

CREATE OR DECORATE REUSEABLE BAGS

Between 500 billion to one trillion plastic shopping bags are used worldwide each year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Most of these bags are used only once and thrown away, ending up in landfills or polluting land and water and damaging wildlife habitat. We can reduce plastic-bag waste by using reusable bags. Using four or five reusable bags multiple times at least once a week can replace 520 plastic bags a year.

Outcomes

Participants will learn the problem with plastic shopping bags and commit to using reusable bags.

Audience

Youth (5+), adults

Time

20 - 40 minutes

Concepts

- Plastic shopping bags, while convenient, are a waste and are generally not accepted in residential recycling programs.
- Avoid plastic bags by using reusable bags when you go shopping. Remember to bring bags with you every time you go shopping, including at the grocery store, retail and clothing stores, farmer's markets, department stores, hardware stores – everywhere!

Supplies

- Reusable bags made from canvas, cotton, recycled plastic, etc. Order reusable bags through the Hennepin County Green Partners Seed program at www.hennepin.us/greenpartners.
- Crayons, fabric markers, glue and art scraps such as yarn, ribbon or fabric.
- "Remember the bags" window clings (order online at www.hennepin.us/literatureorderform).



CREATE OR DECORATE REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

Preparation

Order free reusable bags to decorate and "Remember the Bags" window clings in advance at www.hennepin.us/greenpartners.

Procedure

- Discuss the use of reusable versus disposable shopping bags with participants. Do they already use reusable bags? When do they use reusable bags? Do they have any challenges with remembering to bring or using reusable bags?
- Pass out plain reusable bags and reusable art supplies and bags to participants and have participants decorate the bags.
- Distribute Remember the Bags window clings, and encourage participants to place the clings where it will prompt them to bring their bags with them when they go to the store.
- Ask participants to commit to bringing bags with them every time they go shopping. Even if they already use reusable bags, discuss ways they can increase their use of reusable bags (for example, people may use bags at the grocery store but forget about it when they are shopping for clothing). Have participants sign a commitment form to pledge to bring reusable bags with them when shopping.

Discussion questions

- Does anyone already bring reusable bags when shopping? What motivated you to start bringing reusable bags? Where did you get the bags?
- If you are not bringing a reusable bag with you when shopping, what is holding you back? How can people overcome those barriers?
- How can you remember to take reusable bags with you when you go shopping?
- How do you define reusable? What are the benefits of reusable bags?
- What are the impacts of plastic shopping bags on the environment? Consider having participants research impacts of plastic shopping bags and report back to the group.
- Why are plastic shopping bags a problem at recycling facilities? What are other options for recycling plastic bags? (Bring them to a drop-off facility or retailer take-back program)

Resources

- Handout: "Remember the bags" window cling available at www.hennepin.us/literatureorderform. See Appendix for a sample.