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Introduction

Compassion and Connection

Why is compassion the foundation and the frame for a book on sustainability, plant-based eating, and animal protection? It's because, whether we care about preventing cruelty to animals, avoiding environmental disasters, or optimizing our health, compassion is the answer. But compassion isn't simply a soft, fuzzy beacon of hope. It is the very catalyst for change. At a time when hopelessness about the future, anxiety over the state of the planet, and cynicism toward one another threaten to undermine our collective and personal well-being, compassion is exactly what's needed in response. Compassion is the solution, but it's a solution many don't look to because of how profoundly misunderstood it is.

If ever a human quality needed a public relations boost, it's compassion.

Simply speaking, compassion is the awareness of others' suffering and the desire to alleviate it. More profoundly, it is a guiding principle in all the world's religions and in most secular philosophies and has been for millennia. It is one of the great human virtues, and yet many people struggle to manifest compassion in their daily lives, regarding it as impossibly lofty—achievable only by saints and sages who possess exceptional levels of purity or piety. Dismissed as naïve, sentimental, even saccharine, compassion is often seen as an impractical response to serious matters, incompatible with the evolutionary principle that says only the most ruthless survive in this world that favors cruelty over mercy.

While it's true that compassionate teachings do indeed underscore empathy, kindness, and concern for others, compassion is anything but weak. It requires strength, courage, resolve, resilience, and a deep understanding of another's experience—i.e., empathy. Compassion is anything but passive. It is resolute. It is dynamic. By definition, compassion demands *action*.

I think that one of the reasons compassion is characterized as weak stems from fundamental misinterpretations of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, the idea that it's a dog-eat-dog world. Every man for himself. Eat or be eaten. Darwin's work, especially his theory of natural selection, indeed acknowledges the competitive aspect of survival in the natural world, where organisms compete for

limited resources. But his theory also emphasizes the importance of cooperation, sympathy, and compassion in advancing both individual and species survival.

In 1871, Charles Darwin published *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, in which he explores the origins of human behavior and the similarities between humans and other animals. In a chapter called “Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals,” Darwin describes the genesis of empathy and compassion, exploring how both human and nonhuman animals come to the aid of those in need and how natural selection favored the evolution of this sympathy, this compassion. He argued that communities that demonstrated more compassion fared better than those that showed less concern for others:

In however complex a manner this feeling may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals which aid and defend one another, it will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.¹

What Darwin was talking about here was more than mere physical strength or competition. He was acknowledging that the fittest individuals—i.e., those most likely to survive and reproduce—possess cooperative and social traits that contribute to the success of the group.

Unfortunately, Darwin’s nuanced perspective became distorted with the idea of “social Darwinism,” a term coined years later and not by Darwin, and a term predicated on the fallacy that societal progress occurs only through fierce competition, with the strongest (read: most superior) rising to dominance and the weakest (read: most inferior) being subjugated by them—a false narrative that stands in stark contradiction to Darwin’s actual findings.

At worst, this ideology has been used to justify supremacist and racist beliefs, genocide, ethnic cleansing, eugenics, and other related atrocities. At best, it has succeeded in associating compassion with weakness, naiveté, and gullibility, leaving an individual ill-equipped to navigate the rigors of mortal existence and destined to be devoured by the ruthless currents of modern life.

To be clear, the challenges we face in this world didn’t come about because we have so much compassion that we don’t know what to do with it. The problems we face in this world come about because we’re not living according to our own values of compassion, kindness, and wellness, because we’re not reflecting

our own ethics in our behavior. It's one thing to say that we're against violence, cruelty, environmental degradation, and perpetual ill health. Most people are. It's quite another to manifest our principles of compassion, kindness, and wellness in our daily actions.

If I had to whittle down *compassion* into one (other) word, it would be *connection*. Compassion is about seeing ourselves connected to—not separate from—other people, other beings, and the universe itself. As waves are to the ocean, we are intricately and inherently interconnected with one another and the rest of creation. When we recognize and internalize this interdependence, when compassion is the lens through which we see the world and our relationship to it, we are naturally compelled to act in ways that cause the least amount of harm—to anyone, including ourselves.

There's a passage in the *Tao Te Ching* that beautifully captures this idea:

See the world as yourself.
Have faith in the way things are.
Love the world as yourself;
then you can care for all things.

And a similar one attributed to the Buddha:

See yourself in others. . . .
Then what harm can you do; whom can you hurt?

And Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote,

What injures the hive, injures the bee.

Any harm to the collective community also harms the individual members, and vice versa. Any benefit to the collective community also benefits the individual members. There is no way to separate the two, just as there is no way to separate heat from fire.

If compassion is about connection, then its opposite is about separation, and it would be a mistake to think that the opposite of compassion is cruelty. Cruelty is the effect; apathy is the cause. When we see ourselves as separate, when we don't see our interconnectedness, we lack the emotional resonance to both recognize and respond to the needs of others, to the needs of the planet, and even to our own needs. Apathy begets inaction. Compassion inspires action.

While *compassion* tends to be used interchangeably with *sympathy* and *empathy*, compassion is not just about feeling someone else's suffering. By definition, compassion necessitates a commitment to alleviating the suffering of others through *action*.

And action is what this book is all about, which is why I have framed this book around compassion. Our desire to live sustainably, prevent animal suffering, and achieve optimal wellness is contingent upon the presence of compassion. And through this lens, we can aspire to live zero-waste, plant-based, and cruelty-free.

Zero-Waste

Motivated by the desire to reduce pollution, prevent resource depletion, mitigate human-caused climate change, conserve water, eliminate greenhouse-gas emissions, or stop the destruction of essential ecosystems and wild habitats, many people are looking for ways to live more sustainably, consciously, and environmentally friendly.

