

Big Black Plastic Waste

When we were given the challenge of writing a report for the environment I really wanted to find a point of difference and hopefully make a change to the way people deal with plastic waste. Not only that I wanted to base it on something local and happening in our country.

My family own a grapevine nursery. What is that? You may ask. A nursery is plant propagation, or a place where plants are made and grown for buying and selling needs. In order for my dad to grow the grape vines he needs to use black plastic polythene. Yes the first part may seem like daisies and butterflies because we are growing more plants, but the second is not whatsoever. So this means we have a problem in our hands that is becoming dire.



Before I dug down and found the facts and statistics that I had not been aware of, I thought it was all okay, I mean compared to some things I thought that it wasn't much plastic coming off our property. But then I

started researching and I was struck by how much black plastic polythene we use and then take to the landfill every year, as it is a very difficult product to reuse on your own property.

When I began writing this article I started actually looking deeper and going to nursery. I noticed that little, tiny bits come off and flap around in the wind. We have a stream next to our house and I know that it is very easy for bits to make its way into it and flow out into the ocean. I was moved to think that every little piece that breaks off is possibly one animal killed, and these tiny pieces could make its way into the food chain.



When I asked my dad about the problem and possible solutions there was many things I had to consider. First of all the material has to be black, because absorbs heat from the sun and keeps the soil warm, secondly it had to be able to stretch a fair way before it would break, thirdly it can't biodegrade before it is supposed to, lastly it has to be cheap and affordable. With all these things to keep in mind I was lost for ideas.

Then my dad then to me a story about the biggest nursery in New Zealand. I got excited because I thought this might mean a possible solution. This nursery made the same long strips of plastic polythene as on our property, but substituting the plastic for a type of maize that would

do the same job. They grew 40 hectares of the maize then turned it into a substitute for black polythene. They started putting it over their nursery and then they faced the problem. The maize alternative only covered one quarter of the land they needed covered. So overall after the time, effort and money they would have used/spent was not very effectively used.

It may appear that this is not a very big problem, because you might not have seen a nursery before and it may appear that there are bigger problems than this. Yet 6.5 kilometres of plastic polythene is taken off our 1 hectare nursery every year, and after the time of just five years there will be 32.5 kilometres of plastic polythene all piled up.



For a couple of years we were just putting it on, taking it off and taking it to landfill. But then a problem struck. The dump wasn't taking it anymore. Not only that every June my dad would take it off he would feel annoyed that his only solution was to take it to the dump. My dad became more and more wary of the problem so he took action.

Finally he came across a solution that involved the plastic wrap being removed and then sent to a business that bales it. It is then sent to

Palmerston North to be recycled. They make it into reusable substances. It may seem as though the problem is solved. But there are still flaws in this situation. Firstly, with wineries growing by the second this will eventually build up, it costs four times as much which leads in to my next point: not all wine growing companies are recycling their plastic waste.

With wineries flourishing and plastic waste growing I think that this will become a problem we will have to face, so why not start now? I hope that by writing this article and spreading the word it will make more people aware and will help sprout new ideas for the future.

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