our farm or trip to a park if the weather allows.

Giving Back

We also make an effort to give back. On Thanksgiving and Christmas we like to bring baked goods to people who serve our community who are working, like firefighters, policemen and the medical workers in hospitals. On Valentine's Day we bring homemade valentines to folks at the VA hospital. We have also put together care packages for less fortunate children at Christmas or volunteered to serve a meal. One of my favorite charities is Heifer International which gives the gift of livestock to an impoverished person, giving them a source of livelihood and also a way to enrich their community. Our children love to help us decide what to give: a flock of chickens? A cow? A sheep?

When we make holidays all about "what we get" our kids will carry that into their adulthood. We want to teach them service and kindness. Opt out of holiday traditions that you do not feel serve you, your family, or the community. Make new traditions. We always make sure to discuss the reason for whatever holiday it is we are celebrating, the history, the symbolism, the stories. Take sandwiches to the homeless, go pick up trash at the park, donate items to children in foster care,

volunteer at a farm or soup kitchen, visit people in an elder care facility or the hospital. Build holidays around intentionally loving your family and your community instead of buying disposable items and massive consumerism.

Decor

As far as decor goes, try opting for nature based solutions to this. Wreaths are easy to make from found materials, and whatever season it currently is should produce blooms or foliage that are lovely in a vase or turned into a garland. When it comes to holiday crafting with kids, try applesauce or salt dough ornaments, or string popcorn or cranberries, these ideas are all compost friendly. You can also purchase decor and use it year after years instead of buying new decor every holiday. Try a local maker for your decor.

Avoid Convenience Items

When removing pre prepared foods and single use items from the picture for these kinds of events, it may seem like there is more work involved, but really the time that people can spend working together to prepare all of this food and cleaning up after can be an opportunity for bonding and memories. We can all wash the dishes together, and chat about what is going on in our lives instead of escaping to the nearest screen to look at things we will probably not even remember a few hours later. Multiple generations in the kitchen together sharing their hearts. As our parents generation sought convenience and escape from these domestic tasks, we have also become increasingly disconnected. Life is more convenient now, easier, but it is lonelier as well because the work that used to bring us together in conversation and fellowship no longer exists and sometimes to carve out time meant simply to connect, with no other purpose, can seem trivial. We didn't used to make appointments with people to share our hearts, these conversations happened while we hung the clothes on the line, while we washed dishes and they dried, while we cooked or canned or snapped beans together. The work was a way to bring us together and the heart connections were a result of it. Convenience is overrated.



Household.



There are many chemicals and plastic containers to be eliminated in the home. Making little changes over time, like picking one product each week to figure out how to replace for example, is a good way to make the shift without feeling overwhelmed.

Electronics

My parents had the same TV for our entire childhood. Buying new smart phones or massive TVs every year isn't only fiscally irresponsible, it is bad for the environment. Consider keeping your electronics until they absolutely cannot be used anymore. Petition software and computer manufacturers to make older models of computers and smart-phones to be compatible with new updates.

Bathroom

Over a billion toothbrushes are thrown away in the United States every year, creating 50 million pounds of plastic waste. The type of plastic most toothbrushes are made of degrades in seawater, ending up in the bellies of aquatic animals. Bamboo toothbrushes are a more environmentally sound option, and there is also a company that makes electric silicone toothbrushes that they say are better for the environment because silicone does not break down the same way some plastics do. Another thought regarding toothbrushes: I don't think it is necessary to throw them away as often as they are. They can be sanitized with hydrogen peroxide and if brushed with gently the bristles should last a long time.

Instead of buying toothpaste in a tube try making your own. The tubes are not only made of plastic, most of them are filled with chemicals that are not good for us.

Shampoo and conditioner are now being produced in bar form, which is pretty amazing. Also, depending on hair texture, the amount of hair washing might be able to be reduced

which would reduce the amount of product we are using.

Instead of bottles of body wash opt for bars of soap. There are many people making artisan soaps lately out of everything from oatmeal to donkey milk (yes, donkey milk!) so there are endless options for different skin types.

Ditch the plastic scrubbies and switch to washcloths or loofahs. Loofahs are great for exfoliating, and they come from a plant so they can be composted when they are ready to be replaced. .

Plastic disposable razors can be replaced with metal safety razors.