Zero waste—an old concept with renewed popularity—is a way of thinking and living that addresses all of these concerns, focusing on waste prevention from cradle to grave, not just on waste diversion. From a practical perspective, the goal is to move to a circular economy where no trash is sent to landfills, incinerators, or the ocean. From a philosophical perspective, the goal is to make conscious decisions about what we buy, how we eat, and what we do in order to minimize harm and maximize flourishing.

When most people think of “zero waste,” most likely what comes to mind are social media influencers with unrelatable, picture-perfect accounts of their zero-waste triumphs. Luckily, many YouTubers and Instagrammers have moved away from the trend of showing how they can fit five years' worth of garbage into a single mason jar, but it's an image that remains emblematic of the zero-waste movement. No wonder many feel it is an impractical and impossible way to live.

Zero waste is not just about making DIY swaps or reducing packaging. It's a larger ethic, a mindset, a lens through which to see the world, our relationship to it, and our responsibility for it. To be sure, the *zero* in zero waste is aspirational rather than actual. It's about progress rather than perfection.

Plant-Based

Banning single-use plastics, reusing glass jars, and reducing our personal garbage output are all necessary and noble endeavors, but if we truly want to protect

natural resources, decrease rising carbon emissions, decelerate biodiversity loss, end deforestation, and eliminate pollution, we need also to omit or substantially reduce our consumption of animal-based meat, dairy, and eggs.

Of course, abstaining from meat, dairy, and eggs is also a way to reflect compassion for ourselves and our loved ones. Whole books and countless peer-reviewed studies have made the case that eating a plant-based diet is the most beneficial, compassionate thing we can do for our health.

Centering our diet on vegetables, fruits, beans, lentils, grains, mushrooms, herbs, and spices means taking in an abundance of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants, which promote overall well-being and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. Additionally, plant-based diets tend to be lower in saturated fat and cholesterol, leading to better cardiovascular health and weight management.

Optimal wellness is the goal. Eating plants and not animals is an effective and pleasurable way to achieve that goal.

Cruelty-Free

As I mentioned in the preface, living compassionately isn't just about eliminating meat, dairy, and eggs. It's also about seeing animals as fellow Earthlings with whom we share this planet. This involves shifting from a perception and relationship with animals rooted in anthropocentrism, dominionism, and exploitation to one of cohabitation, consideration, and awe. Practically, this means everything from helping injured animals, fostering homeless animals, and providing habitats for wildlife to seeking alternatives to animal-based entertainment, animal-tested products, and animal-derived clothing. We'll explore the most effective and enjoyable ways to do this throughout the book.

I'm often asked if I think we really can make a difference in this world, and my answer is no. I do not believe we *can* make a difference. I believe we *do* make a difference.

Every product we buy, every item we eat, every dollar we spend, everything we do has an impact on something or someone else. We don't get to decide whether we *can* make a difference. We get to decide only if the difference we inevitably make is negative or positive. That's it. There are no neutral actions.

That has been an empowering orientation rather than a paralyzing one. There are many things we can do to make a positive difference and to at least mitigate our negative impact. May this book be a guide for you to increase your positive impacts and mitigate your negative ones.

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WEEK 1

Conduct a Personal Waste and Consumption Audit

In the coming chapters we're going to talk about the benefits of and ideas for creating less waste and consuming more plants, but let's first establish where we *are* before we get to where we're *going*.

- The average person in the United States generates 4.9 pounds of solid waste per day, but most of us underestimate how much garbage we actually create.¹
- The average American consumes approximately 225 pounds of meat from land animals, 20.5 gallons of liquid cow's milk, and 40 pounds of cheese per year.² And yet most people say, "I don't really eat a lot of meat, dairy, and eggs."

The truth is we have no idea how much waste we create or how many animal products we eat until we stop. We don't know how much we do of anything until we stop doing it.

Spending this week paying attention to and recording the physical waste we generate and the meat, dairy, and eggs we consume will be helpful ways to accurately assess our habits—in order to change them. After all, we can't manage what we don't measure.

- A *waste audit* simply means examining and documenting each item we discard during a specific time frame to give us perspective on the volume of trash we generate.
- A *consumption audit* simply means documenting what we eat each day to gain a clearer understanding of our current eating habits, paving the way for informed decisions about our diet.

All you need is a notebook and a pen to record your findings—or an online document you can easily edit. Here's how it works.

WASTE: We need to *know* what we *throw*!

Every time you reach for the trash can to throw something away, whether at home or out and about, write it down. For each recurring item, add a tally mark. It might look something like this:

Empty toilet paper roll ||
Food scrap |||||
Disposable coffee cup |||
Plastic water or juice bottle |||
Aluminum soda or beer can ||
Pet food can |||||
Take-out container ||
Plastic shipping envelope ||
And so on.

At the end of the week, organize your list by the frequency of tally marks. This isn't essential, but I think it provides a helpful visual. I also suggest creating a column that indicates the *category* of waste, or rather what category you *think* the item belongs to. (See below for category ideas.) The goal of the exercise is to identify items that might be diverted from ending up in a landfill, even if we think that's not where they'll wind up.

Categories may vary depending on where you live; for instance, my city offers curbside pickup for kitchen scraps and yard waste, so tissue paper and cardboard can go in either our compost bin (because they break down) or our recycling bin (if they're clean and suitable for recycling). Here are some general categories for you to use as a guide:

Recyclables: paper, cardboard, metals, glass, some plastics

Organics: food waste, yard waste, paper, cardboard

Hazardous Waste: batteries, electronics, paint, chemicals

Landfill Waste: broken items, damaged toys, pens, markers, toothbrushes, used tissues, rubber bands, Styrofoam, disposable razors, electronics, cat litter, dog waste, nonrecyclable plastics

This requires rigorous honesty and the discipline to resist the temptation to *wish-cycle*. “Wish-cycling” is the practice of placing items in the recycling bin that we *hope* are recyclable, even though we *know* they're not or we aren't sure,

such as plastic bags, Styrofoam cups, multilayer plastic food packaging, greasy pizza boxes, cling film, and everything else we're tempted to throw into the recycling bin even though it won't necessarily be recycled.

