

PLASTIC BAGS ARE A TRUE MENACE

Plastic Bags are a true menace to our ecosystems and our waste diversion goals. Barely recycled, almost all of the 400 bags used in the state per second are discarded. Once discarded, they either enter our landfills or our marine ecosystem. People think of plastic bags as being free. Instead, they actually cost taxpayers millions every year.

In San Francisco alone, City officials estimate that they spend \$8.5 million annually to deal with plastic bag litter. That equates to around 20 cents for every bag distributed in the city. Additionally: It costs the state \$25 million annually to landfill discarded plastic bags. Public agencies in California spend in excess of \$303 million annually in litter abatement. Southern California cities have spent in excess of \$1.7 billion in meeting of their Total Maximum Daily Loads for trash in impaired waterways. Cities and Recyclers spend incalculable amounts removing plastic bags from their recyclables stream, where they jam machinery and add to the manual labor costs of recycling.¹

At least 267 species have been scientifically documented to be adversely affected by plastic marine debris and it is estimated to kill over 100,000 marine mammals and turtles each year. Plastic bags are considered especially dangerous to sea turtles, who mistake them for jellyfish, a main food source. 86% of all known species of sea turtles have had reported problems of entanglement or ingestion of marine debris. A study done off the coast of Newfoundland found that over 100,000 animals were killed by entanglement over a 3 year period.

In countries such as South Africa, discarded plastic bags are a major eyesore. Often carried from landfills by the wind, discarded plastic bags are often seen hanging in bushes, floating in lakes and rivers, flapping from fences, spoiling landscapes and choking innocent animals. Plastic bags have become so prevalent in South Africa that they are mockingly referred to as the "national flower." The Irish have been known to call the ever-present bags their "national flag."

Plastic bags, which are made from natural gas or oil, consume an energy equivalent of thousands of barrels of oil a day just to meet California's consumption. Numerous recent international, national, state and local reports have called for the banning or drastic reduction of plastic bags due to their environmental damage. Achim Steiner, head of the UN Environmental Program, recently said "there is simply zero justification for manufacturing [plastic bags] any more, anywhere.

Many countries from around the world have begun to make changes. Uganda, South Africa, and the city of Beijing have all banned single use plastic shopping bags. Bag taxes, usually around \$.15 per bag, have been established in Ireland, Denmark, Scotland, Italy, Taiwan, and Switzerland. Ireland's levy decreased the use of plastic shopping bags by 90%! Large shopping markets in Malawi, Africa now charge for the use of plastic bags. Other countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, India, Hong Kong, China, Australia, Mumbai, and Kenya are considering a bag tax or plastic bag ban. Taiwan began charging for plastic bags and has been able to reduce use by 80 percent. In Bangladesh plastic bags plugged drains and increased flooding. Bangladesh soon banned plastic bags

Trillions of plastic bags have been produced since their introduction over 30 years ago.

¹WEBSITE www.cawrecycle.org

The production of plastic bags depletes our earth's non-renewable resources. The Production of plastic bags necessitates the use of chemicals, energy, and petroleum-based products. Like all plastics, these bags are made from petroleum. The U.S. uses over 100 billion bags annually, according to the Wall Street journal. This is equivalent to throwing away over 12 million barrels of oil per year. An average family of 4 in the United States uses 1,460 bags per year. The recycling rate of plastic bags is less than 1%.

With increased awareness of global warming and other environmental issues, the use of plastic bags will continue to be scrutinized and, hopefully, minimized. Ikea, a world wide furnishing chain, has begun to charge shoppers \$.05 per plastic bag. At Safeway, King Shoppers and Albertson's stores nation wide a \$.05 rebate is given on your shopping bill for using a reusable cloth bag. Recently, San Francisco approved a ban on plastic grocery bags. It is probable that many other U.S. cities will follow suit. Currently Boston, Oakland, neighbor, Los Angeles, Portland, Washington DC, and the state of New York are all considering banning plastic bags.

Paper bags are not the answer either. Paper bags require more than 4 times the energy for production than plastic bags, and also cost double to produce. (5.7c vs 2.22) Paper bags deplete another of the earth's valuable resources, trees. It is estimated that the United States consumes 14 million trees per year to make paper bags. The recycling rate for paper bags is less than 15%. Over 85 billion bags are thrown away each year in the U. S. alone.

