



Plastic Bag Recycling

About Plastic Bags

Australians use about 3.9 billion lightweight supermarket shopping bags every year, mostly as a single use item.

There are two major types of plastic shopping bags.

Lightweight, checkout-style bags are most commonly found in supermarkets and takeaway stores, and are made from high density polyethylene or HDPE. The heavier, tougher plastic bags found in boutique and department stores are

made from low density polyethylene or LDPE.

Plastic bags are linked to a range of environmental impacts.

Most are made from a non-renewable resource (oil) and used only once before being thrown away. As oil supplies become scarcer, we simply can't afford to throw away such a valuable resource. Plastic bags also present life-threatening risks to wildlife and livestock. Turtles, whales, birds and fish are especially vulnerable. Plastic bags floating in water can be mistaken for food. Once ingested, a bag can prevent the animal from digesting food or can prevent them submerging.



There are a growing number of options for recycling soft plastic

Recycling Options

Some council's now accept plastic bags in their kerbside recycling bins. Check with your council first if they accept plastic bags, otherwise keep them out of the recycling bins as they can get caught up in the processing machinery and contaminate other recycling streams. Most supermarkets have a front of store bin that accepts single use plastic shopping bags and reusable 'green bags' for recycling.

Working out what to do with some types of plastic bags can be tricky as some are labeled 'Biodegradable', 'Compostable' and 'Degradable'. These types of bags unfortunately cannot be recycled.

- **Biodegradable bags**- made from plant-based materials like corn and wheat starch, in the presence of oxygen these bags will break down. However, in landfill, an anaerobic environment, the bags cannot biodegrade.
- **Compostable bags** - generally refer to biodegradable bags that will biodegrade within 6 months if composted.
- **Degradable bags** - are made from petroleum products that contain metal compounds to help accelerate their breakdown. Oxygen, ultra-violet light and/or heat chemically weaken degradable plastic bags until they become brittle and fragment into smaller pieces (the full environmental impacts of these fragments are unknown but a proportion end up in our waterways and the ocean). This breaking down process may take up to 5 years to occur. These bags cannot be composted.

Why Recycle Plastic Bags?

- **It saves energy** – refusing, reusing and recycling plastic bags reduces the need for the energy required to produce new plastic bags.
- **It reduces environmental impacts** – recycling plastic bags helps reduce littering and bags entering our waterways and becoming a threat to wildlife.
- **It saves resources** – plastic bags are mainly made from non-renewable petroleum based resources. Recycling existing plastic helps reduce the need to use these resources.
- **It reduces waste going to landfill** – recycling plastics bags diverts them from landfill where they are unable to break down.

Take Action

1. Whenever possible, refuse and reuse plastic bags. When shopping take reusable bags with you.
2. Find out, through RecyclingNearYou.com.au or your council's website, whether your council accepts plastic bags and to find your nearest supermarket that accepts them for recycling.
3. Check out the [REDcycle program](#) that accepts plastic bags and other soft plastic through participating supermarkets.
4. Increasingly, bans of plastics bags are becoming more common. See below for further information.



REDcycle Soft Plastics Collection Bin

Further Information

[Zerowaste SA](#)
[NT Government](#)
[ACT Government](#)