Women's feminine hygiene products are full of a multitude of hormone disrupting and cancer causing chemicals. Not to mention the amount of plastic waste they create. There are many other options available these days, from cups to washable pads and special underwear. The long term effects of women using these products for between 3 and 4 decades has never actually been studied. If you are a woman and still using standard pads and tampons make the switch to a more health conscious and environmentally sound option today.

Toilet paper has been almost exclusively packaged in plastic for years. Recently I have noticed more available options packaged in paper. Be aware that most toilet tissue is also heavily treated with chemicals, which is not only an environmental issue but is also of concern in regards to health as it is used very regularly on our most vulnerable bits.

Bidets are also a great way to cut down on paper waste, they are more common in European countries. Maybe we should follow their lead!

Kitchen

Consider trading in your paper towels and napkins for cloth napkins. They are easy to throw in the wash and will last a long time. Making cloth napkins can be a fun project for little ones who are just learning to sew. A pretty jar with rags in it can replace the paper towel holder on the counter.

Opt for loofahs and washcloths as opposed to plastic scrub brushes and sponges. To store food use jars, glass pyrex, and beeswax food wraps. Beeswax food wraps are wonderful because they can be made out of fabric that might otherwise be thrown away. Gently wipe them down after using and they will last 20 uses or more, at which time more of the beeswax mixture can be re-applied or they can be composted if the fabric is no longer in suitable condition. Simple bags can be made and coated with this mixture as well to store sandwiches or snacks to be taken to go. We often wrap our picnic items in a cloth napkin and it works just fine. Avoid plastic bags, aluminum foil, and plastic packaging in general.

As you begin to avoid bringing plastic into your kitchen you will notice that less processed food makes its way in as well since it is all packaged. Things that can be bought in bulk tend to be ingredients. If you have children and the idea of going

with no packaged items for their lunches seems overwhelming, enlist their help in preparing a couple of simple recipes each week, like granola or energy balls. They can also help cut fruit and vegetables. Bento box style lunch containers make it simple to pack many items without using plastic bags. Eating real foods instead of processed ones is not only healthier for your body, it reduces our carbon footprint, especially when we make an effort to source foods that are produced as locally as possible.

When it comes to supplying the kitchen with cookware and gadgets opt for tried and true brands that have a good reputation. Cast iron and cast iron enamel cookware are good options, avoid teflon coated pans. Cheap cookware is just that, cheap, so chances are it will need to be replaced much sooner than a quality brand. Think of kitchenware in terms of being long lasting enough to pass down to your children someday. High quality pots and pans can be expensive, so don't feel the need to buy them all at once. Build a collection of quality cookware piece by piece, maybe one a year, and over time you will have an exceptional set of cookware, instead of a cheap one that begs replacing after only five or ten years. The same goes for dishes, silverware, and appliances. Instead of buying a cheap blender every 2 years, buy a good one that will last forever.

Furniture and Decor

When buying furniture and decor seek out options that are environmentally sound or buy used. We often use natural materials to make decor or wreaths, staying away from artificial flowers and foliage made of plastic. Try flea markets, thrift stores, and garage sales. Refer to the section on shopping to get more ideas. Always make buying new a last resort, and make sure when purchasing new to be mindful to support companies making products ethically and sustainably.

Think about trends as well and opt for items that are more classic and less trendy, especially when it comes to the big pieces, like couches and kitchen tables. Redecorating every few years is not really a sustainable practice. If you do want to redecorate, seek out a young person or couple who is just getting started who would be happy to have the hand me downs instead of buying new but cheaply made furniture to get them through their first couple of years on their own. Also consider refinishing or repurposing items that do not please personal taste aesthetically anymore. Upcycling has grown in popularity and there are many books on the subject showcasing beautiful and creative ways to reuse items.

Building and Remodeling

When building and remodeling a home take care to use materials that are as locally sourced as possible and also non toxic. Sometimes it costs more to buy flooring or paint that does not emit toxic fumes, but the cost of these items will pay

off in better health for the people who live there.

Energy efficiency is also important. There are many things that can be accomplished with the design process, (the solar orientation of the house, nearby landscaping, the types of windows used and their placement) to reduce the amount of energy that will be needed to heat, cool, and light a space. If you are doing the process yourself, make sure to study up on ways to make the build or remodel more green, if hiring someone make sure you let them know these things are important to you. It would be wise to hire someone who is enthusiastic about these things and doesn't just give you a yeah, sure, kind of response.