Analyze Your Waste

At the end of the week, examine your list.

- Did you accurately identify items that your city accepts as recycling—such as paper, glass, metal, plastic bottles? (Check local guidelines to see which plastics your municipality recycles.)
- Did you trash items that may *not* be recycled by your city—such as electronics, computers, old or damaged furniture—but that *could* be upcycled, refurbished, or repaired by a third party?
- Did you trash items that could be reused, such as glass bottles or jars, old T-shirts, or aluminum foil?
- Did you throw away things that might have been donated, such as pet supplies, school supplies, books, or toys?
- Did you dispose of hazardous materials (batteries, paint, and chemicals) properly?
- How much organic waste (garden cuttings / yard trimmings, food scraps, leftovers) went into the trash that could have been composted, eaten, frozen, or properly stored in the fridge?
- How many items did you throw away that a local seamstress, cobbler, or upholsterer might have been able to repair?
- How many items were those that were “designed for discard,” such as disposable diapers, disposable cutlery, or party decorations such as balloons or streamers?

Identify Opportunities for Improvement

Based on your findings, identify areas where you might be able to reduce waste. For instance, you might try to:

- Make simple swaps for common waste items.
 - › Use Q-tips with paper bases—instead of plastic ones—that can be thrown into the compost.
 - › Try toothpaste tablets instead of standard plastic toothpaste tubes.
 - › Buy soap bars instead of liquid soap packaged in plastic bottles.

- Avoid single-use disposable items.
 - › Carry a reusable water bottle everywhere. Most tap water in the United States and other economically developed countries is perfectly potable, so you can fill up wherever you go.
 - › Bring your own reusable coffee cup to coffee shops.
 - › Use reusable dish towels instead of disposable paper towels.
 - › Consider menstrual cups, cloth pads, or reusable period underwear as more sustainable alternatives to disposable tampons and pads.
- Reduce food waste.
 - › Repurpose leftovers.
 - › Compost food scraps.
 - › Freeze or eat what's about to go bad.
 - › See Weeks 13 (Declutter Your Fridge), 22 (Play the Dating Game: Understanding Sell-by Dates), and 25 (Your Fridge Is Not a Compost Bin: Eat Leftovers) for more.
- Give away something that someone else might use.
 - › Find groups online (Buy Nothing Project, Freecycle, Facebook Marketplace) to gift items you no longer need or want but that someone else does.
 - › Identify organizations that will properly recycle, upcycle, or use what you cannot, such as Terracycle, Ridwell, or Habitat for Humanity.
 - › Participate in trade-in programs for electronics, smartphones, and computers to prevent e-waste. Apple, Best Buy, Amazon, and Dell all have trade-in programs.

The idea is not to feel overwhelmed, hopeless, or guilty. You will never get to *zero*. There will always be unavoidable trash. The idea is to recognize your habits so you can avoid creating garbage in the first place—when possible and practical. Be compassionate with yourself, but don't do nothing because you can't do everything.

MEAT, DAIRY, AND EGGS: You don't know how much you eat until you stop

For one week, keep a detailed record of everything you eat, including meals, snacks, and beverages. Add a tally mark for each recurring item. For instance:

Scrambled eggs ||
Toast ||
Coffee with cow's milk ||||
Banana ||
Lettuce |||
Carrots ||||
Bell peppers ||
Turkey sandwich |
Chinese take-out |
Ice cream |||
Hamburger |
Pizza with pepperoni |
And so on.

Just as you did for your waste audit, consider ordering them by frequency of consumption and categorizing them (Fruit, Vegetables, Meat, Dairy Products, Grains, Legumes, Chips, Candy, etc.) to give you a fuller picture of how much and how often you eat what.

Don't judge. Just observe.

Identify Opportunities for Improvement

As you go through your week's audit, identify where you can switch out animal products for plants. I don't just mean switching out a hamburger for a salad or swapping out a commercial, store-bought animal product with a commercial, store-bought plant-based product. I mean identify the sensation and satisfaction you get with the familiar animal products you've been eating, and see where you can get the same satisfaction from plant-based versions.

For instance, when we reach for a beef-based burger, it's not because we're "craving" animal flesh. Humans are not obligate carnivores and do not "crave" the meat of other animals. But what satisfaction we do get from that beef-based burger (or any other food) comes from

- fat;
- salt;
- texture;
- flavor;
- familiarity.

And all of these experiences can be met with plants. So, identify what you find satisfying about your favorite animal-based meals—“*salty* bacon,” “*creamy* ice cream,” “*chewy* meat”—then see if you can meet that satisfaction with plants (or plant-based products). Here are some ideas:

FAT

Fat tastes good, and plant fats are healthy. So, eat the nutrient-rich fats from plants:

- Instead of dairy-based Parmesan, toast walnuts or pine nuts along with a little salt, and pulse in the food processor. Sprinkle over pasta or on salad.
- Blend peanut or almond butter into a fruit smoothie.
- Add nuts and/or seeds to oatmeal or a salad.
- Add avocado, guacamole, or nondairy sour cream to a burrito, fajita, or chili.
- Cook, roast, or grill vegetables with a little oil. Though it's true that some plant fats are saturated, they're molecularly different from that of animal-based saturated fat and do not have the same negative effects on our body.
- Use eggless mayonnaise to make your favorite salad or sandwich (or whatever you'd typically use egg-based mayonnaise for).
- Snack on some olives, or add them to a salad.
- Make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich!

