

WOMEN

## She's making shampoo more sustainable by eliminating the most useless ingredient in it — water

After selling two million bottles of liquid shampoos and beauty products over 20 years, beauty veteran Lynn Tan is rewriting the rules by creating her own water-free powder shampoo. CNA Women speaks to her in this instalment of our women in sustainability series.



Beauty industry veteran Lynn Tan believes that switching from a liquid to water-free powder shampoo is more sustainable for the earth and your wallet. (Photo: The Powder Shampoo)

**D**id you know that 80 per cent of our regular shampoo is made of water? This water however does not enhance the formula in any way. On the contrary, it dilutes the product so consumers need a larger quantity for a single wash.

“The thing is, when you shampoo, you still need to wet your hair to lather the product. So why do we need to add water to the shampoo formula in the first place?” said Lynn Tan, founder of The Powder Shampoo.

“Also, why are we transporting gallons and gallons of liquid shampoo around the world? The water makes it heavier than it needs to be. And because of the liquid, brands usually use single-use plastic to store the product. It is all so unnecessary.”

Her solution is so logical, it is a wonder no big brands have picked up on it sooner. To reduce single-use plastic and the carbon footprint of transporting products – simply subtract water from the formula.

This April, Tan will launch four variants of this powder shampoo. Don't confuse these for dry shampoo, which you sprinkle on your scalp to absorb excess oil. Tan has designed her product to be applied directly to wet hair for the full lathering shampoo experience.

## THE POWDER REVOLUTION

Beauty insiders will know Tan. The 43-year-old runs a distribution business BBN International, which specialises in botanical brands such as Phyto, Lierac and Trilogy.

In early 2021 however, as she was watching Netflix documentaries on sustainability, she felt increasingly shaken and saddened, and began asking questions about the beauty industry – especially the need for single-use plastic bottles in personal care products.

“Only 9 per cent of plastic is recycled; 12 per cent is incinerated, which releases toxic fumes into the air. The rest is living among us.

“This plastic harms our ecosystem, birds, animals and sea creatures. It also becomes microplastic, goes in the air we breathe and the water we drink, and affects our lungs, brain, nervous system and reproductive system. A lot of reports show that plastic is poisoning us,” she said.

“This led me to wonder if there will be a beautiful earth left for my children, my grandchildren and everyone's grandchildren if we keep going like this,” added the mother-of-three.



Tapping into her extensive haircare expertise and tweaking the formula 10 times, Lynn created her vegan, foaming powder shampoos. (Photo: The Powder Shampoo)

It also dawned upon Tan that she has been part of the problem. “As a business owner, you want to sell as much as you can, as often as you can, to as many people as you can. However, the more I sell, the more I contribute to this plastic plague,” she reflected.

“While a lot of us are trying to be eco-friendly, it is so hard because we have very limited sustainable options. You can shampoo less, pick products that use recycled plastic packaging (but these can only be recycled once), or use shampoo bars.”

While shampoo bars were a good option, Tan did not enjoy the experience. She wanted a sustainable product that was “easy to use, lathers nicely and smells amazing”.

Tan decided to go to the drawing board to create her own product from scratch. And so The Powder Shampoo was born.

## WHY SWITCH TO POWDER?

Tan's product is not the first powder shampoo. Over the past couple of years, a handful of cult brands from the US, UK and New Zealand have launched similar products.

Most consumers, however, aren't even aware of them. And Tan's goal is to create more awareness and more options.

"This should be a new movement and new category because you would reduce so much single-use plastic just by switching to powder," she said.

Tan also stressed that powder shampoos are longer lasting, reduce overconsumption and are more cost effective as compared to liquid shampoos. "You only need 0.5g to wash short hair, 1g to wash shoulder length hair, and 1.5g to 2g to wash thick long hair. Our 100g bottle can last for 100 washes, which means you only need to buy a new bottle in three to six months," she said.

She added: "In comparison, a 100ml bottle of liquid shampoo only lasts for 10 washes on average. Most liquid shampoos are 250ml to 500ml and only last for one to two months."