For the most part remodeling, even when adding a significant addition, will most likely be more sustainable than building a brand new home.

Travel.



Our generation loves to travel. I have to agree that travel can be an amazing opportunity to learn about another culture or completely relax, but maybe there are ways to do this while also being mindful of the environment.

Air travel creates a lot of pollution, especially many small flights. If you are traveling very far try to take a direct flight to your first destination and then if you will be traveling regionally make use of trains or buses.

Make sure to bring your own toiletries, foregoing the single use options available at hotels. Don't insist on all new clean towels and linens daily unless it is necessary.

Bring your reusable cup/mug and flatware on your trip, vacationing doesn't mean you have to fall back on disposable everything.

Traveling far away can be exciting, but don't forget that there are most likely adventures to be had much closer to home. Explore national parks and seek out historic or tourist destinations in your surrounding area. I lived in Arizona for 15 years before I saw the Grand Canyon! Do you have something in your backyard that people travel from all over to see? Be a tourist in your own hometown or state. If your family takes a yearly vacation, think about possibly trading a far away vacation every single year to every other year, and then stick closer to home some years.

Leisure



There are unlimited options for leisure time these days. Are they sustainable? It seems the most sustainable leisure activities would involve being outside in nature. Being in nature and connecting with it also makes people feel a stronger desire to protect it. While spending all day playing video games, for example, builds no connection with nature and also uses energy resources to power the game and most likely to climate control the building the game is being played in.

Get outside, get away from screens, use your body. Take a hike, play basketball or tennis (very poorly if you are like me), take a walk, play on the playground with your kids. Explore a garden. Go swimming in a creek, bring buckets for your children if you have them and they will most likely spend hours catching minnows, crawdads, and frogs (releasing them afterwards of course).

Have a picnic, leave your phone at home and enjoy Mother Nature.

Break the Shopping Habit

When I was growing up, shopping at the mall was a leisure activity. It seems like malls may be dying, but Target is always packed! I know shopping for food and some other things is essential, but don't fall into the trap of spending every day you aren't earning money at a store. Just spend time with people you love or learn how to do something new. Take a book and a hammock to a park and spend the whole

day.

Leisure doesn't have to mean spending tons of money, fun outings like bowling, miniature golf, or seeing a movie on the big screen should be saved for special occasions, not just an every week occurrence. When we do these things all the time they don't feel special anymore.

Learning how to make wherever you are fun is a skill that we should all try to learn if we haven't already, and one we should try to pass on to the younger generation. If you have children in your life teach them creative ways to have fun, and also try to teach them about service. Volunteer work helps our communities and can build a sense of pride and worth in young people. Helping others feels good, constantly indulging ourselves really doesn't. It's sort of like how eating ice cream tastes good, but if we overdo it we feel a little sick.

Transportation.



Transportation accounts for a large part of emissions. I can remember the days in my late teens actually feeling embarrassed when I was walking, as if people might be judging me and thinking I did not have a vehicle. As with many paradigms, we need to reframe the way we think about transportation. Walking with family members or friends can be such a pleasant way to get to a destination, a little planning ahead is all it takes.

Alternatives to Driving Everywhere

Can you walk, skate, or cycle instead of drive? Is mass transit an option? Walking is a great way to better connect with our surroundings and it's great exercise. Community forms of transportation can be opportunities to connect with members of our city or town.

Rideshare

Another option could be to ride share with a friend, family, or coworker. If you know someone who commutes the same direction or route it may be possible to ride with them, splitting fuel costs while reducing emissions.

Most health professionals agree that Americans are far too sedentary and some studies even show that sitting too much is just as deadly as smoking cigarettes.



Most things can be bought second hand. Really they can. The internet is my best friend when searching out a particular size or brand for my family. I usually search my favorite local thrift stores first, then reach out to my community, then use the internet. Ninety-nine percent of things can be found this way.

One of my favorite ways to shop second hand is to organize a shop and swap a couple of times a year with my friends. We all bring gently used, but quality items to one location, and everyone gets to “shop” for the same number of items they brought. Sometimes these are themed, like childrens clothes and toys, or household goods, but most of the time we bring together what we have. Doing one of these before Christmas holidays is an awesome way to find lovely second hand gifts. Any items that are left can be returned to the person who brought them or donated. A bonus is that we all get to hang out and chat with each other, sometimes we even bring a snack to share. This could be done with neighbors, a church community, co-workers, or any social group.

