

# Shopping Bags from reused materials

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## **An Opportunity**

British shoppers are thought to use about 8,000,000,000 of plastic shopping bags a year, some 134 a person, and at present plastic bags are mostly thrown away as soon as the shopping is brought home, creating a huge waste problem. The obvious solution is for people to have their own reusable shopping bags that will last for a good long time.

Here is an opportunity to reuse some materials that are currently being discarded. I have been making very acceptable shopping bags out of the large non-returnable bags currently used for the delivery of sand and other aggregates. I have found builders only too happy for me to take away any empty bags.

## **Method**

1. The bag may need to be turned inside out and hosed down to get rid of any residual contents.
2. The bag needs to be taken apart at the seams. All the bags I have dealt with so far have been sewn together with chain stitches. If you cut and unpick from the right end you will soon find out how to start to unravel the stitching. If you get it right there will be a sewing thread on either side which can simply be pulled to unpick a whole row of stitching. It is usually worth the effort to take the bags apart at the seams, it can reveal selvedged edges that can be used in making up the new bags. I have found that taking a bag apart takes up to one hour depending on the stitching.
3. Next, some rough ironing, to open any folded hems and generally to flatten the material as best you may. The material is, I think, polypropylene which has a fairly low melting point. On my iron I use the setting for silk, any hotter than this and the material starts to pucker.
4. The material is now ready for cutting. I use a sheet of plywood as a cutting board, a metal straight edge and an old kitchen trimming knife. I cut pieces 18 ins by 36 ins (or the width of the material) The cutting out consists of cutting whole pieces off the sand bag panels, avoiding worn or damaged areas. Heat the tip of the knife blade to red heat in a gas ring and then lightly run the blade along the straight edge melting and cutting through the material. BE CAREFUL, the melted material sticks to dry skin and can give you a nasty burn. If you do handle the cut edges I suggest that you do it with wet fingers. It is probably also wise to do the cutting out in a well ventilated area. In my experience, the edge of the residual material seldom stays straight. I usually find I have to cut both sides of each cut out piece.

At this stage I hem both ends of each cut out piece. If there is a selvedge I do a single hem, if not then a double hem. As a precaution I also run a single line of stitching down both sides. The purpose of this is to reduce the chances of the material unravelling in the next stage.

Stages 3 & 4 take about one hour per bag.

5. Load the pieces in a washing machine and run it. I use the setting for synthetics (40 degree wash and fast spin, any particularly persistent marks can be scrubbed using an abrasive if necessary. The material is very tough). Unload and give the pieces a rough ironing to reduce creases caused by the washing.

6. The bag material is rather too stiff to be used for handles. Any suitable remnant cotton or polyester material will serve. Remnants of curtain lining material seem to be available (at least they are in my local co-op store). This material (as long as it is cotton) is also suitable for the logo.

7. The original for the logo is available on floppy disk. In addition to the GreenSpirit logo I also have a Green Man. This has proved to be quite popular and is acceptable to non-members. The logos can be printed to suitable transfer paper and ironed on to white cotton material.

8. At last you can sit at the sewing machine and finish of the bags. Following the pattern given below. Sew the **handles** on the **inside** and the **logo** on the **outside**. For the side hems I usually stitch from top to bottom and back at least three times and at least four times on the looser weaves. That's six or eight lines of stitching. The top corners of the side hems can be quite sharp and it is a good idea to trim them with scissors or a hot knife before turning the bag outside in. The sewing takes about half an hour per bag.