Hong Kong lawmakers approved a tax on every plastic bag handed out by supermarkets in the city as of July in a move to cut the mountain of waste created by the bags. The tax of 50 Hong Kong cents (6 US cents) will be levied from July 1 in a total of 2,000 shops, including every major supermarket, in the high-rise city of seven million. Legislators voted 35 to 3 in favor of the levy which was opposed by industry groups representing Hong Kong companies making plastic bags at factories in neighboring southern China. In recent years, countries from Ireland to Australia have brought in restrictions on plastic bags, while New Delhi has threatened jail sentence for customers and shopkeepers who ignore a ban. Last June, China moved to slash its annual consumption of an estimated one trillion bags, banning ultra-thin versions and introducing a charge for regular bags.

In January 2002, the south African government required manufacturers to make plastic bags more durable and more expensive to discourage their disposal—prompting a 90-percent reduction in use. Ireland instituted a 15¢-per-bag tax in March 2002, which led to a 95-percent reduction in use. In the early 1990s, the Ladakh Women's Alliance and other citizens groups led a successful campaign to ban plastic bags in that India province, where the first of May is now celebrated as "Plastic Ban Day." Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Philippines, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom also have plans to ban or tax plastic bags.

Supermarkets around the world are voluntarily encouraging shoppers to forgo plastic bags—or to bring their own bags—by offering a small per-bag refund or charging extra for plastic. The organizers of the 2000 Olympia Games in Sydney, Australia, were able to collect 76 percent of the food waste generated at the sports venues and athletes' village by using biodegradable utensils and plastic bags that composted as easily as the food and eliminated the need to separate the garbage.

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Plastic shopping bags are among the most ubiquitous consumer items on Earth. Their light weight, low cost, and water resistance make them so convenient for carrying groceries, clothing, and other routine purchases that it's hard to imagine life without them. Weighing just a few

grams and averaging a few millimeters in thickness, plastic bags might seem thoroughly innocuous—were it not for the sheer number produced. Factories around the world churned out a whopping 4-5 trillion of them in 2002, ranging from large trash bags to thick shopping totes to flimsy grocery sacks.

Compared with paper bags, producing plastic ones uses less energy and water and generates less air pollution and solid waste. Plastic bags also take up less space in a landfill. But many of these bags never make it to landfills; instead, they go airborne after they are discarded—getting caught in fences, trees, even the throats of birds, and clogging gutters, sewers, and waterways. To avoid these impacts, the best alternative is to carry and re-use your own durable cloth bags.

Please think twice about taking a plastic bag if your purchase is small and easy to carry.

Keep canvas bags in your home, office, and car so you always have them available when you go to the supermarket or other stores. Ask your favorite stores to stop providing bags for free, or to offer a discount for not using the bags. Encourage your local politicians to introduce legislation taxing or banning plastic bags.

INGENIOUS, IMAGINATION IDEAS WAYS TO RECYCLE THOSE PESKY PLASTIC BAGS!

Do you end up with plastic shopping bags every time you go shopping? How do you answer this question: “What do I do with all these leftover plastic bags?” Before you discard (or even recycle) another plastic bag, consider trying some of these ideas:

- Storage bags. Simply store and hang items you need to put away.
- Make Into rope by Finger Crocheting. You can use this rope for a clothes line, or a child's jump rope.
- Hanging Planter. There are expensive plastic bags on the market which are just plastic with some holes speared in them. You can hang the plant anywhere. Just use two or three plastic bags together for strength and then fill with dirt and plants. Water regularly.
- Emergency Rain hats. Tie one over your coif for rain protection.
- Emergency Diaper (nappy) cover. In a pinch a plastic grocery or bread bag makes a nice emergency disposable cover!
- Keep a couple plastic bags in a diaper bag for soiled clothing.
- Place disposable diapers in a bag before tossing in the diaper pail. It helps diminish odors somewhat.
- Washable Shelf Liners. Cut and tack for a nice washable shelf liner.
- Don't buy expensive mailing fillers. Save plastic bags to protect and keep items from moving around.
- Use plastic bags to protect Christmas decorations while storing.
- When traveling, use plastic bags in your suitcases for dirty underclothes.

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- Place your wet swim suits or other wet clothing inside plastic bags until you arrive home and can launder or hang out to dry.
- When away from home, put dirty shoes or boots in a bag so you don't get dirt in your car. (That's assuming you have other shoes to wear.)

