

# A Reusable Shopping Bag That Folds in an Instant



Foldable bags in the popular new range

**Charging a fee for plastic shopping bags became mandatory for shops in Japan on July 1, 2020. As a result, many people now carry their own bags with them at all times. One new type of bag which is compact and can be folded quickly is proving particularly popular with shoppers.**

## KATO KYOKO

**T**HE number of people walking around carrying small, foldable shopping bags has recently increased due to the mandatory fee for plastic shopping bags. These reusable shopping bags come in a variety of sizes and designs, and there are more than a few people who use several bags depending on the purpose and situation. Among these bags is a hit product that has shipped more than seven million units since sales began in 2015.

This product is the Shupatto<sup>i</sup> series of compact bags developed by MARNA INC., a manufacturer of household goods that was established in 1872. The standout feature of this foldable bag is that it can

easily be made smaller simply by pulling both ends, while also being easy to open up. For its functionality and design, the Shupatto bag was awarded the prestigious German Red Dot Award 2016<sup>ii</sup> and iF DESIGN AWARD 2017<sup>iii</sup>.

Kikuta Minami, product designer at MARNA INC., explains the background to the creation of the bag.

“With conventional reusable shopping bags, even if they can be folded small, albeit with some bother, storing them in the included storage bag was a bit of a pain. My superior said, ‘It’d be great if there was a bag that could easily and properly be folded. Why don’t you try and make one?’ So I began developing one in my first year at the company.”

As Kikuta observed people using reusable shopping bags, she noticed that they folded the bags while looking for the fold marks on the bag. But after the bag is used a number of times, those fold marks disappear. Days continued as she thought about how to make a bag easy to fold. She got a hint from a disposable hat made of nonwoven fabric that she had worn when doing inspections at a distribution center

<sup>ii</sup> Sponsor: Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen

<sup>iii</sup> Sponsor: iF International Forum Design GmbH (iF)

<sup>i</sup> Shupatto has acquired intellectual property rights both in Japan and overseas.

All photos: Courtesy of MARNA INC.



Over-the-shoulder foldable bags



The design keeps the contents of the bag out of sight



Forming a belt-like shape quickly by pulling both ends, the bag can be rolled up into a compact shape



Two bags pulled and rolled

during her new employee training. Before use, it came folded in a long, thin, belt-like shape, but it turned into a hat when opened up. From this shape, she thought of a design that would fold when pulled.

Kikuta says that she aimed “for the bag to intuitively be folded quickly and properly, even without reading the instructions.”

The highly reproducible fabric was processed with pleats that can’t be easily removed, creating strong fold marks. And by making the color of the bag different from the color of the tape on both ends that are pulled when storing, it makes it easy to understand where to pull. It also isn’t necessary to store the bag in a separate storage bag as the bag can be rolled and fastened with the rubber elastic or snaps that are attached to the bag.

Shupatto’s features include the fact that the bag can be opened up wide like a *furoshiki* wrapping cloth and fit to the shape of the contents when in use, as the design has no bottom gusset. “You can

carry items of a variety of shapes, including things that are flat, round or square,” says Kikuta. “The polyester material is lightweight and fully machine washable, so it can easily be cleaned, too.”

The standard M size, sold from the start, can carry items weighing up to 5 kg and, when in use, measures about 30 cm by 32 cm. When folded, it becomes smaller, with an approximate diameter of 6 cm by 8 cm. In addition to different sizes of compact bags, the product comes in the form of backpacks, shoulder bags and Boston bags, as well. In March 2020, the company also sold a reusable shopping bag that was jointly developed with Seven & i Holdings Co., Ltd. and made with recycled polyester from discarded plastic.

The variety of uses are expanding for reusable shopping bags that are lightweight, easy to open, easy to fold, and multifunctional, so they can be used not only as shopping bags, but also to carry lunch boxes, unexpected purchases made on an outing, and more. 