



Disposable shopping bags are everywhere. From department stores to gas stations, they are the way we tote our purchases. These lightweight containers were introduced in the 1970s as a means of making shopping easier for consumers. So what's the big deal? The average American goes through six shopping bags per week. With a population of roughly 300 million, that means 1.8 billion bags are used and discarded in America every week, and all of that trash adds up.

We've compiled 25 facts about plastic bags and paper bags that we think are good reasons for you to pick up a reusable bag and make the next bag you throw out your last.

1. How long does it take for plastic bags to decompose? A plastic bag can take from 15 to 1,000 years to break down, depending on environment. In a landfill, kept away from the environment that would help them biodegrade more easily, paper bags don't do much better.
2. Plastic bags don't biodegrade, but they can break down through photo degradation. When photo degradation, decomposition through exposure to light, happens, the bag breaks down into small, toxic particles.
3. An estimated one million birds, 100,000 turtles, and countless other sea animals die each year from ingesting plastic. The animals confuse floating bags and plastic particles for edible sea life such as jellyfish and plankton. Once ingested, the plastic blocks the digestive tract and the animals starve to death. Other animals drown after becoming entangled in plastic waste.
4. The cost to recycle plastic bags outweighs their value, so most recycling facilities will not take them. Instead of being recycled, they are thrown out with the rest of the trash.
5. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, which has been collecting plastic bag statistics for more than a decade, roughly 2% of plastic bags are recycled in the United States. The rest are left to live on indefinitely in landfills or decompose in our oceans, where they leech toxins into the water and soil.
6. The United States uses about 100 billion plastic bags per year, with the average person using between 350 and 500.
7. Thanks to their light weight, plastic bags in landfills don't always stay there. They are likely to fly away and can settle in trees, block storm drains, and clutter beaches.
8. When it comes to the cost of using plastic bags, facts don't lie. Public agencies in California alone spend more than \$300 million on cleaning up coastal litter every year.
9. Plastic bags make up more than 10% of washed-up debris that pollutes the U.S. coastline.
10. Discarded plastic bags have turned up as far north as the Arctic Circle and as far south as the Falkland Islands, according to the British Antarctic Survey.
11. Plastic bags are made from petroleum products and natural gas, both non-renewable resources, and their manufacture helps to drive up gas prices.
12. It takes 12 million barrels of oil to produce the plastic bags that the U.S. uses every year.

13. Think custom paper tote bags are better? Think again. The U.S. cuts down 14 million trees a year to supply the raw material to make paper shopping bags.
14. It takes 13% more energy to make a single paper bag than to make two plastic bags.
15. Paper bag production involves the use of chemicals and high temperatures, and it releases toxins into the atmosphere at nearly the same rate as plastic bag production.
16. Paper bags weigh almost ten times as much as plastic ones, meaning that more fuel is required to ship them to stores.
17. Despite being highly recyclable, only 20% of paper bags end up being recycled, while the rest share a fate with their plastic brethren.
18. In landfills, paper bags create more than twice as much atmospheric waste as plastic ones do, so they're not necessarily a better choice for the environment.
19. Ireland was the first European country to impose a tax on plastic bags. The nation has decreased its plastic shopping bag use by 90% since 2002, cutting overall plastic bag use by 1.08 billion.
20. More than a dozen nations have banned or taxed disposable bags in the past five years.
21. Custom reusable grocery bags come in a wide variety of stylish shapes and prints, making shopping a bit less routine and more fun. They can be customized and imprinted with logos and designs to be used over and over.
22. Some grocery stores offer discounts to customers who bring reusable bags: Now that's an incentive!
23. If every person in New York City used one less grocery bag, it would cut waste by 5 million pounds and save \$250,000 in disposal costs.
24. The average reusable bag has a lifespan equal to that of more than 700 disposable plastic bags.
25. One person using reusable bags over their lifetime would remove more than 22,000 plastic bags from the environment. Isn't that an even better incentive?

PLEASE CONSIDER USING A REUSABLE BAG IN THE FUTURE!

Mayor John E. McCormac

