



# Wholefood

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Welcome to Plastic Free July – shop, prepare and cook food with no disposable plastic packaging. I'm not sure if you've heard of this, but it's gaining momentum in the world and so it should. In my lifetime plastic has pretty much taken over the world – my school sandwiches were wrapped in waxed paper and put into a brown paper bag - that same sandwich is now wrapped in cling wrap and then packed in a plastic bag. It's ubiquitous, pervasive and out of control – a lot like a cancer. As Australians, we are sending 1 million tons of plastic to landfill each year. I'm not a big fan of plastic and try to reduce it's use wherever possible but I am also reminded of something my daughter shared with me not too long ago – a lecturer had commented that in one way plastic has provided humans with many amazing opportunities. It's really that society has taken something that does have its advantages and abused it – really, exactly as we've done with just about everything else – including fuel and food.

I tend to take this approach to plastic – I use it judiciously. For example I am a big fan of the Pyrex or such heat stable glass containers with the plastic lids, they enable me to store all sorts of foods and stocks in fridge and freezer in glass. If I am going to heat the meal directly in the container, I will remove the plastic lid before placing in the oven, sometimes I might cover it with some foil. I think this is a good and sensible use of plastic as it allows me to use glass – I adore glass. The plastic that distresses me are as follows:

Plastic shopping bags (truly, using them to put your garbage in is not a plus and does not offer redemption from having used it – you have still taken one from the shop – further encouraging them to provide them – and it is still going into landfill albeit it now filled with rubbish), cling wrap, any foods wrapped in plastic (can they please put cheese in something else), cheap plastic storage containers (so much cheaper than those glass Pyrex ones), fats stored in plastic (oils and such), tins lined with plastic (for example tinned tomatoes, beans etc– including many organic brands), non – stick cookware and the plastic tools that accompany it and the current trend to cook everything in plastic. I would encourage you to begin excluding all this from your home as quickly as possible. How you might ask? This is what I do...

Have a vast range of **bags** – get yourself into the habit of ensuring you have a bag/s **as you leave the house to go shopping**. I like calico or such over those neon coloured eco bags they sell in supermarkets (I don't trust them). I have also collected a vast range of smaller - medium calico bags over the years that originally came with oats or flours in them. I think a size range of calico bags for shopping (putting flours/veggies/grains etc into) would make such an amazing present for someone, don't you? I'm not beyond taking glass jars with me – any shop worth their salt will be happy to weigh them for you before you fill with goodness from the bulk storage.

**Get yourself organized** – left overs are such an essential part of surviving a busy life well nourished, so stock up on the best quality glass storage containers – as noted, I like Pyrex as I can freeze and heat them. But many left overs go into

recycled glass jars or jam jars that are not currently in use. Perfect for the fridge, but not for freezing.

If you're buying a lot of **canned foods**, stop. Or if you must, search out brands that don't. This only happens by trial and error – some brands such as Eden pack their beans in a BPA free can – more expensive but worth it. But ultimately you are invited here to begin preserving in glass – the time honoured way of preserving the bounty of the season for the leaner times. There are many systems, we know the Vacola system in Australia the best. Right now, you could be preserving Apple Butter, Fruit Mince, Pears, Apple and Carrot based Chutneys and Marmalades, Preserved Lemons, Lemon or Lime Curds. Of these, if doing Apple Butter, Fruit Mince and Pears you **must check some safety details first** – I am just wanting to ignite that passion right now.

**Are you cooking in plastic?** Stop that right now. And if you are cooking in a soft plastic (such as cling wrap) – are you nuts!!!? There is far too much transference of xenoestrogens and hormone disrupting chemicals when you heat plastic and it's close to food. If you are going out to eat – ask them what is cooked in plastic – you will be shocked to discover that the boys and girls out there in chef land think this is a clever thing to do – those vegetables on your plate – most likely slow cooked in plastic. God knows why, except because it's in and clever. If they tell you they do it because it keeps that piece of protein so tender and it will be so soft and delicious, ask them if they've ever hear about braising – the original method of slow cooking to keep protein tender, that's served most chefs and food cultures very well for hundreds of years.

**Cheese** sweats in plastic and goes off very quickly. Seek out cheeses wrapped in paper, cut from a large piece or packed in glass – tricky in the organic cheese world, but a good treasure hunt none the less. Often the glass option has cheese packed in oil and that oil is usually refined (yes, even in organic world) not olive (so I don't buy it). A good reason to learn to make cheese ☺ !! I keep an old, very worn linen tea towel that is brilliant for wrapping cheese but muslin is great too.

**Storing Vegetables?** The best place is, seriously, the ground. When you grow your own vegetables you can harvest as needed. Sometimes you can't use them all, but most, even when left will only grow more. This can be good or bad – the flavour is not as sweet and they can go to seed – but this means you have to be savvy and cook seasonally, often thinking on your feet – for example turning those carrots into a soup or a fritter (or chutney). But, in the fridge, those glass Pyrex containers are fabulous for storing vegetables. Herbs? A slightly damp cloth laid on the base of that said Pyrex dish, with washed herbs laid on top and then sealed with the lid will keep them fresh for days.

