

How we eat now

The fight against plastic



Emma Freud joins the war on supermarket packaging, and creates two plastic-free recipes for you to try at home

@emmafreud

On 11 February this year it was announced that, following a conversation between the Queen and Sir David Attenborough, the royal households would no longer be using plastic water bottles or plastic straws. We had reached the tipping point: the days for single-use plastic are finally numbered, and not before time.

Last year, our supermarkets sold 2.1 billion disposable plastic bags – that’s 25 per person in the UK, and every single one takes 200 years to break down in a landfill. Planet Earth also got through 480 billion plastic bottles – roughly a million per minute – and they each take 450 years to biodegrade (they can be recycled, but billions aren’t and end up in landfill).

The clear message from Sir David and the Queen is that we may pride ourselves on feeding our families healthy food, but the grocery sector accounts for more than 40% of plastic packaging so we ALL need to pull our socks up on this.

Determined to play my part, however small, I went to the supermarket with my biggest canvas bag to buy the ingredients for an entirely plastic-free meal. Looking at all the wrapped food in the aisles, I realised how much of it is disgracefully unnecessary: one person in a position of authority at a major supermarket could cut half of it out in a heartbeat.

If the creator of *Blue Planet* and Her Majesty had been there, they’d surely demand paper bags at the till instead of plastic ones. Cucumbers DON’T need to be swaddled in cling film. Sure, they won’t last as long if they’re open to the elements, which will ultimately affect a shop’s profit margins, but that’s a sacrifice we now have to make. Avocados don’t need to be wrapped in two types of plastic. In fact, Marks and Spencer are now lasering the skin with the sell-by date, rather than using plastic trays and stickers.

By the time I got to the checkout, I’d only found enough plastic-free fresh food to make roasted plantain with turnips for dinner – not a family favourite. So I resorted to Plan B: I bought the (wrapped) ingredients for a meal, but as the nice young man at the till swiped them, I removed all the plastic packaging, and boldly handed it back to him. ‘Please recycle as much of this as possible and tell your manager there is too much single-use plastic in this store, thank you, sorry.’

To my surprise, the nice young man bellowed ‘TOO RIGHT’ and declared me his favourite customer of the day. He told me that in Sweden, customers are paid cash for any plastic bags or bottles which they return – and they consequently return everything. He said there should be a plastic-free aisle in every British supermarket – there’s one in Holland with 700 plastic-free products in it and it’s really popular. ‘Does your

manager agree?’ I asked. ‘No,’ he said, ‘It’s never been mentioned. But if enough people were to ask for it, it will eventually happen. That’s how changes take place round here.’

Slightly in love, I left the supermarket determined to line up behind Her Majesty and His Marvellous, but the issue is this: change is not going to be pain-free. There are now biodegradable options for every piece of single-use plastic, but many of them cost more. In reality, the damage to our planet is so shocking that a supermarket declaring ‘our customers would rather have cheaper food’ is no longer a valid argument. If it costs more to make those changes, we should either accept paying higher prices, or find greener ways to shop. Change is possible – but it will only happen when we stop seeing the fight against plastic as a choice, and start seeing it as our responsibility.

“ Cucumbers don’t need to be swaddled in cling film ”

3 THINGS TO DO AT THE CHECKOUT

- Give back all the unnecessary packaging on your items after you’ve paid for them and ask for it to be recycled (don’t do this at self-service checkout – it doesn’t work).
- Ask the cashier if the supermarket is planning to create a plastic-free aisle.
- Ask the cashier to tell their manager you’re concerned about the excessive use of plastic in-store.

5 GREAT ALTERNATIVES TO SINGLE-USE PLASTIC (ALL AVAILABLE ONLINE)

- Biodegradable rubbish bags and bin liners.
- Try using Bee Wrap instead of cling film.
- BowlOvers (small cloth caps) instead of cling film or foil to cover bowls in the fridge.
- Small paper bags instead of small plastic bags.
- Kilner jars instead of plastic bags or containers.

