

Paper or Plastic? Neither!

When you are asked if you want a paper or plastic bag, answer neither. Use a reusable bag instead. Get a sturdy reusable bag. And bring it to the store – to reduce waste from a paper or plastic bag. Or reuse a bag you already have. If you take a plastic bag, recycle it!

Often the waste haulers do not want plastic bags put in the curbside recycle bins. If you are not sure, contact your waste hauler and ask. If they are unable to take recyclable plastic bags, ask where you can drop of the bags for recycling.

Plastic bags are made from natural gas, a non-renewable resource; they are not made from recycled plastic. The whole process of making plastic bags is highly polluting, including with drilling for the natural gas, fracking, transporting the natural gas, and processing the gas into plastic bags.



It makes sense to use reusable bags. Plastic bags can be found drifting across the landscape and polluting water bodies. They add to the volume in landfills. The bags are not biodegradable, they photo-degrade which pollutes the environment. That is why a reusable bag makes sense. In 2013, a study reviewed plastic bag litter after San Jose, California, banned plastic bags. The study found that the ban resulted in almost 90 percent less plastic in its storm drains and almost 60 percent less plastic in its streets.¹

Some communities have implemented laws banning single-use plastic bags.² Some communities are implementing laws that require businesses to charge for all bags. Unfortunately, the Iowa legislature passed a law that forbids cities and counties from adopting plastic bag bans.³

It is important to keep reusable bags clean. And it is easy to do.

- Use separate reusable bags for meats, fresh vegetables and fruits, prepared or ready-to-eat foods, and cleaning products. Put meat, poultry and fish in a plastic bag before placing in your reusable bag to prevent leaking juices from contaminating your reusable bags and as well as other foods; then toss that plastic bag.
- Clean the kitchen counters and tables where you place your reusable bags loaded with groceries.
- Store dry reusable bags in a clean, dry location. Avoid storing them in a vehicle trunk.
- Wash your reusable bags after each use.
 - Cotton bags - machine wash with hot water and laundry detergent; machine dry or air dry
 - Bamboo and hemp bags - machine wash on the gentle cycle with mild laundry detergent; machine dry or air dry
 - Insulated bags - wash by hand with hot soapy water and line dry; they can also be disinfected with anti-bacterial wipes
 - Nylon or polyester bags - wash by hand in warm soapy water, turn inside out to line dry
 - Polypropylene bags (woven & nonwoven) - machine wash on the gentle cycle with soap and cold water, they can also be hand washed. Line dry

¹ Jenny Luna, “The Worst of Times. Can we stem the tide of disposable utensils?”, Mother Jones, July/August, 2017, page 67

² Information about plastic bag bans can be found at www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/plastic-bag-legislation.aspx

³ This was enacted on March 30, 2017, under bill number HF295, Iowa Code 331.301(6) and 364.3(3).

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