



Single-use plastic shopping bag ban

Environmental pros and cons of alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags

All bags have an impact on the environment. Energy and other resources are used in their production and there are also environmental impacts when they are disposed of. In this factsheet we provide the pros and cons of different bag types and tips to reduce their overall impact on the environment.

Woven and non-woven polypropylene (100% recycled content) – Best Option

- **Pros:** One of the lowest environmental impacts, durable, strong.
- **Cons:** May be more expensive than new (virgin plastic material bags).

Tip: where possible consider offering a take back scheme for bags and recycling them into new bags.

Woven and non-woven polypropylene

- **Pros:** durable, strong.
- **Cons:** needs fossil-fuel based plastic to manufacture.



Tip: Look for bags with recycled plastic content to reduce environmental impact.

Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) reusable bag

- **Pros:** durable, strong.
- **Cons:** sometimes includes composite materials making it harder to process if recycled.

Tip: Look for bags with recycled plastic content to reduce environmental impact.

Cotton (tote style)

- **Pros:** durable, light and compact, easy to wash.
- **Cons:** needs a lot of resources (energy, water) to manufacture, typically needs pesticides in the manufacturing process unless explicitly stated as being 'organic cotton'.



Tips: Need to be reused 130+ times to make the environmental impact lower than single-use plastic bags. Try to avoid bags with plastic liners as these often break up and make the bag hard to recycle or compost.

Cotton/hemp string bag

- **Pros:** Light and compact, easy to wash, easy to carry.
- **Cons:** Cotton needs a lot of energy and water to manufacture. Not suitable for smaller items.



Tip: If choosing a string bag, hemp may be better than cotton as it requires less energy to cultivate.

Jute or hessian

- **Pros:** durable, strong, jute needs little water for cultivation.
- **Cons:** may be lined with other materials or have cotton handles which makes it harder to process if recycled and may require more resources in production. May not perform well in wet weather.



Tip: Try to avoid bags with plastic liners as these often break up and make the bag hard to recycle or compost.

Recycled fabric bags

- **Pros:** reuses existing resources, light and compact, easy to wash.
- **Cons:** quality of bag may vary depending on how well it is made.



Tip: May work well for a bag share scheme (eg, boomerang bags).

Paper

- **Pros:** light, accessible, easy to carry.
- **Cons:** high carbon footprint, uses a lot of resources (eg, wood, chemicals, energy and water).



Tips: Choose unbleached over bleached. Look for recycled content.

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