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Kicking the plastic bag habit: practice makes perfect

Learning something new takes practice, time and patience. So does forming a new habit, like remembering to bring a reusable bag to the grocery store.

In October, the City of Portland enacted a landmark restriction on the use of single-use plastic bags at most grocery stores and large retail stores. These are the bags that many shoppers received in grocery stores and pharmacies, and they also can cause environmental problems, including at recycling facilities and littering Oregon rivers and the Pacific Ocean.

Many Portland residents already own reusable bags, but it can be a challenge to remember them when you head to the store or pharmacy. According to the Northwest Earth Institute, it takes about two weeks to break an old habit and form a new one. The City of Portland will be working with residents to help them remember reusable bags as a way to introduce a new green habit, as well as providing reusable bags free-of-charge to qualifying low-income residents and seniors.

While it will take a bit of time and a few reminders to develop the new habit, the city of Portland offers these tips to help you to remember:

- Return bags to your car.
- Store bags near your house keys or near the door.
- Write a reminder on your grocery list.

“Portlanders are creative folks, so I know that they will come up with their own unique ways to remember reusable bags,” said Portland Mayor Sam Adams. “Using single-use bags is a habit worth kicking.”

For older Portlanders, another challenge is deciding what bag works best for your needs.

- *Do you walk to the grocery store?* Bags with longer handles allow them to be slung over the shoulder. Bags with shorter handles can be more comfortable if you’re carrying them by hand.
- *Do you drive, take transit or cabs?* You can pack a few bags inside of a single bag to make sure you have options.
- Sturdy cloth bags are preferable to some shoppers, while others prefer coated plastic reusable bags, many which have square bottoms and are better for certain types of groceries.
- There are so many options, and most reusable bags cost between fifty cents and two dollars, and can be laundered in the washing machine.

Residents who cannot afford to purchase a bag can fill out the form for a free reusable bag at www.bringyourbagpdx.com or call the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability's curbside hotline at 503-823-7202. There are also many non-profits helping to distribute bags, including Elders in Action, Meals on Wheels and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon.

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