SALT

Most of the sodium in people's diets comes from animal products, so you're doing your blood pressure a huge favor by getting these things out of your diet. Of course, there is naturally occurring sodium in plants, but one thing I can guarantee is that you start to crave salt less after you remove the bulk of it from your palate. Here are ways to bring a salty flavor to your dishes:

- Table Salt: Sprinkle a pinch of salt over dishes just before serving to enhance flavor. Salt flakes are a game changer.
- Smoked Salt: Use smoked salt to season grilled or roasted vegetables, mushrooms, or tofu for a unique and savory flavor profile.
- Soy Sauce, Shoyu, and Tamari: Add to stir-fries, marinades, or sauces.
- Miso Paste: Incorporate into soups, dressings, or marinades for a salty and umami-rich flavor.
- Olives: Chop or slice olives and add them to salads, pasta dishes, or pizzas for a salty and briny taste.

- Pickles: Use pickles or pickle juice to add acidity and saltiness to sandwiches, salads, or dressings.
- Capers: Sprinkle capers over salads, pasta dishes, or roasted vegetables for a burst of salty and tangy flavor.
- Nutritional Yeast: Sprinkle over popcorn, roasted vegetables, or pasta dishes for a cheesy taste.
- Dried Seaweed: Crumble dried seaweed or nori over rice bowls, soups, or salads to add a salty and oceanic taste.
- Plant-based Cheese: Incorporate salty, plant-based cheeses like feta, Parmesan, or blue cheese into salads, pasta dishes, or sandwiches for added flavor.

TEXTURE

Consider the texture you're "craving" and go from there.

Crispy or Crunchy:

- Roast or bake vegetables at high temperatures.
- Use a light coating of oil and seasonings to vegetables, and cook in an air fryer.
- Fry or bake thinly sliced tofu or tempeh until golden brown.
- Make homemade veggie chips by baking (or air frying) thinly sliced vegetables like beets, sweet potatoes, or carrots.
- Toast nuts, seeds, or coconut flakes in a dry skillet or oven.

Chewy:

- Marinate and grill or bake portobello mushrooms for sandwiches or burgers.
- Use seitan, tofu, and tempeh in stir-fries or sandwiches.
- Freeze and thaw tofu before cooking to achieve a chewier texture. (You can freeze a block of tofu for up to 6 months, but make sure to thaw it and squeeze out all the water first. Crumbled, it's perfect for chili or pasta sauce.)
- Cook grains like farro, barley, or brown rice until al dente to add to salads or grain bowls.
- Incorporate cooked beans or lentils into soups, stews, or salads.

Creamy:

- Blend ripe avocados into sauces, dips, or dressings.

- Use coconut milk or coconut cream in curries, soups, or desserts for an indulgent texture.
- Mash cooked beans or lentils to create a creamy base for spreads, dips, or fillings.
- Blend potatoes into soups to thicken and add a creamy texture.
- Blend silken tofu into smoothies, puddings, and mousses.
- Make creamy sauces or dressings using soaked and blended cashews as a base.
- Use hummus for dips and as a sandwich spread.
- Prepare macaroni and cheese or nachos with plant-based cheeses, or make a cheesy sauce with potatoes and carrots. (This will blow your mind. Search online for recipes.)

FLAVOR

Think of all the things you've used to flavor meat: ketchup, mustard, barbecue sauce, Worcestershire sauce, steak sauce, relish, vinegars, oils, horseradish, hot sauce, chutneys, jellies, jams, salsa, soy sauce, wasabi, curries, tahini, pickles, garlic, ginger, onions, lemons, limes, and an endless array of spices and herbs. The flavor is in the plant foods, as evidenced by all the condiments in your kitchen. Use them!

FAMILIARITY

Some of our attachment to certain dishes comes simply from our familiarity with them. This is exactly why food scientists are tasked with creating plant-based versions of animal-based foods. They're known quantities. In other words, some of our satisfaction comes from simply recognizing the *form* of a food—regardless of what the dish is comprised of.

- A sandwich with veggie turkey slices, tomatoes, lettuce, avocado, and eggless mayo ticks all the boxes.
- You won't know the difference if you load up your plant-based burger with lettuce, tomato, avocado, pickles, and other favorite condiments and stick it on your favorite bun.
- Same goes for veggie hot dogs with relish and mustard; chili or tomato sauce made with veggie crumbles; or a milkshake with plant-based milk, chocolate sauce, and sprinkles!

You get the idea.

As for some specific swaps:

Consider Plant-Based Proteins. As we'll discuss in Week 23: Build Muscle. Don't Eat It., protein is prevalent in all grains, legumes, and vegetables (and even some fruits), but some plant foods have higher amounts than others.

- Swap out animal-based chicken in a stir-fry with tofu, plant-based chicken, or more veggies.
- Try a new plant-based product like veggie chicken nuggets.
- Use brown lentils or beans instead of ground beef in tacos or chili. (As I mentioned above, tofu that has been frozen, thawed, and squeezed of all its water makes for a chewy texture that is perfect for tacos, chili, and tomato sauces that call for ground beef.)
- Grill portobello mushrooms as a meaty alternative for burgers or sandwiches.
- Experiment with tempeh bacon or coconut bacon as a flavorful addition to salads or sandwiches. (Bacon is all about fat, salt, and smokiness! In a plant-based bacon, you get the fat from some healthy, plant-based oil, salt from tamari soy sauce, and smoke from liquid smoke. All the flavor. None of the harm.)

Swap Out the Dairy. If ice cream and dairy products were prevalent on your audit, consider plant-based versions instead.

- Try decadent nondairy ice creams made from coconut milk, almond milk, or cashew milk. A variety of brands are available
- Purchase a barista-style nondairy oat creamer for your coffee.
- Use nutritional yeast or toasted pine nuts with salt as a topping for popcorn, pasta dishes, or roasted vegetables.
- Make creamy sauces and dressings using cashew cheese or almond milk.
- Enjoy a dairy-free yogurt parfait with layers of nondairy yogurt, fresh fruit, and granola.