Finally, the best way to reduce your plastic is to make as much as you can from scratch or as close as possible. Anything pre-packaged will not only cost you so much more but will almost always contain plastic of some form (especially those horrible plastic/pretend paper labels on glass jars). Buying from a bulk bin should

become a way of life. If you bake a lot, you can buy grains and flours in a good 5kg calico or paper bag. This is available in Australia – notably the brands Kialla, Four Leaf and Demeter Mills all offer this option – if your shop doesn't stock it, ask them to do so. Certainly many legumes also come in these options also, but often the size options can be much larger – 12.5kg up to 25 kg and this can be somewhat too much for a home – but not for a co – op ☺

You will find a collection of my recipes on the Nova Website for foods that commonly come in plastic – yoghurt, Bengal chutney and muesli bars especially. But for breakfast – one of the easiest places to buy goods in plastic, why not try this delicious version of porridge – perfect for a cold, blustery winter day.

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## Home Made Cereal: Cinnamon and Coconut Toasted Oat Muesli

Wheat Free  
Makes 5 cups

This is the next best option to soaking your muesli overnight and represents a home – made, ready to breakfast cereal. Oats are soaked in coconut oil and yoghurt overnight, before being slowly dried and toasted in the oven. Yes, it does take a bit of time – you have to be around while the oats dry out in the oven, but the end result is a highly digestible and nourishing breakfast cereal. I've used hazelnuts and figs in this recipe, but you can use any nuts, seeds or dried fruit you prefer. Rather than add too much dried fruit to the mix, I prefer to serve this in summer with poached stone fruits, and in winter with reconstituted dried apricots or peaches and their poaching liquid – this makes a dry breakfast cereal much easier to digest. Serve with yoghurt as desired.

**KITCHEN NOTES:** It's very important to use '**natural**' yoghurt– one that has no milk solids for the soaking procedure.

3 cups rolled oats  
¾ cup yoghurt or kefir  
½ cup melted coconut oil  
¼ cup maple syrup  
¼ cup brown rice syrup – I like Spiral brand  
½ - 1 teaspoon cinnamon  
½ teaspoon ground cardamom  
1 teaspoon natural vanilla extract

1 cup lightly roasted, skins rubbed off, roughly chopped hazelnuts  
1 cup sultanas  
½ cup dried figs, finely chopped

Add the rolled oats to a bowl, with 1 cup water, yoghurt and melted coconut oil. Mix together well, making sure the liquids are well distributed throughout the oats. Cover with a clean cloth and place in the fridge for 24 hours. In winter you can leave this out at room temperature.

After the oats have soaked, pre heat the oven to 90c.

Add the maple, brown rice syrup, cinnamon, cardamom and vanilla to a small pot and gently heat until they have relaxed and are runny. Add to the oats and mix through well.

Spread the oat mixture out over a baking tray, taking care to make sure it is evenly distributed and place in oven. Bake for 2 hours, making sure every 30 mins or so, you gently stir the oat mixture around. Increase the heat to 130c and continue to toast for 40 mins – 1 hour, or until the oats are to your liking. You'll need to stir this every

10 mins or so, turning the oat mixture over, exposing the ones that may be underneath to the heat. If your oven has a hot spot, take care to turn the tray also.

Allow to cool before adding the hazelnuts and dried fruit. Mix through and store in an airtight container away from light and heat.

## **Barley, wheat and rosemary crackers**

Makes about 64 large crackers

These are insanely delicious and very good. With an earthy and robust flavour, they're just what you want with some good cheese and a glass of wine. I've specified wheat flour here, as it gives the gluten require to make a good cracker. You can do this in a mixer with the dough attachment, but it's just as easy to do by hand, and that means less washing up.

110 g /1 cup barley flour

150 g /1 cup wholemeal wheat flour

2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh rosemary

1 teaspoon fine sea salt, plus extra, for sprinkling

2– 4 twists of freshly ground black pepper

60 ml extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon polenta (cornmeal), for dusting

35 g 1/4 cup plain (all-purpose) white wheat flour, for rolling

Place the barley and wholemeal wheat flours, rosemary, salt and pepper in a mixing bowl and whisk through to combine.

Place 125 ml (1/2 cup) of water in a small bowl with the oil and add this to the dry ingredients. Use your hands to mix it together. You may need to add a little extra water, but no more than 2 tablespoons, to make a moist, but not at all wet dough.

Turn onto a work surface and knead the dough for 5–8 minutes or until smooth.

Separate into four balls, place in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap (not a tea towel or they will dry out) and leave to sit for 30 minutes to 1 hour. If the weather is hot, leave them to sit in the fridge.

**Preheat the oven to 210°C or 190°C if fan forced.**

Sprinkle two baking trays with 1 teaspoon of polenta, so that it is evenly covered — you may bake these in batches.

Sprinkle a work surface with a small amount of plain white wheat flour. Working with one ball of dough at a time (make sure to keep the others covered until you use them), roll out the dough to a circle about 33 cm (13 inches) in diameter and about 1– 1.5 mm thick. Roughly cut into 16 wedges like you would cut a cake (they will be large triangles). Prick each cracker about five to six times with the tines of a fork. Use a palette knife to move them to the trays. Sprinkle each cracker with a pinch of salt.

Bake for 8–10 minutes or golden along the edges — keep your eyes on these as they cook as they can go from ready to overcooked very quickly.

Remove from the oven and cool on the trays for 10 minutes before moving to a wire rack.

Repeat with the remaining dough.

Store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.