- Place disposable diapers in a bag before tossing in the diaper pail. It helps diminish odors somewhat.
- Keep several in your car, especially if you have children. If someone gets unexpectedly sick while on the highway and you're unable to stop, use double bags. You can knot and dispose—better in the bag than all over the car.
- Use for puzzles or other items which have small parts that may get lost. My elementary-age sons enjoy putting together (and taking apart) 500-piece puzzles. Unfortunately, some of the puzzle boxes have become worn out. I keep the puzzles in the boxes with a rubberband around the box. To prevent pieces from falling out and getting lost, I then place the puzzle inside a bag.
- Place food inside a plastic bag before packing in a lunch bag. Even "airtight" containers can leak, especially if the lid is not on tightly.
- Put sippy cups (even "spill-proof" ones) in a bag to prevent accidental spills in the diaper bag.
- For easy cleanup, place a plastic bag inside a bucket or pot next to your sink when you peel fruits or vegetables. You can quickly dispose of the bag or place peelings in a compost pile.
- Double line a bucket with plastic bags. When removing the skin and fat (or even bones) from chicken or other meat, place in bags for easy cleanup.
- Place frozen ice packs in a plastic bags to prevent condensation from "puddling" in your lunch bag. When we travel, we freeze some water in our water bottles before filling them up with cold water. The bottles produce so much condensation, that it looks like a little lake in our cup dispensers. To prevent that, pack water bottles in a plastic bag.
- Use for organization in a deep freezer. I stock up on frozen vegetables and place like vegetables together in a plastic bag. (Rotate by putting newest vegetables on the bottom of the bag.) I usually place my vegetables in the freezer in alphabetical order. Doing this helps me know exactly where to find certain vegetables. You can also use various colored bags to sort vegetables.
- When defrosting meats, place a paper towel in a plastic bag and put meats in the bag to prevent messy leaks and cleanups.
- In the winter, use plastic bags over your children's snow boots to keep feet drier.
- Carry a couple bags with you while you walk. You can use it to pick up trash and then dispose.
- Take bags to the grocery store to reuse instead of getting new ones each time.
- Donate bags to food pantries, used book stores, libraries, thrift shops, or other organizations. Instead of stuffing all the bags into one bag, flatten the plastic bags, fold them in half, and place in another plastic bag before donating.
- Fill several bags with food or other items for a needy family. (This is one of the most rewarding ways to use those bags!)

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- To keep your plastic bags neat and available, you can purchase special cloth bags for storing them, make your own bag, or use an empty tissue box. I find empty tissue boxes to be the most convenient and economical (as well as environmentally friendly) for me. Keep several in different rooms (pantry, closet, basement, baby room for diapers, etc.)

and pull out bags as needed.

- At a garage sale recently a lady showed us how she folds her bags--lay out flat and smooth with hands then fold in fourths lengthwise, then start folding in triangles as flags are folded line liter pans with plastic bags, double if needed, easy to dispose of.
- I always take stitching or crocheting with me in the car and on trips. I keep it in double plastic grocery bags. They are lightweight, fit in smaller spaces, and if the outer one gets dirty or torn, the inner one is still protecting my project.
- Walking the dog... I don't think this needs further explanation! - Nancy
- I use them to collect and dispose of weeds in my yard. I use the bags to collect spent flowers when deadheading. - Jack

- Preparing the Thanksgiving Turkey is a little hard on my ick nerve. I put my hand inside of a plastic grocery bag before reaching inside to pull out the neck and gizzards. I pull them out, then, with my other hand, pull the bag in the other direction so they're inside of the bag, tie it and dispose." - Angie
- Crochet bags into door mats, easy to hose off. Around here several people have been crocheting the plastic bags into oval or circular rugs for their entry's, porches, and patios. Cut into strips to make into a washable placemats or rug. (See pattern below)

Plastic Bag Crochet Rug

MATERIALS:

12 ounces of plastic grocery bags

J size Crochet hook

Scissors

DIRECTIONS:

Cut the plastic grocery bags by spiraling the cut around the bag into one continuous strip. I made mine 4 inches wide as I cut. This produces a thick sturdy rug. Chain 50. Chain one and turn. Work in double crochet along the side of the chain. Make three stitches in the end stitch and work down the other side of the chain. Make three stitches in the other end, and then begin to work around the rug in a circle. At each end, increase three stitches to make the turn. Work in this manner until you have made six rounds --or thickness desired. Break off the final round and pull through to secure. Feed end the end stitch into body of rug for a nice finish.

There you have it! A great washable boot rug! You can also use this technique to make place mats and more. Be creative!! Think outside the box! I hope this inspires you to re-use and recycle other common household items! The above suggestions and information was taken from articles from BellaOnline's Frugal Living Editor - Jennifer Skinner; Guest author - Lili Pintea-Reed; Rachel Keller and Plus Reader's Ideas, and Reader's Ideas edited by Michelle Jones - Nancy, Annie, and Jack.