

# How the package you pick makes a difference

## PAPER VS. PLASTIC GROCERY BAGS

■ **Impact:** About 19 billion plastic grocery and merchandise bags are used annually in California. Of those, 4 percent or fewer are recycled. Plastic bags often end up as non-degradable litter. When they enter the marine environment, they become a threat to animals there. Most curbside recycling programs do not accept plastic shopping bags.

■ **Options:** Bring your own bags and use canvas. When that's not possible, choose paper bags, which are almost always made of 40 percent to 100 percent recycled material. Return plastic shopping bags to supermarkets for recycling. When you can carry an item without a bag, skip the bag altogether.

## PAPER TOWELS AND NAPKINS

■ **Impact:** The manufacturing of paper causes deforestation and consumes fresh water.

■ **Options:** Use cloth dish towels and napkins, which can be laundered and reused. If buying paper towels and napkins, look for ones of 100 percent recycled material; any used to clean up food spills can go in the compost pile.

## PLASTIC CLAMSHELL FOOD PACKAGES

■ **Impact:** Clamshells, clear or foam, can't be recycled. The packaging increases transportation cost because of increased bulk. Transportation causes pollution and uses petroleum.

■ **Options:** When possible, buy items in bulk or packaged in paperboard, which typically is made of recycled material.

## EGG CARTONS

■ **Impact:** Cartons made of polystyrene plastic polymer (which looks similar to Styrofoam) cannot be recycled and do not break down in landfills. In addition, the manufacturing of polystyrene uses byproducts of petroleum processing, involving a nonrenewable fossil fuel.

■ **Options:** Buy eggs in paperboard containers, which are made of 40 percent or more recycled materials and can be recycled in curbside-collection programs.

## COFFEE FILTERS

■ **Impact:** Bleaching of paper products with chlorine creates wastewater and harmful byproducts. Many unbleached filters are made with virgin materials rather than recycled material.

■ **Options:** If possible, use a reusable filter, which can be washed and reused, or at least buy filters made with unbleached, recycled material.

## WATER BOTTLES

■ **Impact:** The International Bottled Water Association, a trade group in Alexandria, Va., reports that last year, Americans drank 8.25 billion gallons of bottled water. In California, 53 percent of plastic drink containers are not recycled and end up in landfills. In addition, energy is used to manufacture and transport bottles to market, which uses fossil fuels.

■ **Options:** When possible, bring tap water from home in a reusable container. When you buy bottled water, make sure you recycle the container.

## MILK JUGS

■ **Impact:** When plastic jugs are recycled, there's little impact. But the polycoated paper used for milk products and frozen food cannot be added to curbside recycle trash in some communities.

■ **Options:** Plastic food containers that have the number 1 or 2 on the bottom, such as milk jugs, can be recycled. Only a few communities are able to recycle the gable-style, polycoated paper cartons, so choose plastic and recycle.

## FOOD STORAGE BAGS

■ **Impact:** Like plastic grocery bags, they often end up as litter and can't be recycled. Over time, they will break down into smaller pieces, but they never disappear.

■ **Options:** There are few options other than using reusable, rigid plastic containers that can eventually be recycled. When using plastic food-storage bags, try to reuse them as many times as possible before discarding them.

## SIX-PACK RINGS

■ **Impact:** When they end up in marine environments or in wildlife areas, they can cause distress to animals. They are photodegradable under perfect conditions, according to Murray, but that can take months or years.

■ **Options:** At the very least, take the time to cut apart the rings to prevent animals from becoming trapped.

## TRASH CAN LINERS

■ **Impact:** They have not degraded yet in our history, according to Murray. At best they break down into smaller and smaller pieces over time. This applies even to those labeled as biodegradable.

■ **Options:** Use paper grocery bags when possible. Make good use of compost piles. If you can't compost, place wet garbage into curbside cans and deal with the yuck factor.

