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cal<sup>fresh</sup> Nutrition Education

# UC FOOD SAFETY CE UPDATE

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## Reusable Grocery Bags

At one time, using reusable grocery bags was a trend; a popular “green” alternative to reduce waste. Now, it is a commonplace practice. But just how safe are they for our health?

The fabric or materials in reusable grocery bags can get contaminated with germs like *Salmonella* or *E. coli* from food or other items. These germs could then cross-contaminate other food or items carried in the reusable bag and make you sick.

Here are some simple steps you can follow to reduce cross-contamination and keep you and your family safe from germs.



## Tips for the Use and Care of Reusable Grocery Shopping Bags

### AT HOME

- Reusable grocery bags should be machine or hand-washed frequently! Dry the bags in a clothes dryer or allow them to air dry.
- After putting groceries away, clean the areas where the bags were placed while un-bagging your groceries, especially the kitchen counter and the kitchen table where food items may later be prepared or served.
- If food residues from any food products have leaked into the bag, make sure to wash and dry the bag thoroughly before reuse.
- If reusable grocery bags have been used to transport non-food items, such as detergents, household cleaners, and other

# Tips for the Use and Care of Reusable Grocery Shopping Bags (continued)

## AT HOME

chemicals, wash and dry the bags before using them to transport food items.

Alternatively, you may wish to use bags of one color for food items and bags of a different color for non-food items.

- ↪ Store grocery bags away from sources of contamination, such as pets, children, and chemicals. Storing reusable grocery bags in the trunk of cars is not recommended. During the warmer months, the increased temperatures can promote the growth of bacteria that may be present on the bags.



## AT THE STORE

- ↪ Place reusable bags on the bottom shelf of the grocery cart (below the cart basket where food products are placed).
- ↪ When selecting packages of meat, poultry, or fish, consider putting the packages in clear plastic bags (often available in the meat and produce sections) to prevent leaking juices from contaminating other food items and the reusable grocery bags.
- ↪ Fresh produce should be placed in clear plastic bags to help protect the items from contamination.
- ↪ At checkout, do not place reusable grocery bags on the conveyor belt. Hand the bags to the checker/bagger or, if self-bagging, carry the bags to the bagging area at the end of the checkout counter.
- ↪ Meat, poultry, and fish should be placed in separate reusable bags from fresh produce and ready-to-eat foods.
- ↪ Non-food items should be placed in separate reusable bags from food products.

Following these simple food safety tips will ensure that the reusable grocery bags can be used repeatedly by consumers without increasing the risk of foodborne illness

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.