There are facebook marketplaces, many websites that specialize in second hand

items, (some of these even give items away for free) Craigslist, thrift stores, consignment stores, etc. Honestly, I prefer to shop second hand now because I am not limited by the “trends” of any given time. I get to buy what I actually like instead of having narrow choices offered to me by the manufacturers. Who only change the “trends, by the way, to make sure people feel as though they must buy something new to fit in. I wonder what they are going to do now that sustainability is the trend?

It is only after exhausting all of these options that I seek out something new, and in that case I opt for local first, and I also check out the human welfare practices and the environmental impact of the company I am choosing. The Good On You website is an excellent resource for determining a company's impact. Shopping should be something we do when it is necessary, but we should avoid making it a hobby.



Parenting.

Recently, Nature Valley made a powerful commercial that asked three different generations the same question. The two older generations (parent and grandparent age) were asked what did you do for fun as a child? And the youngest generation, who are currently children, were asked what their favorite activities were. The oldest generation recounted memories of growing gardens, fishing, and picking blueberries. All of their best memories revolved around activities that created provision. They were doing real things that contributed to the family larder, but they remembered them fondly. The next generation (the parents of young children), remembered playing with neighborhood children, riding bikes, and building forts, basically spending a lot of time outside, most of it recreational. This was during a time when people had moved into suburbs to give their children a “better” life. The youngest generation said their favorite way to spend their time was with technology. Texting, watching videos, playing video games, sending emails. Literally not one of them mentioned their interaction with another person. Or spending time with nature.

This is troublesome to me because not only have studies shown that nature and relationships can help alleviate anxiety and depression, but too much exposure to technology has been shown to increase both of those things. Something else important to think about is that people who feel no connection to the natural world will have absolutely no reason to protect it. "Nature" becomes an abstract concept with no feeling attached to it. As parents, one of the best things we can do to help the planet is to foster our child's relationship with the outdoors.

Technology

Children today are the first children being raised with smartphone technology, I didn't have one when I was a child. It seems reckless to allow children to spend so much time on these devices when we really don't know what the long term effects are. As a parent, I know we want to see our children happy, but we must insulate our children from choices that are too difficult for them to make so they can form the correct habits. We must also model the correct behavior.

Homesteading allows our family life to revolve around the stewardship of the land, the care of animals, nature, the observing of the seasons, and working hard together. Yes, my children watch TV sometimes, and they would watch it much more if I let them. But they are truly happiest when spending time as a family and doing real things. The joy when they grow their first veggie or when we get the first egg of the year, a new baby lamb, hunting for mushrooms, these things provide tangible useful rewards and provide a sense of capability and self esteem that are not possible in the digital realm.

A large part of our homeschool revolves around natural science. I believe it is important for children to know the names of things in their environment because it helps them to feel more at ease in it. Also, many plants have medicinal benefits and it is important for us to know how to identify them so that we are able to use them. Western medicine is great in an emergency, and I am grateful we have access to it, however for everyday things like colds, or sleeplessness, people should be capable of using things found in nature to create their own remedies. We make our own vitamins, elderberry syrup, and medicinal teas. This cuts down on packaging. They also make great gifts!

Crafts

We skip the plastic crafts of any kind and gravitate more toward nature art, which consists of collecting things from nature and using them to make a pretty design or collage. We also do a lot of "life school" activities like shelling beans, cooking, food preservation, gardening, sewing, needle felting, making natural inks to paint or dyes to dye fabric, crocheting, knitting, embroidery or wood working. We want them to learn real things, not just keep them busy with things that are meant to be disposable. For little hands we do make play dough sometimes out of flour, water, salt, and cooking oil.

Snacks

Kids are always hungry. It is so easy to grab a bag of chips or fruit snacks at the gas station, but these foods are not nourishing, most contain chemicals, and they are a source of tons of plastic waste. We use fruit and cut vegetables for snacks. We also dry meat to make jerky, it is surprisingly easy and delicious. If you have access to large amounts of fruit for a good price, dehydrating or freeze drying can be a fun way to preserve it for later use. Vegetables cooked in broth and packed in a jar make a great snack, especially for toddlers, and they are nutritionally superior to goldfish crackers or cheerios. We soak and roast organic nuts (soaking and roasting makes them more digestible). Use beeswax wraps, cloth napkins, or glass jars or containers to transport snacks. So much waste can be avoided this way.

