



Trashmagination Podcast #33 – Zero Waste

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Today we'll talk about the concept of zero waste. With the holidays coming up, zero waste might seem like an unlikely theme for this podcast, but actually there are gifts you can purchase to help your loved ones to produce less waste in the New Year. I got three of them for my birthday this month from my husband. Woohoo!

Before I share the info about my birthday gifts, I wanted to share a bit of info about this concept of zero waste. People first started using the term in the 1970s. The initial focus was on the chemical used in the electronics industry. Early proponents of zero waste emphasized that recycling was not the answer, and that we needed to redesign our lives to not produce waste in the first place.

I first heard about zero waste through the story of Bea Johnson who wrote the book *Zero Waste Home* [<https://zerowastehome.com>] in 2013. This book has now been translated into 20 languages. My birthday gift ideas came from following Bea and other zero waste advocates.

My first gift was four metal straws. I don't drink with straws usually but my family likes to sip drinks with straws. I saw a video where someone was pulling a plastic straw out of a sea turtle's nose. It clearly hurt the sea turtle, but it needed to come out. The nice thing about metal straws is that they are quite strong, so they will last a long time in my purse. I am sewing a little bag to put them in to keep them clean until we need them.

Did you know that straws used to be made from paper? An artist named Karyl Sisson makes incredible sculptures from antique straws [<http://www.karylssison.com/>]. She weaves and rolls them into sculptures. Most artwork made from plastic straws use new straws, so I would not describe them as creative reuse.

The second gift I received was silk dental floss. I saw a fact on many dental websites which said Americans purchase three million miles of dental floss each year. Most dental floss is made from nylon, which is a plastic made from petroleum. I learned about this produce made by a company in Maine called Dental Lace. It came in a glass vial rather than a plastic box, and you can order refills of the lace and keep reusing the glass vial. I have been flossing with this for almost a week and I think it's great. Once the floss did break, but that is actually a good thing. I saw a photo of a seal with nylon floss cutting into its neck, which would not happen with silk floss. My daughter got braces this year and we purchased a water pik for her. That seems like a good environmental option, but I haven't made the shift myself.

The third gift I received was four bamboo toothbrushes. This is another case of not wanting to have petroleum products as part of my dental hygiene. Did you know that 4.7 billion plastic toothbrushes are dumped into landfills and oceans every year? Bamboo is a material that is easy to grow and is actually an invasive species in many places. It's naturally anti-microbial. The brand I got was Wowe – W-O-W-E. The bristles are still nylon, but I have since found out that another brand uses less plastic – that brand is Brush with Bamboo. Their bristles are only 38 percent nylon – the rest is made from a castor bean oil. That toothbrush is made by the Kumar family. Their toothbrush also comes in non-plastic packaging. You should check out this video about their story on my blog – they seem like such a cool family.

Other gifts that can help your friends and family to produce less waste in 2018 include:

- reusable produce bags
- beeswax wraps
- bowl covers – check out the ones by <https://www.instagram.com/teebags.halifax.purses/> - Teebags in Halifax
- highlighter pencils
- paperless towels or “unpaper towels” – I like the ones by Anne Riggs which snap together on a roll just like a roll of paper towels - <https://www.etsy.com/shop/AnneRiggsDesigns>
- make-up remover pads

Photographing Trash Audits

One recommendation that you often hear when researching waste reduction is to do a garbage audit. This involves tracking what you throw out and reducing that over time. For inspiration I recommend a Tumblr called Trashlation [<http://trashlation.tumblr.com/>]. This is an international project where people take a photo of themselves with the trash that they produced during a 24 hour period. It’s very interesting to see the packaging from different countries. You can click the link that says “Random” to see a variety of people.

I also recommend the photographer Gregg Segal [<https://www.greggsegal.com/>]. He has done a number of projects related to trash and photography. One was called Detritus where a character made from trash appears in photos with other people doing their daily activities. In another project, he photographed families from around the world laying on the ground surrounded by the trash they had produced over a one-week period. That project was called 7 Days of Garbage. His current project is called Daily Bread where he photographs kids with what they eat in a week.

Zero Waste Instagrammers

If you are interested in learning more about a zero waste lifestyle, I will post a list of zero waste enthusiasts in the show notes. They are great to follow on Instagram so you can get daily inspiration. They often show photos of their groceries, so you can see how they prepare food for a week without packaging.

- Be Zero - <https://www.instagram.com/bezerowastegirl/>
- Going.Zero.Waste - <https://www.instagram.com/going.zero.waste/>
- Green Upward - <https://www.instagram.com/greenupward/>
- Package Free Shop - <https://www.instagram.com/packagefreeshop/>
- Pare Down Home - <https://www.instagram.com/paredown/> - Canadian
- Tiny Yellow Bungalow - <https://www.instagram.com/tinyyellowbungalow/>
- Trash is for Tossers - <https://www.instagram.com/trashisfortossers/>
- Wasteland Rebel - <https://www.instagram.com/wastelandrebel/>
- Zero Waste Chef - <https://www.instagram.com/zerowastechef/>
- Zero Waste Home - <https://www.instagram.com/zerowastehome/> - The Instagram feed of Bea Johnson who wrote the book Zero Waste Home, where I first heard the term.
- Zero Waste Nerd - <https://www.instagram.com/zerowastenerd/>

Our family has a long way to go to be zero waste. I’m grateful to these bloggers for sharing simple and small ways we can reduce what we consume.

Until next time – may you see *less* trash in your life.