

Zero waste living: a Lewisham Council guide on how to reduce your waste to zero

There is now a growing movement worldwide to go further than just recycle our waste, but to avoid producing waste in the first place. Living zero waste is about [rethinking our relationship with stuff](#); shifting from mass consumption to living more healthily, avoiding clutter, all whilst significantly reducing your environmental footprint. The term 'zero waste living' might seem intimidating at first, but it should be seen as an aspiration to aim for, rather than a rule. The good news is that there is plenty of support out there to help transition towards a zero waste lifestyle.

Where to start?

Check out this [Ted Talk](#) by the founder of the zero waste movement, Bea Johnson. One year's worth of waste for her family of four fits into one jar. What an inspiration!

We have put together a list of tips to get you started:

1) Ditch the disposable and go reusable

For every disposable household item, there is a reusable alternative. Although possibly an initial investment at first, this step stands to save you money in the long term. Check out [this list of reusable alternatives](#) for inspiration.

2) Buy in bulk/packaging free

As an alternative to buying food in packaging - even if it is recyclable - there are now an increasing numbers of shops that are selling food and other household items package free. You will need to get into the habit of bringing your own bags or Tupperware or jars to the shops, but once you start, it becomes second nature and you don't even need to think about it.

[Climate Action Lewisham](#) have put together a handy [list of how to shop zero waste](#) in Lewisham.

You can now shop zero waste even online with this new initiative called '[The Loop](#)' whereby you pay a deposit for the container and return it for refills.

If packaging free isn't an option, then buying in larger quantities, if you are able, allows you to reduce the amount of packaging you are buying. Larger quantities are more likely to be available at wholesale retailers or online.

3) Don't just declutter, prevent clutter

Many of us will find ourselves in the position at some point of needing to declutter. But why accumulate so much stuff in the first place? Taking a step back to evaluate what we own and why we own it can be a liberating and insightful process. [Marie Kondo](#) provides plenty of wisdom on this subject.

Furthermore, it is now common to find products to suit every possible need, whereas in reality one product can perform many functions. For example, there are separate cleaning products for floors, kitchens and bathrooms whereas one product could

clean all of those. [Bea Johnson](#) goes into this in more depth in her book '[Zero waste home](#)'.

For those in the process of decluttering, online platforms such as [Ebay](#), [Gumtree](#) and Facebook Marketplace are easy to use to sell your items with little hassle.

Alternatively, you can give away stuff for free using platforms like [Freecycle](#). [Olio](#) performs a similar function but also facilitates food sharing to prevent food waste.

4) Don't buy, borrow

Depending on how much you plan to use a product, it might not always be the wisest idea to buy; buying means you have to find a place to store it, repair it if it stops working, and for expensive items you might not even get your money's worth if you don't use it a lot. Fortunately there are now an increasing number of hiring services available. This allows you to make savings (for products used rarely), gives you access to potentially better quality products and also reduces your environmental footprint.

Check out the [Library of things](#). There are also services similar to a library of things that allow you to rent out your own possessions such as [Think Bagsy](#), [Fat Llama](#), or [Streetbank](#) where you simply share with your neighbours. These services reduce the need for us all to buy as much, help build community and protect the environment.

Industry is also increasingly turning towards leasing, instead of traditional models of ownership, as explained [here](#) by circular economy think tank the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#). For example, you can now [lease a pair of jeans](#), or [hire children's bikes through a subscription service](#) that allows you to exchange for a larger bike as your children grow. Services like this ensure that products are high quality because they have to last a long time, and it also means the responsibility to repair lies with the company.

5) If it's broke', fix it!

The endless cycle of manufacturing products and disposing of them causes tremendous environmental damage, not to mention carbon emissions. Instead of throwing away your broken product and buying a new one, why not fix it? This can save you money in the process and if you do it yourself, also give you immense satisfaction by learning a new skill.

Fix it yourself:

There are plenty of resources around to support fixing products. [iFixit](#) provide guides to help consumers repair a wide variety of electrical goods ranging from phones to laptops, to cars and even bathrooms. They even sell repair kits and tools. [Youtube](#) is also an indispensable resource for 'how-to' guides, although there is less quality control, so it is important to pay attention to reviews.

