

DID YOU KNOW THAT ...

- The average American throws away 4.5 pounds of materials every day, over 16,000 pounds a year.
- Californians discard 600 plastic bags a second, that's 19 billion plastic bags each year.
- Public agencies in California spend more than \$300 million annually in litter cleanup.

Becoming aware of our culture's excessive consumption habit is the first step toward creating positive change. The second, is getting over that initial overwhelmed feeling and committing to make small but significant changes to your daily choices. As inconsequential as one plastic bag, one coffee cup, one plastic water bottle may seem, multiply one by 365 days or 6 billion people and those numbers suddenly take on a whole new meaning. Our choices do matter and it's time we felt empowered to do our part for the planet, for our children, and for our children's children.

WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

Today, more than half of what you take home from the store will go to landfill in less than 6 months. Let's uncover the culprits and the greener alternatives:

THE CULPRIT: PLASTIC BAGS

- Made from petroleum, a non-renewable resource
- Not biodegradable
- Easily blown away, even when "properly" disposed
- Lethal to marine life, that mistake bags for food
- Can only be "downcycled" into low-grade materials

ALTERNATIVES

- Your hands - a truly renewable resource
- Canvas tote bags - choose sustainable materials like organic and fair trade fabrics
- Cloth produce bags and pouches - great for produce and bulk items
- Paper bags from 100% recycled content - reuse as long as possible, then recycle or compost
- Compostable "bioplastic" bags - use sparingly if nothing else is available
- Wash and reuse your token plastic bag

THE CULPRIT: STYROFOAM

- Defined by EPA as "toxic"
- Not biodegradable or recyclable
- Chemicals leach into hot food and drinks
- Breaks into tiny pieces, contaminating our soil, water & food chain

ALTERNATIVES

- Bring your own container for leftovers
- Bring your own mug or bottle

THE CULPRIT: HOT CUP LIDS

- Made from same plastic as styrofoam (polystyrene)
- Hot liquids draw chemicals out of the lid

ALTERNATIVES

- Bring your own stainless steel or ceramic mug
- Sit down and enjoy your drink where you bought it; consider this your grand opportunity to slow down

THE CULPRIT: PLASTIC CUTLERY

- Another non-biodegradable plastic
- Harmful chemical (BPA) released into hot food

ALTERNATIVES

- Bring your own reusable cutlery: stainless steel, bamboo, or "Spudware" (starch-based compostable cutlery)

THE CULPRIT: THE PLASTIC WATER BOTTLE

In 1973, no plastic water bottles were sold in the US. By 2006, 75% of Americans were drinking bottled water. The bottled water industry spent \$53.8 million dollars that year persuading us that their product was purer, tastier and "a healthy alternative." Yet studies show that bottled water is not necessarily any safer or better tasting than tap water. In 2002, US citizens threw away 93 billion plastic water bottles; placed end-to-end, that's enough to reach the moon and back 38 times.

ALTERNATIVES

- Buy a stainless steel canteen
- Carry a glass bottle or container
- Seek out a drinking fountain

PAPER OR PLASTIC? NEITHER.

WHY NOT PLASTIC?

Annually in the US, we use over 12 million barrels of non-renewable fossil fuels to produce 88.5 billion plastic bags. Plastic bags are not biodegradable and usually end up in landfills or as unsightly litter. Although plastic bags can be recycled (once only), estimates are that less than 1% actually are. Plastic bags can last for up to 1000 years in a landfill.

WHY NOT PAPER?

In 1999, 14 million trees were cut to produce 10 billion paper bags for American shoppers. It takes more energy to manufacture paper bags than to make an equivalent number of plastic bags. Paper bags are biodegradable, more likely to be recycled, and many are made from recycled content. Still, if they end up in an air-locked landfill, deprived of oxygen and micro-organisms that break down biodegradable materials, their ability to decompose will be severely limited.

"Waste is a terrible thing to waste."



CREATIVITY IS KEY

While there are hundreds of green alternatives on the market these days, some of the best options require just a dash of creativity. Reuse glass pasta sauce jars and plastic yogurt containers. Reshape old t-shirts into cloth produce bags. Take a look around your home, you'll be surprised by what's at your finger tips.

ALTERNATIVE BAGS

REUSABLE BAGS AND CONTAINERS: *Your Best Bet*

REUSABLE BAGS come in all shapes, sizes and materials. These bags can be made of: bamboo, cotton, canvas, eco-spun (bags made from recycled plastic), hemp, or nylon.

REUSED CONTAINERS AND TUPPERWARE are perfect for delicate berries or leafy greens. Give your yogurt containers and apple sauce jars a second breath of life.

Your conscious decision to use a reusable bag, or a reused container from home, is an important step toward living more lightly on the planet. If reused again and again, any reusable bag or container will eliminate the waste of hundreds, even thousands, of single-use bags over its lifetime.

BIODEGRADABLE BAGS: *A Band-Aid Solution*

There are two main types of biodegradable bags:

1. BIO-BASED: Made from cornstarch, potatoes, and wheat, these degrade at least 60% within 180 days or less. Some bags claim to break down in as little as 10 days when placed in an industrial composting facility.

PROS: Take plastics out of production and the waste stream.

CONS: Many are made from corn grown with genetically modified seed. If placed in an air-locked landfill, their ability to decompose will be severely restricted.

2. ADDITIVE-BASED: These are polyethylene films (read "plastic") which include some type of additive to allow degradation after use.

PROS: Cheaper than bio-based. Eventual degradation of littered bags may reduce harm to wildlife.

CONS: Made from fossil fuels. If placed in an air-locked landfill, their ability to decompose will be severely restricted. Polyethylene particles remain in the soil and water when degradation is complete.

SOURCES

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

ECO EXPRESS. Distributor of reusable bags and eco-conscious gifts. (800) 733-3495, www.ecoexpress.com

GREEN HOME. Distributor of assorted eco-conscious products ranging from reusable bags, to green products for your home and office. (415) 282-6400, www.greenhome.com

MARIN FARMERS MARKETS. In addition to a bounty of fresh and local produce, you will also find tote bags and produce bags, locally made from 100% organic cotton.

REUSABLE BAGS. Distributor of reusable shopping bags and other innovative, practical products, all designed to help people consume less. (773) 912-1562, www.reusablebags.com

FOR BUSINESSES

BIOBAG USA. Producer of biodegradable bags in assorted sizes. Also available through many local distributors. (800) 959-BAGS, www.biobagusa.com

EARTHWARE BIODEGRADABLES. Local producer of biodegradable cutlery. (800) 211-6747, www.earthwarebiodegradables.com

EXCELLENT PACKAGING & SUPPLY. Distributor of biodegradable wares including bags, cutlery, cups, and serving containers. (510) 243-9501, (800) 317-2737, www.excellentpackaging.com

GREEN EARTH OFFICE SUPPLY. Distributor of biodegradable wares including bags, cutlery, cups, and serving containers. (800) 327-8449, (408) 969-0900, www.greenearthofficesupply.com

GREEN HOME. Distributor of biodegradable wares including bags, cutlery, cups, and serving containers. (415) 282-6400, www.greenhome.com



WHAT YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE



GREENING YOUR LIFESTYLE

