DIY Reusable Grocery Bags

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Just when you think you're the reigning *Queen or King of Green*—reusing and recycling your way through the day, someone rains on your parade. Stories have hit the media in recent years about everyone's favorite green choice: the reusable store grocery bag. Turns out we should be washing those things regularly or they can become a breeding ground for bacteria. Problem: if you've ever tried washing the ones you often get at the market, they start to fall apart or go as limp as week-old lettuce. Great. Then, more stories pop up that show many of these bags are coming from overseas, containing potentially unsafe levels of lead. Great x2. Time to make your own: prettier, safer, and sturdier. Reclaim your throne, *Queen or King of Green!* And thank you for helping to keep single-use plastics out of the world's oceans.
You want a substantial fabric for this project, a canvas, heavy cotton duck or an outdoor fabric. We went the outdoor fabric route, which worked well and looked great. Now... we can already hear some of you yelling that outdoor fabrics are dryclean only. First, it's not nice to yell. Second, the recommendation to "dry clean only" is often listed because consumers don't/won't follow instructions carefully. Manufacturers fall back on this professional cleaning warning in an attempt to avoid problems attributed to improper care. Here's the inside scoop: these fabrics can be laundered if you closely follow a few simple rules. Use mild soap and the gentle cycle. Then, either air fluff in the dryer or simply hang to air dry.
The other reason to go with a heavier weight fabric is for stability. The shape and structure of the bag comes from the fabric itself; there is no interfacing. This also allows it to fold flat for storage.

If you're a fan of all kinds of shopping carryalls, we have several other grocery bag projects you may also like:

- Rip Stop Grocery Bags with Carry Pouch
- Soft & Stuffable Fabric Shopping Bags
- Farmer's Market Laminated Tote
- Insulated Shopping Tote
Our bag finishes at approximately 12” wide x 14” high with 8” base and sides.

**Sewing Tools You Need**

- **Sewing Machine** and standard presser foot
- **Denim needle**

**Fabric and Other Supplies**
• ½ yard of 44"+ wide heavyweight fabric for the main body of the bag and the main straps; we recommend a bold printed motif
• ¾ yard of 44"+ wide heavyweight fabric for the base of the bag, bottom insert and strap accents; we recommend a coordinating solid color
• Sturdy cardboard, plastic, thin wood or similar for bag bottom insert; approximately 8" x 12"
• All purpose thread to match fabric
• See-through ruler
• Yardstick or measuring tape
• Fabric pen, pencil or chalk
• Seam gauge
• Seam ripper
• Scissors or rotary cutter and mat
• Iron and ironing board
• Pressing cloth if working with outdoor fabric
• Straight pins

Getting Started

1. From the fabric for the main body of the bag and the main straps (the print in our sample), cut the following:
   ONE 11½" high x 42" wide rectangle for the main upper exterior
   TWO 2½" x 44" strips for the handles
2. From the fabric for the base of the bag and the strap accents (the solid in our sample), cut the following:
   ONE 9" high x 42" wide rectangle for the main lower exterior
   TWO 9" x 14" rectangles for the base insert
   TWO 2" x 44" strips for the handles
3. On the 9" x 42" base rectangle, use your fabric pen, pencil or chalk to draw four vertical lines, measuring from the left raw edge as shown below: 5", 17", 25", and 37". These four lines represent the corner folds, and one horizontal line at the exact middle of the rectangle.
   NOTE: For this marking, as well as the handle marking below, you are working on the right side of the fabric. Make sure you are using a tool that will wipe away easily when done or vanish with exposure to the air or the heat of an iron.
4. On the 11½" x 42" main rectangle, use your fabric pen, pencil or chalk to draw four vertical lines for placement of the handle straps.
At Your Sewing Machine & Ironing Board

Create and attach the straps

1. Find the two 2½” x 44” main strap strips.
2. On both strips, fold back the long raw edges ½” and press. Your finished width should be 1½”.
3. Find the two 2” x 44” accent strap strips.
4. On both strips, fold back the long raw edges ½” and press. Your finished width should be 1”.
5. Pair up a pressed main strip with a pressed accent strip.
6. Center the accent strip WRONG sides together with the main strip, sandwiching the folded-back raw edges in between the two pieces.
7. Pin in place the length of the strap.

8. Thread your machine with thread to match the main body of the bag; this should be a lighter color that will stand out nicely against the accent color on the strap. Slightly lengthen the stitch.

9. Topstitch along both sides of both straps. Your stitch line should be \( \frac{3}{8} \)" from the outside folded edge (the main strap), \( \frac{1}{4} " \) from the inside folded edge (the accent strap).

10. Place the finished straps on the right side of the bag body, using the lines you drew above for positioning. Place a pin and/or make a mark 2” down from the top raw edge of the bag body. This is the point at which you will pivot and turn to stitch your reinforcing box.

