

Practical Alternatives to Thin-film Plastic Bags



REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

One of the most versatile and easiest options for residents is the reusable shopping bag. Reusable bags can be made of woven polypropylene, non-woven polypropylene, nylon, cotton, jute, juco, and more recently bamboo and biodegradable bags. They are readily available at many retail outlets and online. The bags come in various designs, sizes, materials, colors, and prices. They are easy to store and many are washable. Most are strong and long-lasting – over its life a good quality reusable bag can replace 1,000 + thin-film shopping bags. These bags are made in the US and overseas. Some are made from recycled materials, but not all are recyclable. Check to ensure that plastic ones are free of heavy metals. You can even make your own reusable bags, including from t-shirts – you can find numerous design options and how-to instructions online.

***Note:** As with any item in your home, regular cleaning is needed, particularly when using the bags to carry food – and especially raw meat, fish, and chicken – to avoid cross-contamination (which can also happen with thin-film bags that are reused).*

***TIP:** Dedicate one bag for non-packaged/raw food items and place your deposit returns in that bag, so you can remember to bring them with you on your next trip to the grocer.*

OPTIONS FOR COMMON HOUSEHOLD USES OF THIN-FILM BAGS

Note: while the new bylaws will reduce non-essential plastics from everyday use, they will by no means eliminate plastics from our lives. For example, newspapers, bread, some cereals, frozen fruit and vegetables, toilet paper, paper towels, and lots of other things come in plastic bags, all of which can be re-used in various ways around the house, including many of the examples cited below.

**Formerly the Lee Recycling Committee*

Trash, Recyclables, and Compostables

- For large trash baskets, use traditional trashcan liners, which will not be regulated.
- For small waste containers, including compost, skip the liner and regularly wash them.
- For recyclables, use sturdy containers such as recycling bins, totes, and cardboard boxes. (NOTE: you should never dispose of recyclables in plastic bags.)
- Food waste can be composted rather than thrown in the trash (the Committee will host two workshops at the Lee Public Library this year – one in the spring and one in the fall – on composting).

Pets

- Dog: Reuse produce bags from grocery stores, or newspaper bags (which will not be regulated), “Ziploc”-type bags, or other food storage bags; more environmentally friendly alternatives are appearing on the market, including such locally available brands as Biobags and Earth Rated.
- Cat: Many types of litter are reported to be compostable; to dispose of clay litters, alternatives include:
 - the original litter package
 - a plastic bucket with top
 - a cardboard box
 - a capped trash container
 - compostable bags, such as Biobags
 - purchased trash bags (not the best solution)

Note: Please do not flush litter as that act creates its own environmental hazards.

Transporting Items

Many times you may quickly grab a thin-film bag for transporting such items as clothing, shoes, etc. You'll find that the reusable bags described above work well for this. Take care not to use the same bags as you do for your food shopping needs. Backpacks and cloth bags are great alternatives.

Fishing

Some residents use the thin-film bags when fishing for both transportation and waste disposal. The best alternative is a small covered bucket. The fish waste can always be composted and the buckets can be easily cleaned.