

Choosing a Sustainable Grocery Bag

Reusable Grocery Bags

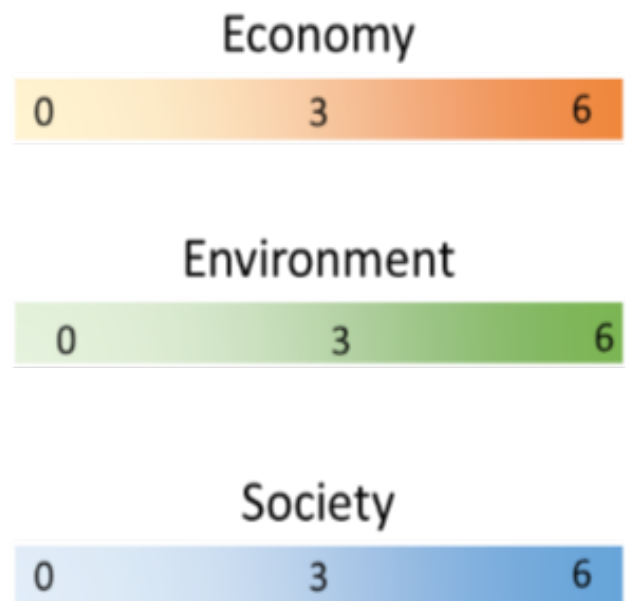
Reusable grocery bags typically cost between \$0.25 and \$3.00 each. Purchasing reusable bags represents a small cost to the consumer, but a significant savings to retailers and local governments. In fact, for every person that switches to reusable bags entirely, a city saves \$250,000 in clean up and disposal costs over the years.

Reusable grocery bags take more energy to produce than either paper or plastic bags. Some are made from cotton, which requires significant water and energy resources to farm. Bags made from post consumer content (recycled materials) are becoming more common, and these use less energy, water, or other resources to produce.

Depending on the type of bag and how it is used, reusable grocery bags can last for years. People like reusable bags because they are stronger than paper or plastic bags. They can hold more items, resulting in fewer trips to load or unload your groceries.



Sustainability Score



Choosing a Sustainable Grocery Bag

Plastic Grocery Bags

Plastic bags are cheap, and easy to produce. Although plastic bags are “free” to consumers, the cost of each plastic bag is incorporated into the price of the goods that are bought. For locally owned, small businesses, supplying plastic bags with each purchase can be an economic burden.

The cost of proper disposal a single plastic bag is \$0.17. Although this sounds inexpensive, American use over 100 billion plastic bags per year. Plastic grocery bags are also a significant source of litter in urban areas. Nationwide, cities spend \$11 billion each year cleaning up plastic litter.

Plastic bags do not easily decompose, but they are lighter than paper bags to transport. Plastic bags are easily compacted and take up less landfill space pound for pound.

Most recycling plants do not accept plastic bags, because they can damage recycling machinery. Plastic bags pose a serious threat to wildlife including birds, fish, and sea turtles. Plastics are derived from petroleum, a nonrenewable resource.

Most people prefer plastic bags because they are lightweight and durable. Plastic bags are often reused for other purposes before being thrown away.

Sustainability Score



Choosing a Sustainable Grocery Bag

Paper Grocery Bags

Although paper bags are given for free with check out, retailers compensate for the costs of the bags by raising prices on the goods they sell.

Paper production emits more air and water pollution than plastic bags, and consumes up to four times as much energy, and three times as much water. However, Paper bags are made from a renewable resource.

Paper bags are heavy and bulky. When discarded, they take up much more land-fill space than plastic bags. Although paper bags are considered biodegradable, they decompose very slowly in landfills, and release methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Paper litter quickly degrades in the presence of sunlight and air. It rarely presents a problem for fish or other wildlife. Paper recycling programs readily accept paper bags.

Some people prefer paper bags because they tend to keep their shape, protecting delicate items like bread or eggs from damage. Paper bags can be reused, and are often used in craft or cooking projects before they are ultimately thrown away.



Sustainability Score

