Fusing Plastic Bags

If you really want to ‘go green’, here's the ultimate project... Use up all those plastic bags lying around the house by fusing them together! Make bags, totes, wallets, & even clothes! Below you'll find lots of ideas & tutorials to inspire. I'm sure you won't have to go far to find the materials needed. Don't we all have a stash of plastic bags somewhere?! Start collecting & save our landfills!

Below, you'll 1st see examples of fused products. Then you'll see tutorials & links to videos so you can get started. So look through these pages & click on the links to see the videos & tutorials. If you need more inspiration, go to www.pinterest.com, www.google.com or www.etsy.com & type in ‘fused plastic bags’. At Google, click on Images. From there, you can click on the links to websites & blogs full of ideas & tutorials. (Etsy won’t show directions but you'll see finished products that others are selling.)

http://www.flickr.com/photos/37009571@N07/sets/72157617366191454/with/3412305789/
Owl - Etsy - SoSheSews
www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9pe5oXYYxU

www.greatgreengoods.com/2010/05/16/fused-plastic-jewelry-from-recycled-plastic-bags/
I realized that I basically explain this technique to an Etsy Labs visitor at least once a day, but had never put the instructions online. So, here it is. Fusing! Plastic! Bags!
Do you have one zillion plastic drugstore and grocery bags under your sink, or perhaps smushed into a drawer? Ever wanted a cheap and easy use for them? One that leaves you with an intriguing and useful homemade craft supply? Do you have an iron? Why don't you fuse them together?

**What you'll need**
Plastic bags (thin, flimsy is best)  Parchment, freezer or plain old copier paper  Iron

**Making it**

Flatten out bag & trim bottom seam & handles off. This allows bag to be opened up into larger rectangle of plastic.

Turn bag inside-out if it has printing on it. Once ink heats up, it comes off the bag and makes a huge mess. If the bag has an interesting design that you'd like to preserve, try using a clear plastic bag layered on top of the printed one.

6-8 layers of plastic gives best results. Either fold bag twice until its 8 ply thick or use 3+ bags layered on top of another. Trying to fuse less than 6 layers often results in little holes forming in the finished piece & a weaker material.

Sandwich plastic bags between parchment paper.

Next, run a hot iron (we set ours to "Rayon", but you will need to experiment a little to see what works for you) and keep the iron moving constantly. Make sure to get the edges, and after about 15 seconds, flip it over and iron the opposite side for a few seconds.

Peel a corner of the paper back to see if the plastic is fused together. It should be fairly smooth and "one sheet" to the touch (watch out, it's a little hot). If the layers are not all melted together, iron it some more.

Peel parchment paper away from finished plastic sheet. Voila. Now, you can use this stuff to make a million things. We've made re-usable grocery totes, wallets, and floor cushions; I think it's an inexpensive way to make waterproof linings for beach bags and makeup clutches.

Fused plastic makes fun & easy-to-clean bibs! Download this pattern & cut out 2 pieces (1 from plastic; another from a pretty cotton fabric), pin together w/ 1/4" bias tape (you'll need about 48") & run a zip-zag stitch around edges w/ your sewing machine.
Alright, y'all. Don't forget to open a window when you do this to avoid potentially brain-damaging fumes. Send us pictures of your creations, or add them to the Etsy Labs flickr pool http://etsylabs.blogspot.com/2007/05/long-overdue-fusing-plastic-bag.html

**Here's a great set of Do's & Don'ts**
**Fused Plastic bags tutorial** - www.myspace.com/eclipse_etsy/blog/261856384

Tips & tricks to add to the above:

**This is all you need to start fusing:**

1. an iron  
2. a hard heat-resistant surface like a wooden cutting board  
3. baking parchment paper. This works better than typing paper because it's silicon coated and nothing sticks to it. It's also larger, and semi-transparent so you can see appliqués have the correct placement, etc.  
4. Some plastic bags! There's no shortage of those, unfortunately.

