

# Kansas Green Teams

## Kansas Green Guide – Your Bi-Weekly Guide to Sustainable Living

All About Bags

July 20, 2012

Paper, plastic or neither! We take shopping bags for granted, especially at the grocery store, and it's easy to fill up several bags per trip. Both paper and plastic bags use resources and are known as single use bags. A great alternative is taking your own reusable cloth or plastic bag. Just remember that as long as you are recycling and reusing bags you are doing your part to help the environment! You can reuse your plastic or paper bags for household trash, car litter bags, lunch sacks, garden shoes and recycling containers.

### Plastic Bags

- Each year, an estimated 500 billion to one trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide. That comes out to over a million per minute. Millions end up as litter each year.
- According to the EPA, over 380 billion plastic bags, sacks and wraps are consumed in the U.S. each year.
- Approx 100 billion of the 380 billion are plastic shopping bags.
- An estimated 12 million barrels of oil is required to make that many plastic bags.
- Thousands of marine animals, including sea turtles, whales and other marine mammals die every year by ingesting improperly disposed plastic.
- Plastic bags don't biodegrade.
- The average family accumulates 60 plastic bags in only four trips to the grocery store.



### Paper Bags

- In 1999, 14 million trees were cut to produce the 10 billion paper grocery bags used by Americans that year alone.
- Paper sacks generate 70 percent more air and 50 times more water pollutants than plastic bags.
- To produce a paper bag, it takes 4 times more energy than it does a plastic bag.
- It takes 91% less energy to recycle a pound of plastic than it takes to recycle a pound of paper.
- Although paper bags have a higher recycling rate than plastic, each new paper grocery bag you use is made from mostly virgin pulp for better strength and elasticity.

### Reusable Bags

Reusable bags are the way to go. Many folks have moved beyond the paper versus plastic grocery bag debate having settled on neither. Today, there are many reusable bags to choose from and made from materials both familiar and unusual, as well as fashion statements. One important thing to remember when using these bags, they must be washed on a regular basis, when carrying raw meat and vegetables. Reusable bags have the advantage of being:

- Durable
- Made from sustainably grown un-dyed cotton or recycled bottles
- Non-toxic
- Allergy-free

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