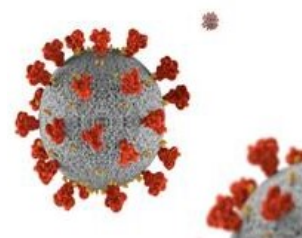


## You Might Be Packing More Than Food In Those Bags!

**Prevent  
the  
Spread of  
COVID-19**



With the nation-wide COVID-19 outbreak, many grocery stores are limiting the use of reusable grocery bags. These reusable grocery bags have many opportunities to harbor germs that can cause illness, according to Margaret Viebrock, WSU Extension County Director and Food Safety Educator.

It's easy for the bags to come in contact with viruses, bacteria and dirty surfaces. These surfaces could include your car, the grocery cart, store service area, conveyor belt, checkout counter and your garage. Reusable grocery bags are a great way to reduce waste, but you may be packing more than food in these bags.

However you may be transporting food, whether it is from the grocery store to home, carrying lunch to work, packing a picnic or taking snacks for a road trip, remember these simple steps to prevent food poisoning.

Your designated reusable grocery bags should only be used for food. Don't carry gym clothes, toys, baby bottles or shoes in the same reusable bags you will take to the grocery store. Keep you and your family healthy by following these safety tips.

1. Designate specific reusable bags just for groceries. Label your bags – one for meats, one for produce and one for dry packaged foods. Don't cross contaminate between the bags by switching the contents.
2. At the grocery store, separate and open your bags so the cashier can easily put your food in the correct bag.
3. If you use disposable plastic bags to prevent liquids from leaking into your bags, throw the plastic bags away when unpacking your groceries.
4. It's also a good idea to use a small fabric bag for non-food items, such as drug store items, books, greeting cards and medicines.
5. Don't store your bags in the car between shopping trips. This is a dark, warm and often humid environment that promotes bacteria growth. Store the bags at home in a cool, dry place where air can circulate.

# Cleaning Your Reusable Grocery Bag

Reusable grocery bags are made from a wide variety of materials. There are woven and nonwoven bags made from recycled plastic. Some bags are made from nylon or polyester fabrics or natural fibers like bamboo, hemp or cotton. Insulated bags can be made with polyester and a coated thermal film to keep foods either hot or cold. Check the label inside the bag for cleaning instructions.

If the bags are not properly washed and dried before they are used again, germs will remain in the bags and on the outside of the bag. You or your children could become sick by touching the bag and then your face and mouth, according to Margaret Viebrock, WSU County Extension County Director and Food Safety Educator.

Follow these easy steps to clean your reusable grocery bags and reduce the spread of germs.

- ✓ Bags made with recycled plastic containers can be machine washed or scrubbed and washed by hand in hot soapy water and then air-dried. Nylon or polyester bags or bags made with bamboo or hemp can be scrubbed and washed by hand in hot soapy water and then air-dried.
- ✓ Machine wash cotton bags with hot water and laundry detergent. Machine or line dry.
- ✓ Wash and scrub insulated bags in soapy warm water or wipe with disinfecting or anti-bacterial wipes, especially along seam lines. Line dry.
- ✓ Before storing, be sure both plastic-lined bags and cloth bags are completely dry.
- ✓ If your bags are worn and dirty, throw them out!



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