**DO** set iron between polyester & rayon. One tutorial says to set at cotton but that's too hot in my opinion - but perhaps irons vary.  
**DON'T** use steam.  
**DO** fuse both HDPE (recycle code 2) and LDPE (recycle code 4) bags

HDPE is the crinkly plastic grocery bags; LDPE is the glossy stretchy bags like Target bags, also clear bags like dry
cleaner bags. They will both fuse, to themselves and to each other. You may need to lower the heat just a bit for LDPE. There are some tutorials which say you cannot use LDPE, but I have successfully fused it.

The sides of the left bag are Target bags (LDPE); the inside layers are HDPE. The right bag is LDPE made from clear bags newspapers are delivered in.

**DO** use all kinds of plastic, not just grocery bags. Use the bags from frozen veggies, use the bag from dried pasta, bread wrappers, etc. You can use potato chip bags inside out to get a silver metallic color. This works better for small appliqués than for a large piece.

**DO** apply the heat a little longer for thicker plastic. You also don't need as many layers when you use a thicker plastic.

**DO** put a clear plastic layer over any vivid colored design you want to show on the outside of the bag. Red ink especially seems to melt and bleed. If you don't use the clear layer on top, the ink will transfer to your paper like this.

**DO** use a layer of clear plastic on top of appliqués too, to seal them in.

**DO** reuse the parchment paper over and over, unless it gets an ink transfer from a bag. Then you will need a clean piece, because it will transfer that ink back to your next fused piece.

**DON'T** use waxed paper instead of parchment paper! The wax will melt and make a stinky mess.

**DO** use a hard ironing surface like a wooden cutting board. A hard, smooth surface will help you get even adhesion.

**DO** use firm pressure when ironing, but keep the iron moving. This isn't like fusible interfacing where you have to keep iron in place 10-15 seconds. If you do that the plastic will probably burn.

**DO** fuse one or two new layers at a time.

**DON'T** try to fuse all 8 layers at once, or the middle layers will have incomplete adhesion.

If you find your fused plastic curling up too much, flip it over and fuse the next layer onto the back. This will equalize the shrinkage and flatten it out.

**DO** sew the finished material in the sewing machine or serger.

**DO** use a longer stitch length, so you won't have too many holes forming a perforated line.(prone to tearing)

**DO** sew small items wrong sides together.

You **DON'T** need to turn the seams to the inside like you do with fabric items, because the plastic does not fray. Also, it may be difficult to turn smaller items like cosmetic pouches inside out.

To see some of my fused plastic finished projects, check out this Flickr set.
To see my fused plastic items for sale, check out my Etsy store.

I stumbled across a wonderfully intriguing image on Flickr.com & it turned out to be an eco friendly coat made from reused plastic shopping bags. The green fashionista responsible for the wonderful creation is UrbanWoodsWalker & her creations are truly inspiring.

This post will show you how to turn used plastic bags into “plastic fabric” & make your own eco clothing. (Warning: Plastic fabric requires the use of an iron. Be careful when using a hot iron & ensure work area is well ventilated)


Ready to go green? Then say goodbye to your old grocery bags by melting them into something cute. Afterall, plastic is the new plastic, right?

**Skill Level**: Beginner to Intermediate

**Needed**:  
- plastic grocery bags (Target bags work best)  
- Fabric for handles and decor (optional)  
- Parchment Paper  
- Iron

We’ll be fusing layers of old grocery bags together to create a stronger "fabric" for our new bags. Let's get started!

1. Gather old grocery bags. After experimenting w/ various bags & my iron I found Target bags work best. They result in a stronger finished "fabric", w/ fewer holes, & a brighter white color: I guess Target needs to add #6. Melt into an even cuter bag.

I chose to only use white portion of bags. I’ve seen many versions which include store logos & look pretty cool. I referenced this and this when learning to fuse plastic. VERY impressive ideas in there. A dress? LOVE it. Okay, so.....
Cut bottom, top & sides off bag.

