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The Green Girl!

Solving the great debate: Paper or plastic?

By Kristi Martin Moyer

Special to The Post

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Living GREEN gets easier starting today, with the debut of Florida Home's THE GREEN GIRL'S GUIDE

by Kristi Martin Moyer.



Tim Stepien/The Post

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Kristi Martin, new columnist for Florida Home: 'The Green Girl.' Neither!



Moyer is the facilities and land manager at Pine Jog Environmental Education Center in West Palm Beach, a primary local source for public information on sustainable living.

Over the next year, Moyer and other Pine Jog staff members will offer tips and ideas to help us live better and greener.

"Paper or plastic?"

We've all been asked that question at the grocery checkout counter.

The Green Girl's answer?

Plastic bags are manufactured from petroleum. The energy costs to package and transport the bags to stores throughout the country are

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landfills.

enormous, costing U.S. retailers \$4 billion annually. Sure, some of us reuse our bags, but eventually you know where they end up - in our

According to the environmental research group Worldwatch Institute, Americans throw away about 100 billion plastic bags annually. Plus, each year an estimated 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide - more than 1 million bags per minute! And they will never degrade.

Paper bags would seem to be a greener choice. But according to a survey done by The Washington Post last year, it takes more than four times the energy to produce a paper bag than a plastic one; the manufacturing process generates more air and water pollution; and recycling paper bags requires 98 percent more energy than recycling plastic.

That's why the answer to "paper or plastic?" should be: "Neither. Please use my reusable bag instead." Many grocery stores are now selling their own versions of reusable bags.

Store the bags in your car and jot down "tote bags" on the top of your grocery list to remind you to take them into the store.

Over the life span of each of your reusable bags, you have the potential to eliminate the production and disposal of about 1,000 plastic or paper bags. Now that's a green habit that does the environment good!

Supplemented by Karen Aubry and other staff members of Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, West Palm Beach, in association with Florida Atlantic University's College of Education. For more information, go to www.pinejog.fau.edu.

Have a question for the Green Girl? E-mail barbara_marshall@pbpost.com

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