

Reuse, Refill, Reduce, Refuse – Some easy as ways to avoid or minimise single-use waste in hospitality.

There are four big offenders in the overpopulated world of single-use: Plastic water bottles, disposable coffee cups, plastic straws and plastic bags. Here are some suggestions of how to avoid or minimise them or their impacts.

If we use something once then throw it away, we are contributing to a problem of methane in landfill, ocean pollution, energy consumption, and pressure on developing countries to clear or repurpose land to make packaging rather than for growing trees or food. These things are happening for many other reasons, but by avoiding single-use, we can massively reduce the stress on our world and its natural resources.

To turn things around, it is vital that we begin to reduce, reuse, refill and refuse. We can do it. And if we end our relationship with single-use products, you can bet that companies will stop making them. In fact, you can bet our planet on it.

Single-use take-out coffee & drinks cups

With around 295 million disposable coffee cups used in New Zealand each year, this is a biggie, and by using your own cup you are making a real difference. Apart from the immediate action of reducing waste, you are:

- Letting cafes know that you will keep coming if they decide to ditch disposables completely.
- Showing other customers that it's an easy thing to do – that there is nothing to feel uncomfortable about.

But of course, it doesn't have to be a purpose bought reusable (although there are some beautiful and efficient products out there!). If you work just around the corner, it can be a mug from home; It can be a jam jar with a lid that you write your name and coffee order on. Making use of what we already own is key. This whole thing is really about a return to common sense. It's about the 'waste not want not' approach that our grandparents would have lived by. Treat yourself to a reusable, put it on your birthday list, but keep a jam jar in a sock in the car for when you forget. We all forget.

Don't go for the 'eco' plant based plastic coffee cups either. Yep, some, a few, are collected up and commercially composted, but it is an insignificant amount compared to how many are used then become landfill. But you know what? Even if all plant based plastic (and it IS plastic!) coffee cups, straws and containers were efficiently collected and composted, the energy used in making and transporting them, then disposing of them is ridiculous if you think they are used for 12 minutes only! And then there is the unnecessary use of land that is used to grow the material to make coffee cups for us to use for 12 minutes – land that could be growing real food for real people, land which is not in New Zealand. We don't need to support yet another business, making profits from products that are used only once. Single-use and Eco-friendly, are not terms that can be used together.

Of course, the best way to reduce waste as a committed coffee lover is to make time to stay and have our coffee in. Be part of the café community. Get to know other customers and the staff. Perfect. Like the old days. Progress can sometimes mean simply reverting to what was lovely.

Very soon, you will be able to use UYOC to search for cafés that have a 'cup swap' system in place, whether it is a lone wolf, cup library set up, or whether they are a member of a wider initiative, like Cup Club. Watch this space – literally – this one...

Single-use water bottles

It falls from the sky and comes out of the tap. How many of these wee buggers we use each year, bobbing about in the ocean, littering beaches, filling up landfill. Avoid at all cost! The answer? Carry your own water flask with you. Fill it up as you go throughout the day. Don't ever be afraid to ask if you can fill it up in a café after your meal – the more we choose to do this, rather than purchase single use bottles, the less pressure there is on cafes to stock single use bottles.

Are you a vegan? Or simple health conscious so have moved away from dairy products? The Tetrapak cartons that many non-dairy milks arrive in on the supermarket shelves are not recyclable. Have a look around for products that come in glass jars. One NZ company we've found is Vigour Vitality – glass jars and returnable glass jars – of raw, activated nut and seed mylks that you make up from 'butter' as you need. Another way to reduce singles use waste within a healthy lifestyle.

Single-use plastic straws

This takes a little getting used to, for folks both sides of the counter. It has become habit to pop a straw in a drink for staff. We have to say when we order a drink, and sometimes say it a couple of times "No straw for me please". If we must suck, because sometimes smoothies can compromise the state of our faces for the rest of the day, how about choose a café that

uses paper straws? Or even better, reusables? Or even, even better! Invest in a reusable straw of our own. Glass, bamboo, metal. There are some gorgeous products we can use and carry with us.

It's just about changing habits, and taking responsibility for our waste. And once we start, it feels good, and we see waste everywhere! And wonder why we never noticed before...

Want to be a little more proactive? Don't be afraid to mention, with a smile, how wonderful it would be if the café you are at ditched plastic straws. Leave them a little note on your table perhaps. Always positive, always focussing on how good it would be for business to adopt a responsible café attitude. Always focussing on what heroes we all are when we choose to refuse single use plastic straws, and this includes saying no to 'eco plastic' straws too!

Single use plastic bags

We all know this one. And so many of us already use canvas or linen shoppers. The time of the plastic bag is over. It's just a case of seeing it out the door. And not looking back. Keep your reusables in your car, or on a hook by your front door. With all these things, keeping our reusable alternatives visible is key.

If you have a stash of plastic bags, re use them! Take them to the supermarket over and over again!

Many markets now have a soft-plastics recycling bin. When your bags finally die, lay them to rest there.

If you don't have string bags, you can use paper mushroom or coffee bags instead of plastic produce bags when gathering up little fruits and veggies, like green beans or brussel sprouts. Paper bags work well for the bulk foods too. Scribble the code on the bag and you can reuse it over and over again.

Are you crafty? Make your own bags? Use pillow cases, fabric, anything that is doing nothing. Extending the life and repurposing what we have is the new chic. Caring is and always will be cool.

Use your own containers

Take your own lunch to work in a reusable tub, Tupperware, tin, anything. Jam jars are great for making smoothie bowls or muesli or porridge in for morning tea.

Or if we take-away, we can use our own containers. When it's take out night, we can take our own tubs to the restaurant, with our name and order written on them, leave them and take a walk while our food is being prepared. Brilliant. And the first time you do this, it can feel uncomfortable. But someone will overhear you, and admire you, and copy you, and so change takes place.

Plastic is a durable and sometimes wonderful material. There is no point deciding that you are breaking up with plastic and throwing away Tupperware tubs or old take away containers, then buying new stainless steel or glass containers. Use your old stuff forever! Remember, it doesn't become waste until we waste it.

Balloons

Balloons are rubbish hey. Find another way to celebrate. Simple. They will outlive us all. In the oceans they are a menace to sea life, and break down, eventually, as do all plastics, into micro-plastics which become a very unhealthy part of the food chain.

Little big extras

Remember you can and do make a difference. We influence each other. Humans copy each other. We are subject to fad and trend and we are capable of making changes happen all around us – by what we buy, by who we tell about it. Use your social media, use your consumer dollars to turn things around. Businesses will adjust to what it is that we prefer. We just have to let them know!

Take home your scraps when you eat out – begin a compost bin or worm farm at home, or ask your café or restaurant if they compost their food waste, or feed it to chooks or pigs, or work with a community garden or such. Your suggestion may get them thinking. Some cafes already do dispose of food waste responsibly. It's beginning to make economic sense to them.

Ask your local café for the coffee grounds for your garden? Condition your soil, makes the compost bin smell great. Worms are happy with it. It'll keep slugs away. And by taking it home, you are saving it from filling up landfill.

One step further? If you are all fired up now, and want to do more to protect and heal our planet, think about moving towards a vegan lifestyle. It's no longer as radical as it was seen to be 10, 20, 30 years ago. The benefits to our personal health, and the massive benefits to the health of our air, land and water are indisputable. Google, 'reasons to be vegan' and take notes.