Think about Alternatives to Chicken Eggs. What to use in place of eggs differs according to the role the eggs typically play. (See Week 17: Bake Better without Animal Products.)

- Substitute applesauce or mashed bananas for eggs in baking recipes like muffins, pancakes, or quick breads.

- Mix ground flaxseeds or chia seeds with water to create a gel-like mixture as an egg replacement in baked goods.
- Make a tofu or polenta scramble seasoned with turmeric, onions, and peppers.
- Use eggless mayo or mashed avocado as a creamy binder in dishes like eggless salads (using tofu instead of chicken's eggs).

Because our lives and habits may change from week to week or month to month, you might want to conduct these audits every six months or so to see where there's room for improvement.



WEEK 2

Eat Less Meat

From the animals' perspective, the ideal amount of meat to consume is *zero*.

From an environmental perspective, there *are* different impacts among different types of meat, depending on whether we're measuring greenhouse-gas emissions, land use, soil depletion, water consumption, or water contamination. Here's what we know.

Whatever the barometer, meat and dairy have a *significantly* higher environmental impact than *any* plant food, whether it be almonds, apples, beans, or blueberries. It must be said that although almonds have been unfairly targeted as being a greater environmental threat than beef, the truth is that their impact is significantly lower, especially when it comes to greenhouse-gas emissions. To illustrate this, the emissions from the highest-impact almond producers are about 2.4 kg carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalents per 100 grams of protein, while beef averages 35 kg CO₂ equivalents per 100 grams of protein, making beef several times more carbon-intensive than almonds.

That's just comparing *two* items; in general, the meta-analyses and large-scale studies measuring total greenhouse-gas emissions in every stage of production across several food categories consistently find that emissions from plant-based products are as much as ten to fifty times lower than animal-based products. The research is clear: we *must* reduce our consumption of animal products for the preservation of the planet.

The hard truth is, while eating 100 percent plant-based will substantially improve your health, heal our Earth, and prevent violence against animals, the environmental benefits of *everyone* eating *less* meat are far greater than a small percentage of people becoming vegan. To be clear, if the world population shifted to a 100 percent plant-based diet, the benefits would be incalculable. The problem is, I just don't see that happening.

However, if only *half* the population went meat-free only *two days a week*, we would cut greenhouse-gas emissions, land use, and water use by a considerable amount. Just looking at land use, researchers mapped out scenarios of how things would look if everyone in the world adopted different diets.

- Simply cutting out beef and lamb (but still keeping dairy cows) would nearly *halve* our need for global farmland. We'd save approximately 4.9 billion acres.³
- Eliminating dairy as well would further halve land use, reducing it to just over 2.4 billion acres.⁴
- If the entire population transitioned to a vegan diet, we could reduce agricultural land use by 75 percent, preserving an area the size of North America, *plus* Brazil.⁵

As an animal advocate, I can't personally advocate switching out beef and lamb (the most environmentally taxing) for chicken and fish, but on an environmental spectrum ranging from good to better to best, that would certainly be the place to start. And there are so many ways we can just *reduce* our consumption of meat, whatever animal it comes from.

1. **Commit to Meatless Mondays.** Consciously dedicating one day a week to plant-based meals is a great start.
2. **Challenge Yourself.** Consider participating in short-term challenges where you commit to a vegetarian or vegan diet for a specified period. This helps you explore diverse plant-based recipes and discover new favorites. (See Week 14: Take a 30-Day Vegan Challenge.)
3. **Gradually Reduce.** Start by substituting one or two animal-meat-based meals per week with plant-based meals.
4. **Know Your "Why?"** Understanding the consequences of our habits can reinforce our commitment. Read books, watch documentaries, or listen to podcasts about the impacts of meat consumption on the animals, your health, and the environment.
5. **Keep Things Familiar.** Identify meals you're already eating that are plant-based (peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, pasta primavera, minestrone, bean burritos, or pasta with marinara sauce), and continue rotating them in your repertoire.
6. **Try New Options at Old Restaurants.** In the spirit of keeping things familiar, continue patronizing your favorite restaurants, but order some plant-based menu items you've never tried before. Or modify what you typically order by making it plant-based—for example, oat instead of cow creamer for your coffee, marinara pizza instead of Margherita, pasta with Arrabbiata sauce instead of Bolognese, etc.

7. **“Plantify” the Recipes You Love.** You don’t have to create an entirely new meal repertoire! Take a look at your audit from Week 1, and pick out three or four of your favorite animal-based dishes. Now think of ways to “plantify” them by swapping ingredients or simplifying recipes. For instance:
- Chili:** If you typically add ground beef to chili, replace the beef with kidney beans, tofu, or a plant-based meat crumble.
- Spaghetti and Meat Sauce / Meatballs:** Replace meat sauce with lentils, mushrooms, crumbled tofu, beans, or plant-based meatballs. Or just enjoy a simple, authentic Italian pasta sauce without any meat at all.
- Pizza:** The marinara pizza dates back centuries, originally consumed by sailors and workers because of its affordability and because the natural citric acid in tomato sauce acted as a preservative, allowing mariners (hence the word *marinara*) to bring it along on long voyages. The point is that while you can add nondairy cheese to any pizza, pizza marinara is a classic, consisting simply of a thin crust topped with tomato sauce, garlic, oregano, and olive oil. No need for any kind of cheese at all. (In Italy, marinara pizza is on most menus; in the United States, you’ll need to ask for it or say “no cheese.”)
- Tacos:** Replace the animal meat with seasoned and sautéed mushrooms, black beans, crumbled spicy tofu, jackfruit, or Mexican-spiced plant-based crumbles. Top with salsa, guacamole, and other favorite toppings.
- Burgers:** Replace beef burgers with any number of plant-based versions. There are countless recipes in cookbooks or online for making your own from beans, grains, veggies, or mushrooms, but there are also a number of delicious plant-based burgers available at grocery stores everywhere. And every one of them has a lower environmental footprint than any animal-based meat.
- Stir-Fry:** Make delicious Asian-inspired stir-fries with just vegetables, or add tofu, tempeh, seitan, or store-bought plant-based meats for added protein, flavor, texture, and nutrition.
- BBQ:** Grill barbecue-seasoned portobello mushrooms for a hearty sandwich or main dish.
8. **Commit to Learning Three New Recipes!** With everything suggested above, plus finding three *new* recipes, your plant-based repertoire adds up to well over a dozen! Buy a new cookbook, take a virtual or in-person cooking class, and/or find recipes online.