11. Pin in place, aligning the raw ends of the straps with the bottom raw edge of the bag body. Also, check the handle loops to make sure they aren't twisted.
12. Topstitch each strap in place, very carefully following the original topstitching line on the strap; you want it too look like a single line of stitching.

13. When you get to your 2” mark, stop, pivot, and stitch across to the opposite line of topstitching. Stop and pivot again when you get to this line, then carefully follow along the stitching down the opposite side of the strap.

14. Reposition the bag under your needle at the horizontal stitch line of the 2”-from-the-top mark. Create an "X" through the center.

15. Repeat to attach opposite side of the first strap, and then to attach both sides of the remaining strap.

Construct the bag

1. Rethread your machine with thread to match the bag base in both the top and bobbin. Keep the slightly lengthened stitch.

2. On the 9” x 42” base piece, run a double line of topstitching approximately ½” to either side of your horizontal marked center line.
3. Place the bag body and the bag base right sides together, aligning the bottom raw edge of the bag body with the top raw edge of the bag base. Pin in place.

4. Stitch in place, using a ½" seam allowance. Stitch all the way across a second time to reinforce.

5. Rethread your machine with thread to match the upper bag body in both the top and the bobbin.

6. Because our simplified bag design does not have a lining, we created a flat felled seam to finish the raw edges of the seam allowance. To do this, press the sewn seam together and flat. Trim back the seam allowance of the bag base ONLY (the solid in our sample) to ¼". We also trimmed out the bulky strap ends so it would be easier to fold and wrap the seam.

7. Fold the un-trimmed bag body seam allowance (the print in our sample) over the trimmed seam allowance, matching the raw edge to the seam line. Press.
8. Turn this 'wrapped' seam down toward the bag base (the solid in our sample), hiding the raw edge within this second fold. Press.

9. Edgestitch the folded-over seam allowance in place.

   NOTE: You can use a straight stitch, but we opted for a narrow zig zag stitch instead. The outdoor fabrics we used frayed easily and our flat felled seam was very narrow. We worried this important seam could weaken if the straight stitch wasn't perfect and something pulled out. A zig zag kept everything secure and it still looks cool.

10. The photo below shows you what our finished flat felled seam looks like from both sides. If you're brand new to the technique, we have a full, step-by-step tutorial you can review.
11. Since you are so good at flat felled seams, let's make another. This one will be the bag's side seam. It's going to be easier because we're making a wider seam.

12. Fold the bag in half, right sides together. The raw edges of both sides should, of course, align. Another 'line up check' is to make sure the handle loops are even with one another.

13. Stitch together, using a 1" seam allowance. Yes, one inch.

14. Trim back one side of the seam allowance to just over ¼".

15. Fold, wrap, press, and edgestitch just as you did above.

NOTE: We stayed with the lighter colored thread in the machine, which meant the edgestitching matched along the bag body and was a highlight seam along the bag base.
16. Hem the top of the bag all around with a simple double turn hem. To do this, fold back the raw edge ½", then fold again ½". Make sure the straps are folded down and out of the way. Stitch in place close to the inner folded edge. This puts the reinforced top of the handle straps 1" from the hemmed top of the bag.

17. Re-thread the machine with thread to match the bag base in both the top and bobbin.
18. Flatten the bag, and pin the bottom raw edges together to create the base of the bag.

19. Stitch together, using a ½" seam allowance.
20. With the bag still wrong side out, the next step is to box the bottom corners of the bag to create an 8" x 12" base.
21. To do this, using both hands, pinch and pull apart the bottom corner.
22. As you pull, the fabric will begin to make a little peak with the corner point at the top and the seam line running down the middle of one side.
23. Center the side seam within this triangle peak.
24. Measure 4” from the point of the peak seam and draw a line across.

25. Repeat to create a matching peak with the opposite corner.
26. Stitch back and forth along the drawn lines two or three times to reinforce.

27. Trim back the 'ears' of the peaks to about ¼” from the seam line. Because our fabric frayed easily, we also overcast ALL the bottom seams with a zig zag stitch. The seams themselves will all be hidden beneath the bottom sleeve, so if your fabric is not prone to fraying, there is no need for this step.
   NOTE: Check out our full [Box Corners tutorial](#) if you are new to this technique.
Create the cardboard pocket

1. Find the two 9” x 14” pieces of base fabric.
2. Place them right sides together, pin, and stitch together, using a ½” seam allowance, along both sides and across the bottom.
3. Clip the corners and turn right side out.
4. Create a simple hem along the top raw edge. To do this, fold the raw edge back ½” and press, then fold back an additional ½” and press again.
5. Topstitch close to the folded edge.
6. Press what is now a finished pocket and slip in the cardboard (or similar). Place this insert down into the bottom of the bag to help form and stabilize the base.

NOTE: The reason the insert is an open pocket is so you can easily remove the cardboard and wash both the bag and the pocket itself. You can also replace the insert if it gets wet or damaged. Or, as mentioned above, use a different type of insert, such as a plastic panel or even thin wood.

Contributors

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Kitchen Linens

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