The Powder Shampoo's water-free formulas are easy to use, gentle on your scalp and hair, and leave it feeling soft and bouncy after each wash.

A self-confessed aromatherapy junkie, Tan incorporated micro-encapsulated essential oils such as bergamot, grapefruit, tea tree and mint into the products. These double as a natural preservative, giving the paraben-free products a shelf life of two years after opening.

She also uses a biodegradable coconut-based ingredient as a sulphate-free surfactant to thoroughly cleanse the scalp.



Thyme features in all the variants of The Powder Shampoo, such as Thyme & Tea Tree Exfoliating & Balancing Shampoo for Loose Dandruff Flakes, and Thyme & Bergamot Invigorating & Stimulating Shampoo for Thinning & Ageing Hair. Each 100g bottle costs S\$39.90, while a 100g refill pack costs S\$35.90. (Photo: The Powder Shampoo)

Tan has taken pains to ensure her shampoos are free of common controversial ingredients. These include: Parabens and phthalates, which Tan believes harms the body; silicone, which may clog pores and harm marine creatures when it goes into the water stream; sulphates, retinol, artificial fragrances and mineral oils, which may irritate sensitive skin.

The products are vegan and cruelty-free. “There is no need to use animal byproducts when we have so many options in the plant world. And there is certainly no need to test products on non-consenting animals when there are so many people willing to volunteer to try the product,” stressed Tan, who tested her products on 100 friends and colleagues from Singapore, Canada, Europe, the Philippines and China, to ensure that they suit different climates, hair types and types of water – including hard water.



In place of plastic, Tan says The Powder Shampoo is packaged in aluminium bottles because each one can be recycled 100 times or more. (Photo: The Powder Shampoo)

Packaging was another big concern for the eco-entrepreneur. She chose aluminium because it is durable, light and can be infinitely recycled, unlike plastic, which can only be recycled once.

To reduce the production of aluminium bottles, Tan also offers 100g refill packs of the shampoo, which are packaged in 100 per cent paper; all products are available on the brand's online store.

## FEEL GOOD BEAUTY

Having said that, one cannot help but wonder why powder shampoo as a haircare category hasn't taken off sooner? Tan has a theory. She believes it goes against the grain of how businesses usually run.

"As a big brand, if you create a culture of people buying shampoo every month, why would you suddenly create a product where people buy from you every quarter or only twice a year?" she asked.

Nonetheless, the straight-shooting businesswoman is not afraid to speak out against liquid shampoos even though it remains one of the key products she currently distributes. "Why hasn't haircare evolved? Why are we still making shampoos the same way as we have in the 50s?" she asked.

Will speaking out alienate the brands she distributes? “It may,” she mused. “Then maybe (the big brands) want to do something about it? My dream is not to be the only one selling powder shampoo, but for everyone to sell it because it makes the most sense. I hope this will create a ripple effect across the globe.”

Another cool bonus for consumers, The Powder Shampoo works with non-profit organisation Tree-Nation. So each time you purchase a bottle, you will get an email notifying you that a tree has been planted in your name in Tanzania, Eastern Africa.

Tan spent her childhood playing at her mother’s plant nursery in Malaysia and is a huge tree lover. “My dream is to plant a million trees by 2030, or in this lifetime. This is my beacon and will be my legacy. It’s important to choose a beacon that you feel deeply for, so you can look towards it when times are tough and you feel lost,” she said.



Lynn Tan credits her children (from left) Julian, 6, Kaela, 13, and Reynna, 17, for inspiring her to create The Powder Shampoo; when she has to work weekends, her husband helps with childcare duties. (Photo: The Powder Shampoo)

After this launch, Tan will be introducing head-to-toe washes in the third quarter of this year and powder conditioners in the last quarter.

“I spent the first 20 years of my career as an advocate for scalp care, hair care and plant-based products, but I contributed to the plastic problem. I feel everything has come full circle and I will spend the next 20 years trying to address this problem (with powder shampoos),” she said.