Lay the long rectangular sheet flat. Repeat the process with 8 bags and lay them all on top of each other. Then sandwich them between two pieces of parchment paper (one tutorial mentioned using Freezer Paper. Do NOT do this. It will fuse TO your plastic. You must use Parchment Paper):

This is the tricky part, so I won’t sugar coat it. It took five tries before I got this right and was very ready to GIVE UP. But I tried it 1 more time & it worked! Play w/iron settings & # of plastic layers. I found “cotton” setting & 8 Target bag layers were perfect. Your iron will react differently, so start by ironing small portions of bag layers to see what it does. It will get little wrinkles as it melts together. But it shouldn’t shrink and shrivel up too bad. If that happens, your iron is too hot.

I found that the best way is to start at the bottom & press iron up to get air bubbles out. Keep iron moving constantly around on plastic. Periodically check under parchment paper to see if it’s working. When front side looks fused, flip sandwich over & repeat on other side. Whichever side you want to be the “right” side, you should iron last. That will result in a smoother finish (while the underside will be more wrinkled)

When you're all done, it should look like this, a large sheet of plastic:
Cont. so you have sheets of this new “fabric” to work with. I made 6 sheets for 4 bags (almost 50 Target bags!)

2. Cut out bag pieces. Take long sheet & fold in ½ to see how much bag you can get out of it. Make your bags as small or large as you like.

With sheets of “fabric” & judging how many bags I wanted to make, I chose these dimensions for my bag.
You need:
(2) front & back pieces (11x11)
(3) side & bottom pieces (11x5)
(2) handle pieces (21x2)
Cut out bag pieces using rotary cutter, cutting mat, and ruler.

3. Personalize your bag with words. Using your computer (or drawing by hand), print off the letters you want to put on your bag. If you own a Cricut scrapbooking machine, this would make the process much faster.

Trace letters on to fabric w/ a marker. If fabric is lightweight, double-layer it or add interfacing to back to give it more strength. I double-layered mine. Trace letters backwards so there are no leftover pen marks when you flip them over:

Cut out letters & sew them to bag front. Start w/ middle letter so word is evenly spaced on bag:

I chose to use a contrasting blue thread:
Continue sewing all the letters to the front of your bag:

Adding fabric to the straps is optional. I like the splash of color. So, cut 2 fabric strips slightly larger than the straps (makes it easier to sew them together, without having to be as precise).

Sew plastic straps and fabric together, on outside of fabric. You won't be turning anything inside out with this project. Then using a contrasting thread, serge off the edges of your straps.
* This is an optional step. If you don't have a serger, just trim the edges of your straps OR zigzag the edges to keep the green fabric from fraying.
* Squeeze a dab of Fray Check on the ends of your serged edges to keep them from unraveling. I was out of Fray Check, so I just left the edges as-is. Over time though, they will slowly unravel at the ends.
To make your handles stronger and easier to hold, fold the middle portion in-half and sew it down:

Decide where you’d like the straps on your bag and pin them down:

Sew around your straps, in a square pattern:
Then sew an "X" across each strap, to reinforce the attachment:

It should look something like this:

5. Sew bag together.
Serge JUST tops of Front, Back, & 2 side pieces. Then, starting with Front & bottom pieces sew the 2 together, right on outside of bag. Do same with Back & bottom piece:

Serge off both seams on the outside of the bag.

This part is slightly tricky. Sew one of the side pieces to the Front of your bag. Start from the top, go down......
... when you get to the bottom portion, lift presser foot & shift bag a bit so it continues to sew all the way around....

.... then continue it up the Back side of the bag too.
Do same w/ other side of bag. Serge off the edges. * if you don’t have a serger, leave it plain or zigzag. Done!

If you're up for more, try a medley of variations. One for each food group:

This fits a one Gallon Milk jug perfectly. I used to tell the checker No bags for the milk. But I really hate it when the jug leaves a milky residue on my car. So we're baggin it classy now! And you can too. Enjoy!
What's on Your Workdesk Wednesday: Fused Plastic
http://patsypat.blogspot.com/2010/05/whats-on-your-workdesk-wednesday-fused.html

A lady asked if I had a project to re-use election banners. In the Philippines, you can’t believe what a mess this makes of our streets! This is what our streets look like! What do we do w/ these after elections?

I got some banners, cleaned them up & put 2 printed sides together.
I fused the 2 plastic banners together by ironing them, putting a layer of paper over it to protect my iron.
I folded some parts to make it thicker & ironed it again.