As far as constant snacking goes, because of our access to food, we may have a lower tolerance for hunger than is biologically healthy. Many cultures do not snack between meals. I am not suggesting starving children, not at all. However, learning how to have self control and delay gratification is a good lesson. In fact, studies have shown that the ability to delay gratification is an indicator for success later in life. Saying something like, “I understand you are hungry right now. We will have something to eat very soon as soon as we are finished with x.” If you have water, offering them a drink may stave off their hunger temporarily. Doing this, instead of immediately digging through your purse or going through a drive through, teaches a child patience. Growing up in a time when everything has become immediately accessible is making it easier for children to grow up without this important trait.



Pets.



Pet stores are an excellent place to see the excess and overconsumption of our culture. Bones wrapped in plastic. Chew toys made of plastic, or cloth - but then usually packaged in plastic. So many types of treats. One time I saw 5 pieces of bark marketed to to gerbils wrapped in a plastic package, it cost 4 dollars.

A dog would love a bone from a home cooked roast. Treats? Little pieces of meat are great. Chew toys? Maybe stuff some old fabric into a sock whose match has gone missing, it will smell like you and your dog will love it. If you want natural looking materials in an animal tank or cage consider using actual natural things instead of plastic, research these items for their safety for your animals, of course. My kids have made wonderful cat toys out of sticks, strings, and molted feathers from chickens. Pets may need a few accessories, a leash, a crate or cage, a few toys to stave off boredom, but really consider each one. They probably don't need ALL the accessories.

Consider also functional pets, meaning an animal that you care for but that also contributes to your life. Like a pet chicken or quail. These animals can be socialized well and will also lay your breakfast. Many pet birds are kept in peoples homes without providing the owner with anything beyond companionship. But a chicken could process your food scraps into eggs. Imagine if most household made this shift, no more factory farmed eggs! A small decision like this could be so powerful! Also, just like humans have lots of processed foods available to them but they are not what our bodies will thrive on, the processed foods that are widely fed to pets do not really represent what they would eat in the wild. Consider researching this, because even if you are only able to supplement a small portion of your pets diet with something closer to their wild diet it may keep them out of the vets office.

Making the Shift.



Breaking The Addiction

Acquiring and consuming things actually triggers our brain to produce chemicals that make us feel happy. It also produces a brief feeling of accomplishment. When trying to make changes to a lifestyle that reduces the amount of waste created, shopping will be happening less. Whether we want to recognize it in our country or not, most of us are actually addicted to consumption, which means when we try to change our habits and we aren't pushing the buttons in our brains that create happy chemicals, it can make us feel depressed or anxious. Often changing consumption habits changes social habits as well, which can lead to a feeling of isolation. Just like dieting, when removing certain things, they must be replaced in some way.

When trying to lose weight, we don't just starve ourselves, because if we do eventually we will get so hungry we will lose self control and binge. People who are successful with weight loss, or changing any sort of habit, know that to quit one habit another habit must be created. So find other healthy activities and hobbies that feel good. We will still buy things, but we will try to buy less, and buy second hand or sustainably sourced goods. Also consider taking up a hobby like gardening or hiking. Learn how to can or sew, come up with a few things you have always wanted to learn and go about learning them. This will fill the void left by old consumer ways and we will be less likely to fall into the habits of over consumption.

Get Over The Guilt

This is so huge. It is easy to fall into the trap of unnecessary consumerism and wastefulness through peer pressure. We all want to be a part of and accepted by the group, so doing things differently may feel a little socially awkward. Our friends might feel judged by us, even if we don't say anything, it is just simply that our behavior and rejection of certain ways of doing things might make them feel bad about their own behaviour, and they may not be ready to change.

Also, it is easy to feel guilty in regards to telling children no about certain things, for example, we are not going to participate in this particular holiday the way everyone else does because it doesn't actually make sense. We have to remember that most ideas that encourage mass consumerism only truly benefit the huge corporations that make lots of money selling things that get thrown away. It may be fun for a little while, but humanity is trading true prosperity for short term gratification. As parents we are meant to help our children make the right decisions because left to their own devices they may not. Like any parent knows, if a child has a choice between chicken and vegetables for dinner or a slice of chocolate cake, they are going to have the cake. We aren't meant to just let them do that and society generally recognizes that to not allow your child chocolate cake for dinner is a form of love. Not allowing children to buy into the latest fad toy that they want a million of and then will never play with again is another form of love, it is having the foresight to see that all those plastic toys have a negative impact on the planet, and caring enough to want our children's children to live on a planet that that is healthy.