Of course, over time, it's a good idea to rotate these dozen dishes and not scapegoat veganism if you get bored with what's in your rotation. Getting stuck in food ruts is not unique to and certainly not the fault of *being vegan*. Whether you're vegan or not, everyone gets mired in meal monotony, usually because of lack of motivation and inspiration. While it's fine to rotate your favorite, familiar dishes, just be sure to explore the wide variety of plant-based foods out there to keep your meals exciting and fresh.

Remember, every step you take, every change you make brings you closer to the goals you want to achieve—for animals, for the planet, and for yourself.



WEEK 3

Be Prepared to Help Sick, Injured, or Lost Animals

If you've ever encountered dogs who are lost, cats who are homeless, or wildlife who are injured, your instinct to help may have been tempered by uncertainty, fear, or just an aversion to being inconvenienced. Is it safe to approach? Will they respond aggressively? What if I make things worse? What am I supposed to do? Where am I supposed to take them? How long is this going to take?

Torn between empathy and doubt, it's natural to want to walk away, believing that someone else will intervene, but when I've faced this dilemma myself (and I have many times, usually while in a rush to or from somewhere else), always gnawing at the back of my mind is the question: if this isn't *my* problem, then whose is it? Being prepared to intervene starts with *expecting* to encounter an animal who might need my help and being pleasantly relieved when I'm wrong. Basically, I've come to accept that whatever plans I have on any given day (especially if I'm in a rush) may be curtailed by an unexpected critter who happens to cross my path. But a few moments of inconvenience for me can make a world of difference for them.

So, start there: buffer in some extra time when heading out for an appointment or even for a walk. The chances of encountering an animal in need are low, but if it does happen, at least you won't feel as much pressure as you would otherwise. Now that we're prepared *mentally*, let's explore some options for safely, responsibly, and conveniently offering assistance to a domestic or wild animal who may be lost, injured, or in danger.

Have Provisions on Hand

Expect the best, prepare for the worst. One of the reasons we tend to feel stressed in such a situation is because we aren't equipped with the essentials needed to intervene. While we may never need to use these resources, it's better to be safe than sorry.

- Keep leashes, treats, towels, thick gloves, and blankets in your car.
- Keep a flattened cardboard box (large enough for a small mammal) in your garage or trunk.

- Have these numbers stored in your mobile phone:
 - › your local municipal animal shelter (often called “animal control”);
 - › the nearest wildlife rescue organization; some have round-the-clock hotlines;
 - › a 24-hour emergency veterinary clinic;
 - › the shelter and wildlife organizations of your destination when you’re going out of town.

Add their addresses, as well. That way, if you are unable to connect to Wi-Fi, at least you’ll have the address in your phone and won’t need to delay.

Take Direct Action

If you see an injured animal on the side of the road, if it is safe to do so, approach slowly with caution. Injured animals may be scared and defensive, so proceed with care. This is where having gloves and a towel or blanket in your car will come in handy.

Always use gloves when handling an injured animal. Carefully place the animal in a towel-lined box, and transport them to a local animal shelter, veterinary clinic, or wildlife rehabilitation center. Sometimes it’s best to call first to make sure they are open or can see you.

Keep in mind that wild animals are just that: *wild*. They experience stress in the presence of humans, so touching them or talking to them—even in a soft, soothing voice—may create discomfort rather than ease. Create a noise-free environment, and resist the urge to pet them.

Provide Temporary Housing

Not all shelters are open 24/7, so if a stray dog or cat you’ve been able to secure isn’t injured and doesn’t need emergency care, take them home to give them temporary shelter until the facility is open.

- Keep them separate from your own animals, and give them water, food, and a warm place to sleep.
- For injured wildlife, try to create a safe and quiet space by minimizing noise and disturbance until you can bring them to a professional wildlife rehabilitator. (Call a 24-hour wildlife hotline if you’re unsure what to do.)
- For dogs and cats, take photos and create a “found pet” flyer to post around the area where the animal was found and at pet stores and veterinary

hospitals. Also, share on websites such as Petfinder.com and neighborhood groups like Nextdoor.com.

- Let the appropriate animal agencies (SPCAs, shelters, veterinary offices) know you have found a companion animal. Provide a description, or email them a photo in case the animal guardian contacts them.
- As soon as you can, have the animal scanned for a microchip.
- If no one claims a lost dog, cat, or other companion animal, consider fostering them to take the burden off of what is most likely an already overtaxed municipal shelter. (See Week 18: Provide Temporary Housing: Foster Animals)

If you think an animal (or *your* animal) has ingested a poisonous or toxic substance, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (888) 426-4435 (open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year). Keep this number in your phone as well.

These small steps reap huge rewards, namely feeling prepared; reuniting animals with their people; providing shelter to lost, scared, or abandoned animals; and possibly even inspiring others to step up the next time they're in the same situation.