Get help fixing it yourself:

If you would like more hands on support to help with repairs you could also attend a [repair café](#). The nearest one to Lewisham is currently [the Goodlife Centre](#) in Southwark, although with the help of the [Restart Project](#), you could start your own repair event called a [Restart party](#).

Pay to have it fixed:

You can of course also pay to have your product repaired. Check out this [directory of London-wide repair businesses](#) or for more Lewisham specific repairs, see our [business directory](#) and search 'repair'.

Buy easily repairable items:

Many products today are not designed to be disassembled or repaired, so prevalent is the custom to buy new when an item breaks instead of to fix it. [Ifixit](#) are attempting to counter this trend with their [Repairability Scores for smartphones](#) as well as for [tablets](#) and [laptops](#).

Some products like the [Fairphone](#) have been designed to not only be easily repairable, but also to be easily upgraded to keep up with evolving technology.

Convinced of the importance of extending the life of our possessions? Take the [repair pledge today!](#)

6) Buy second hand or made from recycled materials

Buying second hand prevents that item from going to waste as well as reducing your carbon footprint. It can save you money because it is cheaper than buying new, so can therefore also potentially give you access to better quality products.

Easy places to buy used items online are [Ebay](#) and [Shpock](#). If you are looking for clothes try [Vinted](#) or [White Rose Fashion](#).

Lewisham is also home to plenty of charity shops such as the [British Heart Foundation](#) and the [Red Cross](#) that accept donations.

There are also an increasing number of retailers selling products made from recycled materials, for example plastic bottles or ocean waste. As a consumer, this simple act makes sense if we are to close the loop and find a purpose for the waste that we send to recycling. Recycled products available to buy range from [clothes](#), [shoes](#), [duvets](#), to furniture and is rapidly expanding.

7) If you can, buy quality

It is sadly very easy nowadays to find products that are poorly made and break easily. It is also a false economy to buy a cheap product over a quality one simply because of the price; as the adage goes, 'buy cheap, buy twice'. If finances permit, it is advisable to buy a quality product as not only will it provide a better experience, it will also last longer. Quality can be verified by buying from well reputed brands, but don't let that put you off unheard of companies; checking customer and [industry reviews](#) is often the most important process of researching a product.

Search for products with either lifetime guarantees or multi-year warranties such as on the site [Buy me once](#).

8) Buy to recycle or biodegrade

If buying new, it is important to consider the materials used in the product as well as the packaging. Once an item has reached the end of its life and can no longer be repaired, depending on the materials it is made from, it can still be recycled in some way.

If you can, avoid buying products made from virgin plastic or synthetic materials because they are more difficult to recycle. Metal, however, is infinitely recyclable and is very durable so can replace plastic in some cases. Natural materials, such as wool, cotton or wood, can also sometimes replace plastic (e.g. polyester), and can be recycled or even be composted over time. Do check out [our recycling guidance](#) for more information on what you can recycle in the borough and where.

An example of a household item replacement could be a dustpan and brush; instead of buying one made out of plastic, consider a wooden brush, plant fibre bristles with a metal dustpan.

There are also now an increasing number of items made from compostable materials such as [cutlery and food packaging](#) or even [phone cases](#). These are not perfect solutions but are regardless better than disposable plastic.

9) For everything else, recycle or compost it!

If we are not able to reduce our waste to zero, even putting nothing in the general waste is a fantastic achievement. However to do so, we need to make sure we are recycling everything that we can, and correctly. Please see [our guidance on what you can recycle in the borough](#). [Climate Action Lewisham](#) have also put together a useful [list of where to recycle awkward materials](#) in the borough.

For materials that are not accepted in our kerbside collections such as crisp packets and pet food pouches, [Terracycle](#) offer a wide variety of free collection services. You can either take your recycling to a public drop off point, register as a private collector for a specific material recycling programme, or if you represent an organisation, register as public drop off point. Although there is a cost associated, there is now also an option to pay for [a zero waste one off collection box](#) for all other waste.