We’re all wrapped up in plastic

By the Samantha Goff
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To me, nothing ruins beautiful scenery like litter. It is one of my biggest pet peeves. The thought of someone carelessly tossing their trash on the ground or out the car window literally makes my skin crawl.

Not recycling is one thing, and it irks me, but not even throwing your garbage in a trash container–seriously?

It caught my attention on a road trip recently, how much litter there is, and how much of it is made up of bags.

Trash bags, shopping bags, bread bags, zip-lock bags, you name it. They are all over. Blowing around on the ground and in the air. Tangled in tree branches. Stuck on fences, whipping in the wind. Or, the worst–floating in water. They are so ugly.

So, I researched. Every year, not to date, EVERY YEAR, it is estimated that about 5,000,000,000 bags are used around the world. That’s five billion. Every year.

That is an absolutely insane amount of bags. If you want to get technical, that’s over one million bags every minute.

First of all, plastic bags take three to four hundred years to decompose and even then, the tiny particles are still toxic and pollute the ground and water.

Second, they use up the earth’s non-renewable resources to make, just to be thrown away.

And finally, plastic bags are number three on the list of top items littered, only losing to cigarette butts and fast food waste.

I don’t know if they are all over the place because they are so lightweight and can easily blow away, or because of the abundance of them, or just simply because people are lazy, or even a combination of all of the above, it doesn’t matter. It shouldn’t even be an issue in the first place.

Plastic bags clog drains and sewage ways, they strangle, suffocate and entangle countless wildlife animals, they pollute our planet, and all this does not include the harm done in the manufacturing of the bag itself that also wastes energy and resources and pollutes the air even further.

Does this not just seem totally senseless? It is so unnecessary to me to need plastic bags for much of anything. I can think of alternatives for just about every reason to use a plastic bag in the first place.

A reusable grocery bag is quite a nifty concept. If I could only remember to bring mine to the store with me! I do often get paper bags at the grocery–however, that is how I sort and then haul my recycles to the bins on the hill. A tupperware for sandwiches and chips in lunches.

If you are an avid recycler like me, you have a lot less trash than your average bear, and if one had a compost, it almost eliminates the need for a trash bag at all.

Trash bags have only been used regularly since sometime in the late 50’s to early 60’s, so

there has to be a way to do without, right?

Recycling and composting everything that you can is key. Eliminate as much “trash” as you can, and then wrap up the sloppy stuff in newspaper. Haul the whole can to the dumpster and dump it, instead of carrying a bag.

Limiting plastic bag use can have such a tremendous affect on the environment. According to research, each person uses approximately 83 bags a year on average. Using those figures: If 50 people reading this column cut their plastic bag waste in half, we would keep over 2000 bags out of the landfill (or whatever other awful place it could have ended up otherwise.) Every little bit counts.

Sometimes, it can be the small conveniences in life that cost the most, and we might not even realize it. I know for me; the more I research, the more I learn and the more I learn, the more I care, and in turn, my concern for the environment grows.

Just a little food for thought: Maybe the next time you reach for a plastic bag, you’ll think about using an alternative.