



Info Sheet

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Reusing and Recycling Plastic Bags

From carrying groceries to taking out the trash, plastic bags are used and reused for dozens of tasks every day. In addition to being convenient and recyclable¹, plastic bags have many positive attributes from an environmental perspective:

- **Energy efficient** – Plastic grocery bags require 70 percent less energy² to manufacture than paper ones.
- **Lightweight and compact** – Lightweight plastic bags help save space and fuel in transport. For every seven trucks needed to deliver paper bags – only one truck is needed for the same number of plastic bags, helping to save energy and reduce emissions.
- **Reusable** – More than 90 percent of today's consumers reuse plastic bags as liners for household wastebaskets, lunch totes and laundry or garment bags.
- **Fully Recyclable** – In 2006, 812 million pounds of plastic bags and film were recycled in the United States – up 24 percent from 2005. Recycled plastic bags can be made into a wide range of second generation products, including durable building and construction products, low-maintenance fencing and decks, and of course, new bags.
- **High fuel value** – Plastics can help trash burn more efficiently in energy-recovery facilities, creating energy that can be used to make electricity in some communities.

Reuse and Recycling Tips

Plastic bags, such as grocery and dry cleaning bags, can multiply quickly in drawers and pantries. Many bags can be reused or recycled, but consumers may not know what to do or where to take them. The following tips can help readers recycle and reuse more plastic bags.

1) **Think outside the bag: Be creative with storage.**

Try storing bags in empty tissue or garbage-bag boxes until you are ready to reuse or recycle them. These items can fit neatly under your sink or in the bathroom vanity and will be easily accessible the next time you are looking for a new trashcan liner. Most boxes hold at least 50 bags and have a parachute hole for dispensing. Be sure to keep bags out of the reach of small children.

¹ Recycling may not be available in all areas. Check to see if recycling exists in your community.

² Boustead Consulting & Associates Ltd. *Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags – Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper*. 2007. See: http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_plastics/doc.asp?CID=1106&DID=7212



2) Find new ways to use old bags.

Use a bag more than once before throwing it away. Plastic bags' durability and water-resistance allow them to be reused in a variety of ways, such as:

- Wet umbrella cover – keep other items in your briefcase dry when your umbrella is wet
- Doggie duty – bring them on dog walks to collect and dispose of pet waste
- Hand protectors – place them over your hands to handle messes indoors and out
- Kitchen clean-up – place them under the cutting board for quick scrap removal
- Suitcase savers – wrap shoes before packing them with clean clothes

3) Bring bags back for recycling.

Many grocers and retailers now offer drop-off programs that allow shoppers to return their used bags to be recycled. In most stores, bag collection areas are located at the front entrance or near checkout areas. Check with your grocer and other area retailers to see where bags are recycled in your community or visit www.plasticbagrecycling.org for a list of stores in your state that offer drop-off bins for recycling plastic bags.

All clean bags labeled #2 (HDPE) or #4 (LLDPE) are recyclable, including:

- Grocery bags
- Retail bags (remove hard plastic or string handles)
- Plastic newspaper bags
- Dry cleaning bags (remove paper and hangers)
- Bread bags (with crumbs shaken out)
- Mattress bags

You can also include polyethylene wrap for products such as paper towels, toilet paper and diapers wherever plastic bags are collected for recycling.

Make sure bags are clean and empty. This is important because receipts, debris and other objects may contaminate the plastic as it is being recycled. When you're collecting bags for recycling, *do not* include used plastic food wrap, bags that have direct contact with food, or material that has been painted or glued.

For more information, please visit www.plasticbagrecycling.org.

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