

best for REAL LIFE



Linda is on a mission to cut down on plastic



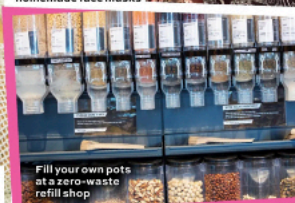
Friend Katie with her packaging-free soup



Buy your fruit and veg loose



All smiles: Katie and Linda don their homemade face masks



Fill your own pots at a zero-waste refill shop



There's lots we can all do to help save our planet

Be fantastic, halve your plastic

A self-confessed novice when it comes to saving the planet, **Linda Aitchison** wanted to see if she could cut back on plastic use and understand how it helps...

Sitting with my friends, I listened as they swapped tips about their favourite plastic-free shampoos and nodded along, but I was the odd one out – completely clueless.

Discussing the best deodorant bars, I didn't let on I'd never even seen one. As a mad-keen super-scripper, with years of budgeting for every penny for me and my twin girls, I was convinced eco-friendly products were out of reach. My partner Phill, now 59, was another avid, frugal bargain lover.

Yet my daughters, Melissa and Emily, 24, had long been fans of ethical, environmentally friendly brands. If I'm honest, despite my aversion to spending, I was starting to feel a tinge of guilt for doing nothing to cut down on plastic use and waste.

It seemed I wasn't the only one, though. According to research by Ecover, more than half of us feel

If there's one thing I've learned
'Even a late starter like me can make an impact: just a few easy switches, shop around and it's done.'

guilty about how much single-use plastic we use.

With 2.5 million tonnes of plastic packaging waste heading for UK landfill every year and each of us responsible for an estimated tonne, it was little wonder.

Visiting my daughter Mel at her new flat in Liverpool in June, I saw her eco-friendly toiletries, and thought I'd give them a go, too. 'Thing is Mum, they last ages,' she said. 'You get so much use out of them.'

So I decided to make a start on going plastic free – or as near to it as I could. My kitchen and bathroom seemed wise places to kick off.

Still a bit sceptical, in the storm of a full-on cost-of-living crisis, who could afford to shell out on stocking up on fancy new brands? I wondered.

I needn't have worried, though, even if my friends' recommendations were new, strange and confusing with

so many options to consider.

As feared, some prices were astronomical. Loads were subscription only, which can work out more economical but I wanted a quicker fix and to shop locally in Wolverhampton, West Midlands.

First stop was Boots, where I asked about reduced-plastic shampoo, shower gel, toothpaste and deodorant. A shop assistant helped and I came away with Wild Natural Deodorant for £5.99 (sounds pricey but being refillable, it works out longterm as good value. Also, the ingredients are refreshingly natural); Garnier Ultimate Blends shampoo bar, £6, (reduced for Boots Advantage card holders); and a Colgate bamboo toothbrush for £3, on offer from £4. I grabbed what looked like a twin pack but when I got home and opened it, I found a single brush with removable head – made with biodegradable



bamboo and packaged in recyclable cardboard, also compostable. This is key, as virtually every toothbrush we've ever owned since childhood still exists (plastics can last hundreds of years) and over 4 billion toothbrushes, including electric ones, get thrown away every year and end up in landfills and our oceans, according to *National Geographic*.

I then turned to Amazon for toothpaste, picking the cheapest, and my Waken peppermint, reduced to £2.25 from £5, was dispatched.

How did it taste? Strong and minty and it came in light, recyclable aluminium packaging. I'd happily buy it regularly. I was also impressed with the shampoo, with lots of lovely foam, but stuck with it. Ultimately, it was a 'no' – underwhelming for my underarms. There are plenty of options out there, so it might just be a case of experimenting to find the right one – I'll keep looking.

Shopping online, I ordered myself a Peace With The Wild mango and passion fruit shower gel from Lush, £4.50. My first impression, was it smelled gorgeous, but it takes getting used to the lack of lather and for me, for now, soap seems a better option.

Never let it be said this cutting down on plastic makekey is boring!

With my friend Katie, after making a no-packaging involved fresh broccoli soup (sounds great, tasted

questionable), we made our own face masks – avoiding plastic wrappers of mass-produced versions. We whisked up two concoctions – honey with herbs or a cut-price avocado languishing in my fridge. My skin felt great.

Overall, like the face packs, I'm being more inventive with household and day-to-day products already about. This alone, I reckon is potentially halving my reliance on single-use plastic.

While vinegar and bicarbonate of soda scrubs surfaces brilliantly, I'd just been too lazy to use them. And having read it was a good switch, I tried cabbage leaves instead of cling film to wrap veggies – I'm now sold.

Online, I found advice from environmental expert and founder of the ToxycFree website, Laura Paulisch. 'Simple, everyday changes can make a big difference,' she says. 'A lifetime-lasting stainless-steel razor can replace disposables. Reusable glass water bottles and organic cotton bags can help. These might seem like small changes, but together, they can significantly contribute to reducing our plastic footprint.'

I've added to my collection of old clothes cut into cleaning cloths, happy about something I was already doing. An old butter dish has been rescued from the back of a cupboard – no more plastic-packed margarine for me. And I invested £10.40 in five litres of

“ SMALL CHANGES CAN REDUCE OUR PLASTIC FOOTPRINT ”

Ecover laundry liquid from Amazon. My maths says it works out at about 29p per use, at around 35 uses in a pack, and 47 per cent less plastic.

Ecover refillable washing up liquid was also the cheapest on Amazon, at £8.80. I was encouraged by their more than 600 'refill stations' across the UK, with my nearest a little under 10 miles away – close to a friend.

There are now a growing number of eco-friendly refill stores across the UK, too. Here, shops offer fresh produce, without packaging, to slash waste. Once you've picked your items, your shopping is weighed and you're charged just for contents. Fabulous!

I asked Laura about the perceived high costs of cutting down on plastic waste. 'Investing in reusable, long-lasting items may seem daunting due to the up-front costs,' she said.

'But savings over time are substantial.'

After a couple of days trying my best to cut down on plastic, I was hit by a strange sensation as I started to fret I wasn't doing enough. Now, at 55, I still have so much to learn. But I'm not the odd one out anymore...

COST VERDICT
Linda spent **£36.44** on the reduced plastic items listed. She saved **£16.59** by swapping out her usual clingfilm, New Covent Garden soup, and 7th Heaven facepacks. She says: 'An overall "cost" of **£19.85** - when you consider the reusable nature of products - has to be good value.'

WORDS: LINDA AITCHISON PICTURES: GETTY