

Everyday Environmental Stewardship



Biodegradable Plastic Bags *Russell Foxworthy*

Key Issue: Preventing Waste

Stewardship Opportunities: Buying and Using Greener Plastic Bags

Every day we use plastic bags to hold our trash, carry our food, protect our papers from the rain, and even to pick up after our dogs. **The average family will throw out 1,500 plastic trash bags every year!** But less than 2% of these plastic bags will actually make it into the recycling process, which means that over 98% of plastic bags will end up in landfills, in the fires of incinerators, or on the streets as litter. Plastic bags are recycled less often than other plastic items like bottles because they are either carrying trash or have somehow been dirtied by waste or food and are thrown out as a result. Plastic bags take hundreds of years to decompose. They trap air in landfills, taking up an artificially large amount of space. Many landfills remain open until they are full, allowing the wind to blow plastic bags out of the landfill, creating more litter.



In addition to creating less waste, consumers can now reduce their environmental impact by buying biodegradable trash bags. Recently, two new forms of biodegradable plastic bags have hit the markets: *oxo-biodegradable* and *hydro-biodegradable*. *Hydro biodegradable* bags are a product of crops and are much more expensive than conventional plastic bags. They should not be used unless they are holding compostable materials, such as food, yard trimmings, and other organic waste. Hydro-biodegradable bags will degrade within several months, making them good for composts but inappropriate for most other uses. In addition, they cannot be recycled with traditional plastics.



Instead, one should buy *oxo-biodegradable* plastic products. *Oxo-biodegradable* plastic bags (the box will usually say from what material its bags are made) cost the same or a little more than traditional plastic bag products. *Oxo biodegradable* plastic bags are made from recycled plastics and are biodegradable because there is an additive in them that slowly breaks them down to a point where naturally occurring microorganisms can take over the decomposition process. Within two years *oxo-biodegradable* bags are completely gone. *Oxo-biodegradable* bags are the same weight and strength as

traditional plastic bags because they are made from plastic. In short, they won't leak! They offer the same convenience as the traditional non-biodegradable bags

In addition to trash bags, certain companies are now selling biodegradable bags in many different forms: Lawn and Leaf bags, Plastic Drop Cloths, Kitty Litter Bags, Sandwich Bags, and even Dog Duty Bags. It is important that we all put in the extra effort to purchase biodegradable bags so that we may leave less waste behind.

You can purchase biodegradable plastic bags at your local grocery store, home and garden supply store, and at pharmacies that carry household supplies (CVS, Brooks, or Walgreen, for example). If a store at which you shop is not selling biodegradable bags, ask the management to start stocking them. You can also purchase the bags online at one of these websites or from a large supplier like amazon.com.



perfgogreen.com
ecoproducts.com
biosmartbiodegradable.com
biodegradablestore.com

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