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Options abound for those who shop by foot or pedal

Retailers are responding to new supermarkets in high-density areas — and more shoppers taking a shine to walking or biking to the grocery store — with a cavalcade of reusable bags, carts, baskets, trolleys and the like to ease the transition to shopping by foot or pedal.

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COURTNEY BLETHEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Chris Cameron from Cascade Bicycle Club, one of the largest bike clubs in the Northwest, demonstrates how to transport groceries via bicycle. The device on the back of his bike is an Xtracycle, where you can attach smaller bags.

It's tough to walk through a market these days without spotting a green bag. Or a red bag. Or a purple polka-dot and teal-striped bag.

No matter what becomes of Seattle's 20-cents-per-plastic-bag tax, many shoppers already are replacing them with reusable bags. And as the bring-your-own-bag movement swells and gas prices remain high, retailers are responding with umpteen takes on the once-humble canvas tote, plus options galore to haul those bags home by bike or foot for those within range or on a good bus line.

Take the Hook & Go (\$59.95 at www.surlatable.com), a folding, tripodlike contraption on rubber wheels. Its extendible arm can dangle several sacks of groceries packed into (what else?) reusable bags.

Or the Xtracycle (www.xtracycle.com, \$489), a hitchless bike trailer and extender that resembles a skateboard bearing wide, deep saddlebags on either side with room for plenty of groceries in the bags or lashed on top.

Or the *bakfiets* (say bok-feets): Dutch bicycles that resemble low-slung wheelbarrows built for cruising (www.dutchbikeseattle.com). Stephan Schier of Dutch Bike Co. Seattle says he can't keep the \$3,000-plus bikes in stock, with customers across the country wanting to swap their cars to ferry food, children and cases of beer (sometimes all at once) in the bike's roomy box.

For those who cringe at such prices, there's always the trusty backpack. Tyler Myers has spotted plenty, along with those collapsible wire shopping carts familiar to anyone who's lived back East and a cavalcade of reusable bags, at his Kress IGA supermarket in downtown Seattle.

He expects even more will give carless shopping a go as gas prices and parking remain continual challenges, as concern for the environment grows and as density levels climb around supermarkets (such as the condo forests fringing downtown Bellevue's Safeway and South Lake Union's Whole Foods Market).

"We see a really high usage on reusable bags. I've stood there and watched people. It's amazing how much people can put in their purse or their backpack," Myers said.

Time was, grocery shopping was something you did in dribs and drabs throughout the week, often by bus, train or on foot. A bakery here, the butcher there, produce from the produce man and butter from the dairy. You bought fresh because you had to; artificial preservatives weren't around to keep bread from going stale.

Shift in shopping habits

Cars made it possible to haul a dozen bags of groceries home at a time, plus bulk items. For newcomers to shopping by bike, foot or public transport, the shift includes adjusting how and when they shop.

Hardware-store manager Jennifer Mullins walks from Belltown to the Westlake Whole Foods several times a week now, rather than the weekly supermarket trip she once made in her car.



Above, Chris Cameron shows how the Xtracycle's wide, deep saddlebags make room

"I buy smart and often and carry two bags, although I do have friends who have cars so I'll hitch a ride with them to Costco and stuff. All my friends are always griping about gas prices and insurance and maintenance and everything. It's worth the \$10 cab ride every now and then just to not."

That said, "It does make it tough for those times when your favorite glass-bottled juice is on sale and you'd like to buy 20 of them and you can't get them home."

for plenty of groceries inside.
THE SEATTLE TIMES COURTNEY BLETHEN /

Her Ace Hardware location in South Lake Union has a hard time keeping expandable pushcarts (\$41.99 and up) in stock, especially since condos in the neighborhood have begun snapping them up for residents to use, she says.

The cycling shopper

Foot and pedal evangelists have been out in force. Walkable-community proponents Feet First distributed 90 carts this summer in West and South Seattle to encourage shoppers to walk and shop.

Cascade Bicycle Club has been sending bike ambassadors to Puget Sound farmers markets to demonstrate how to shop by bike and highlights gear and techniques in its Commuter 101 classes. (One tip: Be sure your panniers are loaded evenly, and that you rig them out of reach of your heels so you're not knocking your produce and milk into traffic.)

"We found a lot of people who said, 'I want to get around by bike. I want to use my bike more for transportation. So what else can I do? How can I shop by bike?' So we slowly started integrating that component into classes," said Chris Cameron, Cascade's commute director.

To wit, REI is selling more and more commuter-type bicycles and accompanying accessories, said spokeswoman Courtney Coe, including a popular pair of Novara Round Town panniers (\$55, www.rei.com) that riders can clip off and carry right into the store.

The options are boundless with bikes: waterproof, roll-top bags (Cameron recommends Germany's Ortlieb brand, \$93 and up at Gregg's Cycle, www.greggscycles.com and REI), a variety of baskets (he likes Topeak, www.topeak.com), racks (\$29 and up) and trailers (around \$200). He also sees plenty of folks rolling past with good ol' plastic milk crates lashed to their racks with zip ties or bungee cords (free, if you know the right person).

Seattle cyclist Brian Peterson shops with two panniers attached to his bike's rear rack and finds he typically can squeeze a week's worth of groceries inside, taking care to bundle frozen foods together on the journey between the Wallingford QFC or University District Trader Joe's and his home near Green Lake.

The key is not buying too many bulky items at once, a lesson he learned his first time shopping by bike about three years ago.

"The first time, I tried to buy a gigantic package of toilet paper along with my regular groceries," he says. "I had to improvise on the way home and held it under one arm."

Now, he knows enough to visit the store several times per week and straps larger items to his bike with bungee cords. Or, he'll take along extra friends for more carrying capacity.

Alas, the eternal Northwest question: But what to do when it rains? There are those lovely waterproof Ortlieb panniers. But in a pinch, Peterson will cover his panniers and purchases in — you guessed it — plastic bags.

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Brooke O'Steen, seated, and Ty O'Steen, pedaling, and their daughter Emma Jade with their bakfiets cargo bike.

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