

Paper Towels Vs. Recyclable or Cloth

The Impact of Paper Towels

Paper towels are exceptionally convenient for drying your hands and wiping down a mess quickly. They are such an understated, ubiquitous part of life that we often use far more than we realize—to the tune of an average of 80 rolls per person per year! While a disposable product like paper towels seem like a perfect solution for cleaning, they come with considerable negatives. Across all stages of use, from sourcing materials to end-of-use when they are disposed of, paper towels are not sustainable. (Impactful)

Paper towels are made from virgin wood pulp, which is the bark of softwood trees that have been mechanically or chemically broken down. Not only is it a large contributor to deforestation, the chlorine bleach used to clean and whiten the pulp seeps into the environment after the paper towel is discarded. Their production also results in the emission of a large amount of greenhouse gasses. Replacing some or all of your use of paper towels helps reduce deforestation and pollution.

Recycled Paper Towels

While not as pleasant to use, recycled paper towels boast a lot of benefits over traditional paper towels. They can be made out of a variety of recycled fibers from old clothing, newspapers, magazines, etc. meaning that new trees are not being harvested to source the materials for their creation. In addition, they are biodegradable, breaking down in around 20 years versus the centuries a traditional paper towel would. (Ecomastery) Recycled paper towels strike a good balance between being a single-use product and sustainable option.

Cloth Towels

Using reusable cloth towels or rags is the best option for the environment when picking a cleaning implement or hand-drying towel. While the other two are single-use, cloth towels have a much longer life cycle, which means less emissions from products, less deforestation, and less pollution. Rags for cleaning are often cut from worn down products, allowing the reuse of clothing, bedding, and towels. There is an environmental cost to washing them, but this is greatly offset by their benefits over the use of paper towels. Reaching for these alternatives over paper towels can help reduce your footprint over time.

Works Cited

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