Amazingly, acrylic paint sticks! I had a fun time painting! It had a sort of "coagulated" texture that made the paint on it interesting.

Then I sewed it up, putting buttons and to reinforce the sides, I piped it with leather.

Of course you can also do this with PLASTIC BAGS! There are too many thrown in the garbage that end up in our oceans & rivers & do so much damage!
I'm going to make my second project with fused plastic- a journal.
Plastic Bags Fused into a Lamp

Plastic bags have found a new following as reusable materials with a little help from a hot iron. Fused plastic bags are now making an appearance in all kinds of crafting circles, and people are finding all sorts of cool uses for these new fused materials. The nice thing about plastic bags is that rarely is there a shortage of this material.

We’re going to learn how to fuse the bags. There are dozens of tutorials but I’ll run through it so we have it all in 1 place. One thing I discovered is that some tutorials say to use freezer paper to fuse bags. .. *wrong*. It fuses into an icky plastic-y waxy mess. The tools I recommend are parchment paper, scissors, iron & a large collection of leftover plastic bags.

Grab a bag and snip off the handles off the top, and the seam at the bottom, so you can flatten the whole thing out into a nice rectangle.

Do this w/ 2 more bags, until you have 3, & lay them all on top of each other, smoothed out & flattened. Then fold these 3 layers in ½ - Too few layers, & you might end up burning right through your plastic, so we need to bulk it up a bit before we fuse it.

Place folded layers between 2 pieces of parchment paper. Quick tip... make sure any sides w/ ink are facing inwards, as ink can melt & get all over. If there’s a design or pattern you want to preserve, cover it up w/ a layer of plain white plastic.

Set iron to hottest setting & iron back & forth, not resting in 1 spot for too long. Lift up parchment paper edge now & then to see how well it’s fusing. Careful! It might be hot. When you’ve ironed 1 side, flip the whole thing over & iron the other side, so everything fuses evenly. Peel newly fused plastic off parchment paper, & admire your new recycled crafting material.

We need 4 of these, so repeat fusing until you have enough. You might need to try it a couple times until you have 4 you like. Right... now you have it, what do you do with it? Well, you can make anything you like out of it. But me? I’m going to make a lamp.

To make your lamp, you’ll want about a ½ dozen thin square dowels, (1/4” thick or so), a small wood saw (you can get these in most craft stores), some wood glue, and some binder clips. You might also want to have an X-acto knife, a ruler, and a pencil about.
There are different light source options. I like the “stick up” light, a light bulb & a base. We’re going to create a cool cover that can be used anywhere since it is cordless & electricity free. Use an energy efficient bulb & rechargeable batteries for max green effect! Other options are lamp kits that come w/ a bulb & base w/ a cord, or for a “mood” light, try a flameless LED candle!

First, we’re going to build a simple frame for our lamp out of our thin wood pieces. Measure out two pieces of wood 10 inches long, and use your wood saw to cut them to size.

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For the other 2 sides of frame, I’m spacing mine out about 5” wide. How large you make it is up to you. Mine will be thin & tall. Just make it large enough to accommodate your light source.

If following my measurements, these are the 4 pieces you need to make 1 piece of your frame – two 10” pieces, & two 5” pieces

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Glue the 4 pieces together to create 1 side. On 1 side, I left a small gap so the lamp would have some “legs” to stand on, instead of being flush w/ the surface it’s sitting on. This is important if you’re using a light source that has a cord, as this gap will allow the cord to snake out the back.

Repeat this process four times, to make the four sides of your frame.

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Finally, to make your finished panels, run a line of glue all around the back of the wood frame, and press it firmly on top of one of your newly fused pieces of plastic. Take care how you frame the pattern, these will make up the sides of your lamp and you want them to look pretty.

To get a good glue seal, place a few heavy things on top of your frame and let it sit until it’s dry. Do this with all four pieces of your lamp frame

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When the glue is dry & your panels are secure, take an X-acto knife and run it along the edge of your frame, trimming away everything but the panel inside the wood

Not that you haven’t figured it out by now, but repeat this for all four panels. At this point, I’m resigned to the fact that I’ve basically made a Target lamp, and I need to vary my shopping habits a bit. At least it’s coordinated...
You might find after trimming your edges that the middle of the plastic is not as fused as the edges, and you have some layers that are starting to come apart. We can fix that...

