

Let's Talk About Plastic Bags

Northbrook Farmers Market believes that change begins when people understand how their choices contribute to solutions for our planet. Please join us.



Let's face it, we use A LOT of plastic bags! The U.S. contributes 100 billion to the trillion used worldwide! Plastic bags choke our landfills and landscapes.

A Few facts:

- More than 3.5 million tons of plastic bags are discarded annually; less than 3% are recycled.
- The vast majority end up in landfills, as well as in forests, rivers, and oceans.
- They don't really break down; a single plastic bag can take decades to degrade. In reality, most plastic does not ever disappear, but becomes long-lasting "plastic dust."
- Plastic bags are toxin carriers. When bags deteriorate, they readily soak up (and release) toxins that then contaminate soil and water, as well as harm animals that ingest plastic fragments.
- Plastic bags are an ever-present danger to aquatic life. They cause the death of millions of marine animals including fish, sea turtles, sharks, whales, dolphins, and especially birds, when animals mistake them for food.
- Plastic bags are costly. They're not free--they cost U.S. retailers about \$4 billion a year. We, the end-users, pay for them in higher prices.
- Millions of barrels of petroleum are needed to make all these plastic bags. Petroleum production and its use harm the environment by polluting air and water.

WE CAN DO THIS!

While we cannot eliminate petroleum use from our economy, we certainly can reduce it. We also can do our part to reduce the amount of plastic bag waste ending up in landfills, landscapes and oceans.

We start by making a cultural shift away from a use-and-toss mentality. How?

- Use the tote bags that are already in your house or car! Take comfort in knowing that each reusable tote eliminates hundreds (if not thousands) of plastic bags in our world. *
- Engage with your community to clean up the local environment. Help out wherever and whenever you can.
- Join an environmental group.
- Speak up: together we can pressure local governments to ban or tax** the use of plastic bags the same way dozens of nations already have done.

* The solution is not switching to paper bags or compostable bags. Why? A study on the life cycle of three types of disposable bags (single-use plastic, paper, and compostable plastic) showed that the added energy requirements for manufacturing and transport of paper and compostable bags far exceed that of the standard plastic bag system.

** In 2001 Ireland implemented PlasTax, the first of its kind. This acknowledges that people will still occasionally use plastic bags. A market-based solution discourages daily, thoughtless use of plastic bags by charging a nominal fee at checkout. The Irish government found that plastic bag usage dropped 93.5%--a drop from 328 to 21 bags per person each year.