5 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO AVOID PLASTIC

- When you go shopping, always take your own bags.
- Get meat from the butcher’s, veg from markets and cheese from supermarket cheese counters.
- Buy herbs in pots rather than pre-cut in plastic bags.
- Use a bulk market with enormous tubs of cereal, pasta, washing-up liquid, pet food etc and bring your own containers.
- Use a cafetière at home rather than plastic-coated coffee pods.

4 Good Food contributing editor Emma Freud is a journalist and broadcaster, director of Red Nose Day and a co-presenter of Radio Four’s *Loose Ends*.

Homemade rosemary crackers

As all crackers come in layers of wrapping, I had a go at making my own. They are addictive – and the dough is just a simple mix of flour, water and oil, into which you can add a flavour (I used chopped rosemary). The work of minutes, no plastic anywhere, and they’re properly delicious.

SERVES 6 PREP 10 mins COOK 15 mins A LITTLE EFFORT

- 150g plain flour
- 1 tsp flaky sea salt
- 1 tsp golden caster sugar
- 1 tbsp finely chopped rosemary, plus 1 tsp for sprinkling on top
- 80ml water mixed with
- 2 tbsp olive oil

- 1 Set your oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7. Put all the ingredients in a bowl and mix with your hands to combine to a rough dough. If it’s sticky, add a little more flour so it’s nice and smooth.
- 2 On a sheet of baking parchment sprinkled with flour, roll the dough out to the thickness of a £1 coin, then use a pizza cutter or knife and cut it into squares.
- 3 Brush the squares with a little water and sprinkle with some salt and the 1 tsp chopped rosemary. Prick each square once in the middle with a fork.
- 4 Transfer the baking parchment straight onto a baking sheet, separate each square of dough a little, and bake in the hot oven for 12-15 mins or until the crackers are slightly golden. Cool, then store in a tin for up to two weeks.

GOOD TO KNOW vegan
PER SERVING 129 kcals • fat 4g • saturates 1g • carbs 20g • sugars 1g • fibre 1g • protein 2g • salt 1.2g

Port & chicken liver pâté

If you’re avoiding plastic-wrapped meat from supermarkets, use a high street butcher who can wrap your meat in paper, and as a bonus, will have lots of alternative cuts – the chicken livers in the recipe cost around £1 and make a decadent pâté.

SERVES 6 PREP 15 mins COOK 15 mins EASY

- 200g butter
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 orange, zested
- handful thyme leaves
- 400g chicken livers, roughly chopped
- 50ml port (or marsala)

- 1 Put 100g butter, shallots, garlic, orange and thyme in a pan and fry gently for 8 mins.
- 2 Add the chicken livers and cook gently for another 4 mins.
- 3 Add the port or marsala and cook for a further min, then tip it all into a blender.
- 4 Blitz until smooth, season, then add the remaining butter and blitz again.
- 5 Sieve into a pretty bowl and put it straight into the fridge.

6 Give it a couple of hours to set, then spread on crackers.
GOOD TO KNOW iron • folate • gluten free
PER SERVING 328 kcals • fat 29g • saturates 18g • carbs 2g • sugars 2g • fibre 1g • protein 12g • salt 0.7g

Fresh fig chutney

Complement with a sticky, sweet, easy fig chutney using fresh seasonal figs from a market.

SERVES 15 PREP 10 mins COOK 1 hr

- 100g light brown soft sugar
- 120ml apple cider vinegar
- 300g chopped fresh figs
- 1 apple, peeled, cored and diced
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 50g sultanas
- 1 tsp flaky sea salt

Put all the ingredients in a pan and bring to a gentle simmer for 1 hr, uncovered, stirring occasionally until it gets sticky and jammy. Spoon into a clean Kilner jar. That’s it. You’re done.

GOOD TO KNOW vegan • low fat • gluten free
PER SERVING 57 kcals • fat none • saturates none • carbs 13g • sugars 13g • fibre 1g • protein none • salt 0.6g



Recipe photograph EMMA BOYNS | Shoot director GARETH JONES
Food stylist ELENA STOCKS | Stylist FAYE WEARS