

How to Make a Substitute for Toilet Paper

Three Methods: [Making Reusable Cloth Toilet Paper](#) [Staying Clean while Camping](#) [Using Quick Solutions](#)

Making toilet paper takes plenty of wood, electricity, and water. Reusable cloth may sound icky, but any parent who's used cloth diapers can tell you they aren't that scary. Give it a try and see if you find it more comfortable. You can also find natural "toilet paper" while camping.

Method
1

Making Reusable Cloth Toilet Paper

1 Tear up rags for a trial run. Wash whatever rags or old clothing you have around. Tear them into squares measuring 4x4 inch (10x10 cm) or larger. Try a sports jersey or washcloth, since these tend not to fray.^[1] This is a cheap way to try out the idea. Keep reading for more durable options, followed by instructions for use.

2 Make your own from flannel. With a little initial expense, you can make a long-lasting, comfortable "toilet paper." In the long run, it will make a big difference in household expense and environmental impact. Here's how:

- Buy a yard of cotton flannel from a fabric store. Choose a patterned cloth to hide stains.^[2] If your family is squeamish about sharing these, buy one pattern per person.
- Cut into squares between 4 and 6 inches (10–15 cm) on each side. Ideally, use pinking shears to reduce fraying.
- Optionally, stitch around the edges with a serger, preventing fraying. Flannel rarely frays anyway, so this is not required.^[3]

3 Set up your storage system. Set up an open container for the clean cloths. Choose a second container with a lid for the used cloths. Ideally, use a small trash can that you can open by stepping on a pedal. Line this with a pillowcase so you can easily transfer the cloth to the washing machine.^[4]

- Some people add water and vinegar to the used container to disinfect the cloths. A wet container becomes much smellier and grosser than a dry one, so this is not recommended. This may not even reduce bacteria, since they thrive in moisture.^{[5][6]}
- Place a "Cloth only" sign on the used container.

4 Wet before wiping (optional). You can use the cloth toilet paper dry, which keeps odor low in the used container.^[7] However, a little water might make the cloth more comfortable and easier to wash. There are several ways to add this to your bathroom routine:

- Wet the cloth in the sink or with a spray bottle before wiping.
- Rinse yourself with a bidet before wiping.
- Dampen the stack of clean cloths each time you load the container. Due to the risk of mildew, you'll need to wash remaining cloths every two or three days.

5 Wipe as usual. There's no special trick here. Cloth will clog the plumbing if flushed, so tell the household to use the container for used cloth.

- You can use "personal cloth" for both urine and feces. Some households choose to use it only for urine, and stick to regular toilet paper for feces.

6 Wash the cloth. About every two or four days, toss the pillowcase and the used cloth into the washing machine. You can combine them with any other laundry except for towels, kitchen cloths, or jeans (which may trap the cloth in pockets).^[8] To ensure they are disinfected, follow these guidelines:^{[9][10]}

- Agitation is an important part of cleaning. Wash laundry loads large enough to rub against each other, without tightly packing the machine.
- If residue remains, increase the length of washing or the amount of detergent or (for high-efficiency washers) the amount of water.
- Use the high-temperature setting.
- Add bleach to the laundry, or sun-dry as a more eco-friendly disinfectant.

**Method
2**

Staying Clean while Camping

- 1 Rinse with a spray bottle.** Spray yourself clean with a peri bottle, or any other water-spraying device. You can find a peri bottle in a pharmacy or baby supply aisle.^[11]
- 2 Identify soft leaves.** Most leaves are scratchy and unpleasant. A few species are soft enough to earn the names "cowboy's" or "lumberjack's toilet paper." Look these up in a local wildlife guide before your camping trip:
 - Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), found throughout the world.^{[12][13]}
 - Lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*), native to Asia but cultivated in most temperate climates.^{[14][15]}
 - Pine needles still attached to the branch.^[16] This may not be as comfortable as other options, but the natural brush shape makes it easy to wipe.
 - Moss is comfortable, but messy if it falls apart.^[17]
- 3 Use a smooth stone.** An oval river stone is a common wiping tool in cultures without toilet paper. It sounds strange, but these are easy to find and comfortable to grip. Just make sure not to point any sharp edges at the wrong place.

**Method
3**

Using Quick Solutions

- 1 Carry around a tissue pack.** Stick a travel-size pack of tissues in your purse or luggage. This is the next closest thing to toilet paper.
- 2 Prepare the cardboard paper roll.** You know that cardboard tube that's still hanging up on the roll when all the toilet paper is gone? Start peeling the layers of paper off it until you have enough to wipe with. Wet it at the sink to make it soft and comfortable. Flush when done.
- 3 Wipe with a sponge.** Although popular among the Romans, this method is no longer considered a great idea. Sponges pick up filth and bacteria quickly, so you'd better know where the sponge has been. After you're done, submerge the sponge in diluted bleach, any product containing quaternary ammonium, or boiling water. Take it out after five minutes.^[18]

Community Q&A

What if you don't have access to a cloth or things like that?



You could use a leaf if you are outside, or if worst comes to worst, use a piece of clothing.

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Will I get into trouble if I do this?



That really depends on your parents. There's no reason you'd get in trouble with anyone else. You're not really doing anything wrong, it's just pointless if you have access to toilet paper. This is meant to be used in emergencies when you don't have toilet paper.

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Tips

- Leave regular toilet paper in your bathroom for guests, and for women who may not want to stain the cloth during menstruation.

Warnings

- If using leaves in the great outdoors, check you're not wiping with poison ivy, prickles, or insects.
- If someone in your house is sick, wash personal cloth separately from clothing.
- Residue buildup in the washing machine can spread bacteria. If you do not use hot water and bleach, periodically run your washing machine with nothing but water and bleach for a full cycle.^[19]

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.sustainablebabysteps.com/recycled-toilet-paper.html>
2. <http://www.sustainablebabysteps.com/recycled-toilet-paper.html>
3. <http://www.sustainablebabysteps.com/recycled-toilet-paper.html>

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