It's All Connected

It becomes obvious at some point that the healthiest choices for our bodies are also usually the healthiest choices for the planet. It is all connected. We cannot poison our environment and also not eventually poison ourselves, and conversely, if people are using a chemical laden product on their bodies or in their household chances are that product is not good for the planet either. This makes things pretty simple, actually.

Redefining Values

The western world is very rich materially and has a high quality of life if quality of life is measured by the size of our homes, the number of vehicles we possess, how many clothes are in the closet etc. But as people keep accumulating more and more possessions and wondering why it doesn't actually make them feel good, many are making the move to a slower and simpler way of life that involves less hustle and less stuff.

We have been sold the idea that if we have all the right “things” that it will generate lasting happiness for us. So we have worked hard, sacrificing time with family and friends to earn more so we could buy more. We were tricked into believing that the things we could buy for others would matter more to them than the memories we could make with them. That our children would rather we be able to provide them with luxury items than spend time with them, and this really isn't true, because most children adore their parents and would trade a day of their undivided attention for almost any toy.

It's not really our fault we bought into it, some of the brightest humans of the last few generations have gone to college for the specific purpose of figuring out how to make people buy things. There have been ads that I have remembered for my entire life, ones that have made me laugh, some have even moved me to tears. These people are good at their jobs, great actually. It took me a long time to wake up from the deep slumber of materialism, to let go of the idea that my level of buying power would equal my level of happiness. That the material comforts I could provide my children with would be more important than my attention. I understand that a certain level of material security is important as to have to worry about being able to meet certain needs like food, shelter, medical care, etc., for yourself or the people who may depend on you is extremely stressful. In our culture we have been sold the idea that many things that are unnecessary luxuries, like the newest smartphones, are in fact necessities, but this is untrue. We need not feel inadequate because we don't buy thousand dollar smartphones on an annual basis, replace our wardrobes seasonally, or go on fancy trips.

When explaining these things to my children, I don't frame these things a “we cannot afford them” I frame it as, we don't need it, it's wasteful. I have explained the idea of advertising to them. There has been never been one scientific study that has proven the amount of things people have in any way impacts their happiness. There have been many studies linking a person's ability to feel genuine gratitude with happiness. Think about what it looks like when someone does not have the ability to express gratitude, to me it makes me think of a person I would describe as spoiled. We have all known people like this. Do these people seem happy? When people feel like they want something it produces anxiety and feelings of lack. When they get that thing, they have brief relief, but because they have a thinking pattern of wanting then buying, it isn't long before they need another thing, and another, and another. Children who are overindulged lose the ability to feel gratitude, which essentially cuts them off from joy. In our efforts to make our children happy, we may actually be sabotaging their chances of that. We have had the best of intentions, but as evidence mounts in the form of a population who has had unfettered access to anything they wanted, but who is also increasingly plagued by physical and mental illness, we must admit the notion of overconsumption of all things just because it is possible may be the wrong approach.

Be the Change

The late president Kennedy once said in a speech that to whom much has been given, much is required. (There is a version of this in the bible as well Luke 12:48). America, when compared to many other nations, has a material quality of life that is much better, even for the poorest of our citizens, than people all over the world. We have been held up as an example to developing nations and we have been a bad influence with our habits of overconsumption and industrialization at the cost of human health and the environment. What if we could be a better example?

As we break our habits of consumption it may become apparent that much of our efforts to help and save people in other parts of the world, although well intentioned, have been misguided and dare I say, even arrogant. We were convinced our way of life was the best way, when it has become apparent that it is definitely not. The problems that exist in other parts of the world that impact people's health and access to education and high quality nourishment are more complicated than simply being able to send a box of food or clothes, and in fact sometimes doing these things have negative impacts on local economies. I do not want to discourage the spirit of charity, I believe we should all lift each other up. We need to be educated in our giving however, and with so much access to information these days, that is easier than ever to do. We also need to understand the difference between someone who requires help, and a way of life that just looks different than our own. There are many organizations that are working to empower people in the third world with access to education and small business loans. These might be good places to start.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world", and indeed, that is the best thing any of us can do, and the only real power we have.