

We all seem to know by now that we should be using cloth bags instead of asking the stores to supply plastic bags for us. Being imperfect, I don't always remember to have them when I pop into the grocery store to pick up those missing ingredients for that day's dinner.

The other day when I told the clerk I had forgotten my cloth bag, she said, "That's O.K. These bags are biodegradable." She's right. It may take up to 1000 years, but all plastic bags are biodegradable. Then just yesterday, I read a story that gave me hope for those bags I carried away that day.

Daniel Burd, a 17-year-old high school student from Waterloo, Ontario has earned top prize (and \$10,000) at the 2008 Canada-wide Science Fair in Ottawa. What fabulous experiment did he do, and what discoveries did he make? He calls it: **Plastic not Fantastic**.

He decided to focus on the plastic bag problem. As he states in the background to his experiment, "Plastic bags are very popular in our daily lives and have a harsh environmental impact on our ecosystems. Every year, **approximately 500 billion plastic bags are used worldwide and billions of those are dumped into the oceans**. Countless wildlife, including sea-lions, whales, birds and turtles ingest the plastic bags and die every year."

His hypothesis was that since polyethylene (PE), - the material plastic bags are made from – does degrade naturally, he could isolate the microorganisms responsible and use them to speed up the process. And that he did.

In fact, he predicts that the process developed in his experiment could be used on an industrial scale and could **reduce the process of degradation from 20 to 1000 years to three months**. As he states, "this would **save the lives of millions of wildlife species and save space in landfills**

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I will do better at remembering to bring my own bags to the store. I promise. In the meantime, until we all make cloth bags an everyday part of our lives, young people like Daniel Burd are finding solutions to our destructive behaviours.

Good on you Daniel Burd!

For those who would like the details... [Plastic Not Fantastic PDF](#)

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