

Seu ENVIRONMENTAL...



The voice of www.reusablebags.com states that “up to 1 trillion bags are used worldwide every year” and they also quote that “over 380 billion plastic bags, sacks and wraps are consumed in the US each year.”

Clean Up Australia quotes that “Australians use in excess of 6 billion plastic bags a year. If they were all tied together they would form a chain long enough to go around the world 37 times!” As part of Clean Up Australia Day, in one day nearly 500,000 plastic bags were collected.

The China Daily website reported that 3 billion plastic bags are used daily in China!

Windblown plastic bags are so prevalent in Africa that a cottage industry has sprung up harvesting bags and using them to weave hats, and even bags. According to the BBC, one groups harvests 30,000 per month.

The Wall Street Journal says that the USA goes through 100 billion plastic shopping bags annually (estimated cost to retailers is \$4 billion).

Disposable plastic shopping bags made their mark on the shopping scene in '70s and '80s and took over from paper bags. Remember the days of coming home from the grocery store with the heavy square-bottomed bags full of produce? So would it be better to return to paper bags? Not according to research, paper in today's modern landfills doesn't degrade or break down at a faster rate than plastic; this is mainly due to the lack of water, light and oxygen. Although paper bags have a higher recycling rate than plastic, each new paper grocery





bag that is used is made from mostly virgin pulp for better strength and elasticity. So there goes the 'recycled paper grocery bag' theory!

Only 10 to 15% of paper bags are recycled and 1 to 3% of plastic bags. There is virtually no market for recycling plastic bags and very few recycling centres accept them because of their low recyclable value. Your local supermarket may collect used plastic bags for recycling but

very few are actually recycled, they are just dumped! The biggest problem with plastic bags is that they don't readily break down in the environment, with estimates for the time it takes them to decompose ranging from 20 to 1000 years.

With today's high consumer use of plastic bags it's about time we took to the machine and created some unique bags that say 'who we are' (they also make great presents for friends and family). Even the world of quilters and crafters are turning to the 'not for the bed, let's use it instead' mentality by making bags and totes with their artistic skills. It's about time we garment makers put aside some time and turned our hand to addressing this environmental disaster.

Kwik•Sew has always had a line of bag and tote patterns and they have upped the ante a little further by running a 'green bag' theme with their pattern 3612 (main photo). A fabric bag is a more personalised and identifiable and a great substitute for the bags that the major supermarket chains have to offer. String, calico or biodegradable bags are readily available at these big stores, but smaller businesses have cost restraints and can't supply these alternatives or they are price-prohibitive in these harder economic times. The rigidity of some of these bags doesn't allow them to be folded up easily and put into a glove compartment, purse or backpack, so a softer bag can be the answer. Fashion folk also like an individual look, so having a bag which has been personally created by or for the user does make more of a statement!



Bag patterns have been a big part of Kwik•Sew patterns in the USA for years and latest pattern 3612 is a winner with all who use it. It's a great base for running a class and they are easy and clean to construct and there is no fitting involved. All the techniques of pockets, zips, buttonholes and lining are used, so bag-making can also be a good entry project for a beginner and an absolute blank canvas for an embellisher! Fashion trims and piping give a unique and professional finish as well. The addition of a little 'bling' can add a more fun aspect as does machine embroidery, for those who have this at their disposal.

If you are wishing to make a stronger bag, use a firmer lining like cotton duck, calico, cotton canvas or cotton drill. If the lining fabric is very heavy the inner shell will need to be a little smaller than the outer to ensure they fit well into one another. This would only be a matter of taking a bigger seam allowance when stitching up the inner bag lining. For making a chiller or cooler-type shopping bag, a layer of 'thinsulate' or 'insultech' (a thin batting that used in table mats and has a foil type look to it) could be used but check to see if it is washable. Variations of these sorts of insulation products are available from some of the bigger retailers or quilting stores. A sleeve (that fits inside the outside edges of a bag) of Neoprene also works very well for chilling goods. Neoprene is the fabric that wet-suits are made from and it's relatively easy to stitch with a jeans needle and a long stitch. Most products that will protect surfaces from heat will generally keep things cool as well. Firm cotton webbing can

be threaded through handles to give a bag more lifting strength as does an extra layer of calico mounted to the fabric and then treated at one. More rows of topstitching on a handle or opening of a bag makes them stronger and more resilient.

Some of the major advantages of using cloth bags are; they are stronger than plastic, much easier to carry by their handles, easier on the hands when they are laden and they can be washed and re-used. It does take a little more effort to get into the habit of ensuring you have them with you when you're shopping as it's just 'another' thing to remember, but these sorts of habits can be formed easily. Having more than a couple is the answer, as is being methodical in returning them to their 'storage place' so they are available for their next use.

A note from Martyn: I was astounded with some of the findings during my research into plastic bags but these facts and findings are forwarded as my own opinion. Making a bag seems like such a little thing to do in comparison to the bigger picture, but if it helps our environment then it's worth doing. I can't say that I'm really good at the whole recycling objective but our household does try to do its bit as I can't stand waste. Over the past six months I've watched two plastic shopping bags that are stuck high up in the Pohutukawa trees over from my apartment. They have withstood storms and gales but they're still there, are not shifting, and will probably blot the picturesque landscape for years to come? Be seen to be green!