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CATALOG CRITIC
Green Grocer

 By LAUREN LIPTON
 September 21, 2007

It started for us when the city of San Francisco passed an ordinance this year banning nonbiodegradable plastic grocery bags. It goes into effect in supermarkets in November. Then we learned that Americans go through 100 billion plastic grocery and shopping bags annually. It was time to do our part by switching to reusable totes.

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We wanted lightweight, strong bags spacious enough for lots of locally grown produce and organic spelt flakes. But -- this was harder -- we also sought chic sacks with no strident slogans. To test our five candidates, we brought them to the store and loaded them with half-gallons of milk, canned goods, a baby watermelon -- the usual.

Surprisingly, they were all rather good. We fit lots into the roomy, sturdy cotton totes from Mission Wear and b. happybags, though the former was somewhat heavy on its own, and the latter, at \$24, might be too pricey for some people. The \$46.95 shopper from Mimi the Sardine also did its job well but was far too nice to toss into the back of the Prius.

Best Overall, by Acme Bags, was styled like a typical plastic grocery sack. Of nearly weightless nylon, it folded into a tiny rectangle for storage. Best Value, the \$7.95 polyester Envirosax bag, was also light and compact, though it didn't fold as elegantly as the Acme. As for the downside, both are made from fabrics that aren't exactly green. We're hoping Mother Nature will look at the bigger picture and forgive us.

How we shopped: We found lots of bag recommendations on the environmental sites TreeHugger and Ideal Bite.

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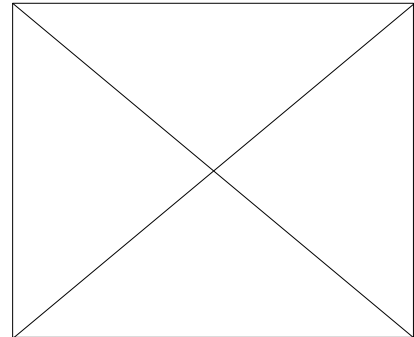
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