Paper or Plastic?

After a person finishes shopping, the groceries are packed into a bag. This bag can be made of either paper or plastic. But which is better? Both types of bags have positives and negatives.

Plastic bags are easy to carry. They have handles which make them easier to hold. The plastic bags are strong. They can protect your car if something spills in the bag. Plastic bags will help keep the liquid from spilling into your car.

This type of bag can be reused in your house. They make great liners for small garbage cans. They can be used for a garbage bag in a car. If you decide not to reuse them, they don't take up a lot of space when they are thrown out. It takes less energy to make and to recycle a plastic bag. But most plastic bags are not recycled. Of all the plastic bags that are used every year, only a small percentage of them are recycled.

There are some negatives about using plastic bags. It takes twelve million barrels of oil to make plastic bags for Americans each year. Plastic bags do not decompose easily. To decompose, they need light and air. After they are buried in a landfill, they get neither. It takes 1,000 years for a plastic bag to decompose. However, plastic bags do not take up as much space in landfills as paper bags. Plastic bags can be compacted into a smaller size than paper bags.

Plastic bags are bad for animals. Plastic bags can get stuck on an animal's legs, wings, or fins. They can limit movement or become wrapped so tightly that they create sores. If animals swallow them, in part or whole, the bags can block the intestines. Eventually the animal dies.

Paper bags are another option. Are they better? What are some benefits of paper bags? Paper bags are made to be strong. They aren't as easy to carry as plastic, but you can usually fit more in a large paper bag than in a plastic bag. This means you will have fewer bags to carry home. More paper bags are recycled than plastic bags. Recycling rates for paper bags are still low, though. Only about ten percent of this type of bag is recycled.

What are the negatives of using paper bags? Paper bags do not stop leaks. Any liquids that spill in a paper bag will leak through into your car. It will also cause the paper bag to become weak and rip. This may cause you to drop some of your groceries.

Paper bags are bad for trees. This type of bag takes more energy to make and recycle. Because the bags need to be strong, there is a limit to how much recycled paper can be used. This means that more trees are cut down to make the bags. Fourteen million trees are cut down every year to make the ten billion paper bags that people in the U.S.

The best bags to use for grocery shopping are made of cloth. This type of bag can be used over and over again. You have to bring this type of bag to the store yourself. If you brought your own bags, you would be helping the environment every time you shop.

There are positives and negatives to both paper and plastic bags. Many stores make the choice for you, but sometimes you will get to decide which to use. No matter which type of bag

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you choose, the best choice you can make is to reuse the bags as much as you can. This helps the environment.

Some countries tax plastic bags in order to encourage people to use their own bags. Do you think the Bahamas should do this?

Directions: Put a check mark to show what these are different and the same.

Bag Traits	Paper	Both	Plastic
1. Easy to carry			
2. About 3% are recycled			
3. Require trees to be cut down to make them			
4. Does not decompose easily			
5. Can protect your car from a spill			
6. About 10% are recycled			
7. Can be used over and over			
8. Made to be strong			
9. Takes less energy to make and recycle			
10. Has no bad points			

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