Place your frame on the ironing board plastic side up, and place a piece of parchment paper over the edges of the frame. Press around all the edges to re-fuse the plastic and keep all the edges tidy and tightly stuck together.

So how do you embroider on plastic? We need to get the design to our lamp. You can’t see a pattern through the plastic, & transfer paper doesn’t work... instead, we’re going to fight plastic with plastic. Cut a small piece of white plastic bag and lay it on top of your chosen design.

Trace your design with a pen or marker, and then tape the plastic with the design onto one of your plastic panels.

Now you’re ready to embroider! Since the plastic is essentially “hooped”, embroidering is relatively simple. It’s a little bit trickier to see where your needle is going to come up in the design, which may make involved stitches more complicated, but essentially you can embroider it as normal. Make sure you don’t tug or pull too much on your plastic, and rip it loose from the frame.

My design all finished and pretty! Now all we need to do is remove the tracing...

The nice thing about a regular, un-fused plastic bag is that it’s pretty flimsy, and you can carefully tear away the traced plastic from underneath your stitches. This way you remove all markings you would otherwise leave behind tracing the design directly on your material.

Here’s the design with all the extra plastic removed. Ta da! This is a great technique for transferring designs on hard-to-deal-with materials.
Now that all your panels are done, it’s time to assemble your lamp. Run a line of glue on the inside border of one of your lamp panels. Line up the panel edges perpendicular to each other, along the glue line, and use one of your little clamps to keep the two pieces held together.

Continue gluing the edges, and clamp each side as you glue it, until finally you have an assembled cube. Clean up the excess glue that squeezes out of the cracks, and let the whole thing sit until it’s dry. Remove the clamps, and if you like, take some sandpaper and lightly sand any gunk left behind from your glue. You now have a totally handmade, DIY lamp cover you make out of a bit of wood and all those extra plastic bags you had lying around!

Place your light cover on top of your bulb of choice, and click it on! The fused plastic makes an awesome semi transparent material, letting light through but hiding the ugly light bulb inside. Plus you can get all sorts of neat patterns from the fused plastic.

Now you’ve got an eco-friendly lamp that’s totally handmade, and if you used a cordless light source, can go anywhere! Turn it on and remind everyone that going green can be a pretty bright idea. Plus, my favorite part of this whole project is that someone inevitably asks, “Hey, where did all the plastic bags go?” “Oh, I fused them into a lamp.” Nobody can say you’re not resourceful.

Turn Your Used Plastic Bags Into Clothing!
www.oureverydayearth.com/turn-your-used-plastic-bags-into-clothing/
Etsy Video Tutorial for Fusing Plastic Bags - www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNziDXtm1SA

1. Collect brightly colored plastic bags (super thin ones work best like the type newspapers are delivered in).

2. You need:
   - Iron
   - Ironing board
   - Scissors
   - Paper - wax paper or parchment paper

3. Set up your ironing board in a well ventilated area. Open windows & set up a fan to direct fumes away from you. Lay a sheet of paper down to cover the ironing board.

4. Choose a plastic bag to start with & if it has handles cut them off. Cut a strip of plastic from the bottom of the bag to make it open ended.

5. Fold plastic bag in ½ then fold it in ½ again. This gives you an 8 ply piece of plastic, i.e. it’ll have 8 layers. Place this on the paper on the ironing board & lay another sheet of paper on top to completely cover the plastic.

6. Start applying heat from the iron to the paper – plastic – paper sandwich! Keep iron moving to provide even heat. Do this for 10 – 15, plastic should then be “fused” together. Watch youtube video above for a tutorial on fusing plastic bags.

7. Once you have a decent collection of fused plastic sheets you can start to design some clothing, or a bag or anything else you can think of! Check out Urban Woods Walker’s coat creation below;
   - www.flickr.com/photos/urbanwoodswalker/ / CC BY-ND 2.0