

Bags of privilege: Saving the world can be expensive

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SASIN TIPCHAI/123RF

Choosing the green options often means spending extra cash.

OPINION: Sometimes it seems that doing your bit to save the planet is a rich person's game.

We're always told about all the little things we could be doing to help the environment. [Swap your heavy-duty spray cleaners](#) for something from Ecostore, [use cloth nappies](#) instead of disposables, [grow your own vegetables](#), buy [organic produce](#), take your own [refillable coffee cup](#) when you buy a takeaway coffee, buy [reusable stainless steel straws](#)...

The list goes on.

But what the bloggers and pontificators often seem to miss is that a lot of these "little things" take time and money.

READ MORE: [Why you should say Bags Not](#)

A quick skim of the Countdown shelves shows that you can pick up a basic cleaner for about \$3. But if you want the Ecostore variety, that's on special for \$5 – or \$6.50 otherwise.

Are you cutting out plastic bags?

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You'll be told that [you can make your own cleaner](#) with vinegar and water (or something – I zoned out) but if you're running from one job to another and trying to keep your kids alive in between, you might struggle to find the time for such an endeavour.

It's great to grow your own vegetables but if you're stuck renting and have no guarantee that you'll even be there when the seeds sprout in the vege patch, it could turn out to be an expensive waste of money.

Now it's reusable shopping bags. Many shoppers have a few in the cupboard or the car, if only to ward off the mountain of plastic that comes with a weekly shop otherwise.

DAVID WHITE/STUFF

Stocking up on reusable bags can be expensive.

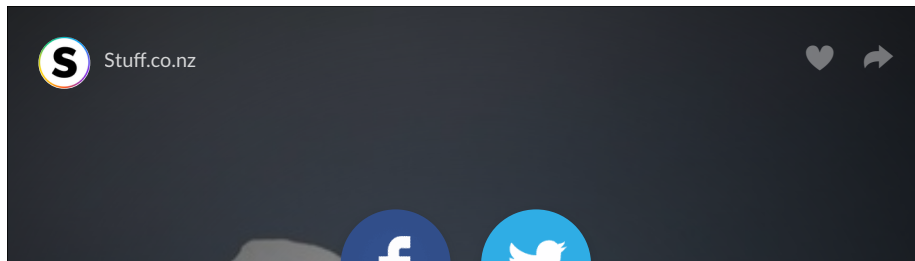
Soon we'll have no choice. The [big supermarket chains are phasing out single-use plastic bags](#) from the end of 2018. You might be able to buy a compostable bag for 15c but otherwise you'll have to bring your own. Pak 'n Save, with its boxes, will continue to be an option, but everyone knows you usually end up with only the banana boxes left, where everything falls straight out the bottom.

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The supermarkets should give some thought to how they will support low-income families through this change.

You can pick up a reusable shopping bag for about \$1. This doesn't seem a lot, [until you consider that recent research found some families only had a budget of \\$25 to spend on their entire grocery bill each week](#). If they then have to buy plastic bags to do things like wrap the kids' wet kindy clothes or line the rubbish bins, as well as adding to their stash of reusables, that might mean having to give up a loaf of bread or bottle of milk.



The supermarket chains will get a big PR boost from this move. Now it's time they gave some thought to how they can help any customers who might struggle to adapt. That could mean a bag borrowing scheme, or a certain number of free reusable bags for each customer.

For any planet-saving change to be effective, it needs to be accessible to everyone.

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