WEEK 4

Adopt a Zero-Waste Mindset

Stop Seeing Food as Garbage

Of the edible food Americans buy and bring home, about 40 percent gets thrown in the garbage.⁶ While farms, grocery stores, restaurants, and manufacturers create their fair share of wasted food, residential households are responsible for the largest portion: an estimated 76 billion pounds or \$240 billion worth of food thrown away annually.⁷

That translates to between \$1,365 and \$2,275 per household per year.⁸

Dollars aren't the only thing we squander when we waste food; we also waste all of the energy and resources it took to grow, harvest, transport, and package it. Every head of lettuce, basket of strawberries, or leftover risotto tossed into the garbage means wasted labor, wasted time, wasted calories, wasted nutrients, wasted fossil fuels, wasted land, wasted fertilizer, and wasted water.

While most of us don't want to think about garbage dumps, the fact is that food rotting in landfills is a huge environmental problem whose solution must be addressed at all levels—by governments, farmers, restaurants, manufacturers, retailers, and corporations, but individuals as well have a significant role to play in reducing the amount of food thrown into dumps.

The first step doesn't even require a change in our behavior. It requires a change in our thinking. When we stop treating food as garbage in our homes, the benefits are manifold, tangible, and, in some cases, immediate:

- we save money;
- we cook more creatively;
- we deter opportunistic critters who seek sustenance in our discarded food;
- we eliminate odors.

The only reason our garbage cans smell foul is because of all the food we throw away. If organic matter weren't putrefying (rather than properly composting), garbage cans—and garbage dumps—wouldn't stink. With no rotting food in the kitchen waste can, there's no smelly, stinky garbage.

Even if you can't eliminate food waste 100 percent, *reducing* it is essential and doable, especially since we know very well how to mitigate it in our homes. According to experts and extensive studies, the top causes of food waste in our homes are:

- misunderstanding “sell by” or “eat before” dates on packaged foods;
- storing food improperly;
- being unwilling to consume leftovers or produce past its peak;
- buying more than we need;
- taking larger servings than we can eat and leaving unfinished food on our plates.⁹

The good news is that most of our activities that cause food waste can be resolved by making some simple changes in food planning, food shopping, and food storing, all of which are addressed in subsequent chapters.

But before we look at the changes we need to make in our *behavior*, it's worth looking at the changes we need to make in our *thinking*—namely, the need to adopt a *zero-waste mindset* that frames ourselves as *owners taking responsibility* rather than as *consumers merely taking*.

In aspiring to waste less food, the zero-waste concepts of *responsibility*, *value*, *use*, and *ownership* can guide and empower us. The definition of waste that resonates most with me is:

WASTE: Any item for which its owner has stopped taking responsibility.

When viewed through such a lens, even a banana peel isn't *waste*—not until we relinquish our responsibility for it. For instance, once I peel a banana and eat the delicious fleshy interior, the remaining skin is only garbage once I throw it away in a landfill-destined bin for someone else to take care of. However, if I dispose of it so it can be used or collected as “green waste,” it's now potential compost.*

In other words, *food scraps* only become *food waste* once we stop taking responsibility for them.

And remember, organic material doesn't just decompose by way of divine intervention. In order for microbes to do their job, certain conditions need to be met: they need oxygen, moisture, the right ratio of nutrients (specifically carbon

* Banana skins are actually edible, and some people eat them. You can search online for recipes.

and nitrogen), and they need the dispersal of these nutrients (by way of turning or stirring).

These are *not* the conditions of municipal dumps and landfills. When food is piled up with waste on top of it, there is no oxygen, there is no dispersal of nutrients. As a result, when food is entombed in oxygen-deprived landfills, it generates methane, a greenhouse gas twenty-three times more potent than carbon dioxide in trapping heat within our atmosphere. In fact, solid-waste landfills are one of the largest human-made sources of methane gas in the United States (next to raising livestock and extracting and burning fossil fuels).¹⁰

As I will reiterate many times throughout this book, the *zero* aspect of zero waste is aspirational rather than 100 percent possible, but when it comes to food waste, I can confidently say that by implementing the suggestions throughout this chapter and subsequent chapters, it really is possible to have a zero *food waste* household. It starts with changing our *mind* about food:

- shifting from viewing food as infinitely abundant and disposable to recognizing it as a precious and essential resource;
- understanding the environmental, social, and economic consequences of food waste;
- challenging the concept that convenience should always come first;
- shifting our focus from *quantity* to *quality* in food consumption;
- cultivating empathy by appreciating the effort that goes into bringing food to the table;
- orienting to gratitude each time we eat.

“Saying grace” before a meal is one way to change our thinking about the meal we are about to eat. It doesn’t have to be anything formal—just taking a moment to acknowledge the resources, time, labor, and love that have gone into planting, growing, and harvesting your food and expressing gratitude for these processes and people can go a long way in orienting toward a zero-waste mindset.

Just shifting our *thinking* can reshape our relationship with food and promote a more responsible and mindful approach to consumption and waste. But of course, we also need to shift our *behavior*, and suggestions for that abound in the coming chapters.



WEEK 5

Eat by Color

Boost Nutrient Density

My message for eating compassionately is simple: *make choices that reflect your values of compassion and kindness.*

My message for eating healthfully is equally simple: *eat by color.*

By doing so, you ensure an intake of diverse vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants without getting bogged down in diet fads or by conflicting nutritional advice.

The color compounds in plants form thousands of pigments, and they don't exist merely for aesthetic purposes. Bolstering a plant's defense against insects and diseases, *phytochemicals* or *phytonutrients* (*phyto* is Greek for "plant") also protect plants from environmental stressors such as excessive exposure to UV radiation and free radicals.

And when humans incorporate these phytonutrient-rich plants into their diets, they, too, benefit from these compounds, which offer antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, and cardiovascular advantages. On the macro level, phytonutrients strengthen the immune system, create healthy blood sugar levels, slow the aging process, and keep the brain functioning optimally. On the molecular level, phytochemicals play vital roles including:

- helping to prevent cell damage;
- inhibiting cancer cell replication;
- decreasing cholesterol levels;
- causing the self-destruction of cancer cells.

