



ANNA SHEPARD

My year of living sustainably

WEEK 12: HOW TO CUT WASTE WITH A KITCHEN APP

I'm pretty careful to avoid throwing out fresh food. I spend a lot of time with my head in the fridge, sorting through what needs eating, reorganising ingredients and jotting down meal plans on paper stuck to the fridge door.

But when it comes to store-cupboard items, I'm less vigilant. If I'm doing an online shop, I'm guilty of buying more basmati rice and black beans, rather than bothering to root around in the cupboards to see if I already have some. This has led to the multiplication of many dried foods in my cupboards, as well as the recent discovery of lasagne sheets almost a decade out of date.

There is now an app to help with this. In fact, there are several, designed to track and organise the food in your home. I try NoWaste, which is similar to Kitche, which I've used in the past. It takes a little time to get going as you have to log every item (a faff, but it pays off), either scanning barcodes or writing items down one by one.

You can do the same for your fridge and freezer, although I skip this. The app cleverly organises this information into categories. You can also scan ingredients and supermarket receipts, which will log best-before dates. Once your inventory is complete, wherever you are, as long as you have your phone, you know exactly what you've got, although you must remember to delete items as you use them.

I find just looking at my pantry list is a useful prompt when planning what to cook. Knowing I have five half-eaten bags of pasta and two jars of pesto in the cupboard prevents me from popping to the shops under the illusion that we need more supplies.



Illustration: Amelia Flower/Folioart



Illustration: Olivia Waller/Folioart

MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



The train is coming, so it's time to focus on what's essential

"If you're standing on the train track and see the train coming, you don't have to stand there and wait to get hit. You can move!" My grandmother always emphasised the word *can* each time she said these sentences, usually in response to something I was worrying could happen.

For weeks now, her words and their tone have echoed in my mind as I've watched the increases, some substantial, in the prices of products we all have to buy. The total for my weekly shop at the supermarket, the price a friend pays to fill up his car, the cost of basic paper, laundry, and cleaning products have all increased substantially. Even the price increase of my beloved brioche has caused me to pause and wonder if perhaps I can be content with plain bread. I dread thinking about how much my electric bill might rise.

Given the overall economic outlook, it's clearly time for us to follow my grandmother's advice and move out of the way, as much as we can, of the oncoming locomotive – the sooner, the better. Like most people, the biggest monthly expense for my friends and myself is the mortgage payment. Nearly everyone with a variable rate mortgage worries about it becoming a significant financial burden when – not if – interest rates go up.

Seemingly, all are applying to refinance to a fixed-rate mortgage for the longest possible period. The consensus is that they'll have the comfort of knowing the monthly sum will be

the same until they pay it off. Inevitably, friends ask: "How long will these marked price increases last?" In response, I joke about reaching into my pocket and pulling out a crystal ball. A few friends roll their eyes. Then we quickly begin talking about and sharing our plans to cope. We all know the buying power of our money will be less due to inflation. Therefore, we all have to be strategic in how we make our money go further.

Friends look at me and laugh. They tease that I already diligently turn off lights, rarely take taxis and only buy certain foods and other items when they're on sale. I explain that shopping the weekly supermarket sales helps me reduce the increase in my food budget. (I didn't confess that I now use an app to keep myself informed.)

I tell my friends that an unexpected benefit of the long Covid lockdowns has been gaining a better understanding of my life priorities – what are necessities, what gives me satisfaction, and what affordably brings me joy. Even without devising a grand plan, many of my friends have done that too. One has talked about using less petrol as she plans her trips more efficiently. A couple shared strategies they used to make the most of loyalty points earned at certain places.

Covid affected our mobility and, for many, their income, so it has caused us all to curtail our normal buying and spending. We saw the effect on our bank accounts and our credit card statements. I learned that I could spend less, but also more thoughtfully and wisely. I'm applying those lessons, which are different for each of us, to the way I use and allocate my money, especially in the uncertain months ahead.

There are costs I can't control (like property taxes), but others I can. To borrow my grandmother's advice: when we move from the path of impending danger, we can use our money in smart, prudent ways that will make it go further. Reduce the worry, and still bring moments of pleasure and joy.