

Reusable Grocery Bags: A Smart Choice But Play It Safe



Reusable grocery bags have become very popular as people seek to reduce waste and protect the environment. Cloth and plastic-lined bags do help, but are they safe?

Reusable grocery bags are a smart choice but there could be some risk. When you carry food or other items in these bags, they may leave behind germs like E. coli or Salmonella. If the bags are not properly washed and dried before they are used again, these germs remain and can make you sick.

Keep yourself and your family safe. Follow these easy steps to reduce the spread of germs:

Separate meat, fish or poultry; fresh produce, and ready-to-eat foods.

- Use separate bags. Dedicate one bag for meat, fish or poultry; another for fresh fruits and vegetables, and another for ready-to-eat foods. It's also a good idea to keep these foods separated in your shopping cart, on the checkout lane's conveyor belt, and at home. This will help prevent germs from spreading.
- Remember: cold food needs to be refrigerated within two hours of leaving the store or market. When temperatures outside are above 90 degrees, cold food should be refrigerated within one hour.

Always put raw meats into a disposable plastic bag before putting them in a reusable bag.

- A disposable plastic bag will help contain any juices that drip off raw meat, fish and poultry packages. These juices will then be unable to touch other foods and contaminate them. Disposable plastic bags are usually available in your store's raw meat, fish, poultry or produce areas.
- Immediately after use, throw away disposable plastic bags used for raw meat, fish or poultry. Never reuse bags that contained raw meat, fish or poultry.

Wash reusable grocery bags often.

- **Cloth** reusable bags should be washed in a washing machine using laundry detergent. They should also be dried in the dryer or air-dried.
- **Plastic-lined** reusable bags should be scrubbed using hot water and soap, then air-dried.
- Before storing, be sure both cloth and plastic-lined reusable bags are completely dry.

Reusable Bags are best stored in a cool, dry place when possible.

- Reusable bags are best stored in a cool, dry place when possible. Make sure your bags are clean to inhibit bacteria growth.

Do not use reusable grocery bags for other purposes.

- Bags used for groceries should be used only for food. Don't carry items such as baby bottles, toys, gym clothes, and other items in the same reusable bags that you take to the grocery store.

These simple steps will help reduce the spread of germs to keep you and your family safe.