It is estimated that there are hundreds of phytochemicals in each of the plant foods we eat, but we can detect the highest *concentration*—the highest *saturation*—of these phytonutrients because of the *color* of the plants. Here are a few to memorize for your next cocktail party conversation:

- Anthocyanins are plant pigments responsible for blue, purple, and red colors in various fruits, vegetables, and flowers. (*Anthos* means "flower")

in Greek, and *kyanos* means “deep blue.”) Known especially for their antioxidant properties and anti-inflammatory effects, you can find anthocyanins in blueberries, cherries, grapes, plums, red cabbage, eggplant, red and purple potatoes, red onions, apple skins, blackcurrants, purple carrots, black rice, red and purple sweet potatoes, and red and purple (edible) flowers such as pansies, petunias, and violas.

- Beta-carotene is a plant pigment responsible for vibrant orange and yellow hues in numerous fruits and vegetables, including carrots, sweet potatoes, butternut squash, pumpkins, apricots, cantaloupes, and mangoes. An important antioxidant, it is known to boost the immune system, promote skin health, and support vision health. Beta-carotene is a precursor to vitamin A, a nutrient so crucial for eyesight that the chemical name for vitamin A—*retinol*—was coined after the *retina*, the portion of our eye that enables us to see.
- Lutein, another essential carotenoid that concentrates itself in the eye, works with zeaxanthin to prevent such diseases as cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in people over fifty. Lutein is concentrated in foods that are visibly yellow (*luteus* is Latin for “yellow”), such as corn, yellow squash, yellow bell peppers, and mangoes, as well as in leafy greens such as spinach, kale, collard greens, and Swiss chard. Lutein’s bioavailability is improved when cooked and consumed with dietary fats, so don’t hesitate to sauté those veggies in some olive oil or roast them and toss in a handful of nuts.
- Lycopene is the reason tomatoes are red and watermelon, grapefruit, guava, and papaya are pink. Lycopene concentrates itself in certain organs of the body, primarily in the lungs and the prostate gland, and a number of studies show promising results using lycopene for prostate cancer treatment and prevention, as well as for improving cardiovascular health, reducing the risk of breast cancer, and preventing macular degeneration and cataracts.

As with lutein, lycopene becomes more bioavailable when consumed with dietary fats after cooking. Pairing lycopene-rich foods with healthy fats, such as olive oil, enhances its absorption by the body. Additionally, cooking and processing tomatoes, such as making tomato sauce or tomato paste, can break down the cell walls of the plant and release lycopene, making it easier for our bodies to absorb and utilize this valuable nutrient.

The list goes on and on—literally! More than ten thousand different phytochemicals have been identified, and researchers are continually discovering more.¹¹

While choosing foods by color, don't forget to use your other senses as well. Phytochemicals can also be detected by smell or aroma. For example:

- Allicin is the reason garlic smells so pungent when it's crushed or chopped and is known for its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.
- Curcumin is a compound found in turmeric, known for its powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects. It's used in cooking and traditional medicine and studied for potential health benefits, including reducing inflammation and fighting diseases like arthritis and cancer. To increase your absorption of curcumin add a pinch of black pepper.
- Limonene, a phytonutrient with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, is found in the peels of citrus fruits like lemons, oranges, and limes.
- Eugenol is a compound found in cloves and is responsible for their strong, spicy aroma. It's used as a flavoring agent in many dishes and has potential anti-inflammatory and analgesic (pain-relieving) properties.
- Vanillin is the compound responsible for the characteristic vanilla scent and flavor. It's found in vanilla beans and is widely used in the food industry as a flavoring agent.

And remember: there are no naturally occurring phytochemicals in meat, fish, dairy, or eggs. *Phyto*, after all, means “plant.” It's only when animals eat plants that they take in these and other nutrients. So, skip the middle animal! When we skip the middle animal, we take in all the healthful substances and avoid the unnecessary and unhealthful animal-based saturated fat, lactose, and dietary cholesterol, all of which work against the benefits of the fiber, phytochemicals, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants prevalent and inherent in plants.

By letting color be our guide, we also rather effortlessly choose whole rather than processed foods. By painting our diets with a rainbow palette of plant foods, we are guaranteed to be eating the most nutrient-rich, flavor-dense, aesthetically pleasing, humane diet possible.



WEEK 6

Keep Flowers . . . Not Bees

We have all heard about the decline of bee populations around the world, which is not good for these pollinators, the plants they pollinate, and the animals (including humans) who rely on these plants for food. In response to what sounds like dire news, many people take up beekeeping as a way to boost the bees!

Well-intentioned though it may be, keeping honeybees and managing beehives does nothing to protect the wild pollinators. Scientists who study bees say it's like farming chickens to save wild birds.¹² Part of the problem is that when we think about bees, we tend to think only of the European honeybee, a species that has been domesticated for crop pollination and honey production and which is not native to the United States. What we should be thinking about are the more than twenty thousand bee species globally, many of which are actually being displaced by the presence of nonnative honeybees.¹³

We cultivate honeybees just like we cultivate chickens, cows, and pigs, and—like all of these nonnative domesticated animals used by the animal agricultural industry—the burgeoning honeybee population does harm to native wild populations. They compete directly for nectar and pollen, they transmit diseases, and they push wild bees out of their native areas.

In addition to habitat loss, another primary reason that wild bees are on the decline is a lack of flowers—so if you want to help bees, forget about beekeeping. Rather, create bee *habitats*.

- Grow pollinator-friendly plants, even if all you have room for are potted plants. You don't need a huge plot of land in order to attract pollinators.
- If you don't have a plot of your own, work with neighbors, local bee conservation societies, and your city council members to create pollinator-friendly public spaces, parks, and road verges.
- Fill your garden or pots with a variety of native flowering plants that are rich in pollen and nectar. Avoid ornamental hybrids that have been bred to produce little or no nectar. Ask your local nursery for recommendations.