

Tips for a Greener Holiday



Americans throw away about 25% more trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, (University of Vermont). That's an additional 1 million tons of garbage each week! Much of this waste is holiday packaging and gift-wrap. The holiday cards sold in the U.S. each year are alone enough to fill a football stadium field 10 stories high, (University of Vermont). All of this extra waste means increased disposal costs and greater stress on our natural resources. Here are some environmentally smart tips for a waste-less holiday season.

Shop smarter. Save gas by mapping your route ahead of time. When shopping look for items with less packaging. Say no to plastic bags and bring your own reusable cloth bags.

Give greener gifts. Donate money to a wild life fund or charity in honor of the gift recipient. Give a national parks pass, concert tickets, or restaurant certificate. How about fair trade organic chocolate or coffee? Consider giving something vintage or antique, or something practical with an environmental message like a water bottle, battery charger, or a set of canvas shopping bags. Homemade gifts, like cookies and jams are also more environmentally friendly. Also consider gifts that get "used up" like soy-based soaps and candles, or seeds for next year's garden. Visit <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/article.cfm?contentID=5616> or <http://green.yahoo.com/holiday2007/> for more green gift ideas.

Rethink gift wrap. Wrap presents with old maps, calendar pages, colorful magazine pages, or children's artwork. Avoid using paper entirely by using towels, scarves, or reusable decorative tins, baskets or boxes. If you do buy wrapping paper, look for ones made of recycled paper. If every American family wrapped just 3 presents in re-used materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields (Environmental Defense). Wrapping paper can be recycled as long as it is actually paper and not tyvek, foil, or plastic backed paper.



No more Styrofoam. If you are mailing gifts, pack them with shredded paper or newspaper, which can be recycled. You can even use popped popcorn, which birds will eat. These alternatives are much more environmentally friendly than the conventional foam packing peanuts, which are not recyclable and will not biodegrade.

Switch to LED holiday lights. They may cost a little more in the beginning but use up to 90% less power, last much longer, and stay cooler.

Recycle your tree. Each year, 10 million Christmas trees end up in the landfill. Many cities and counties offer programs to turn your tree into mulch or wood chips. To find a program near you, visit www.kansasbirp.com.

Say "no" to junk mail. You are probably receiving piles of mail order catalogs this time of year. Recycle unwanted magazines and catalogs at your local recycling center and get yourself off the mailing lists by calling 888-5-OPTOUT or visit www.NewDream.org.

Send environmentally conscious greetings. Send holiday greetings via e-mail. You can customize them with your own photos and music. If you prefer to send the paper kind, make your own cards with scrap paper or look for holiday cards printed on recycled paper. Eliminate envelope waste by sending postcards or folding and sealing notes so you can address them on the outside.

Get creative with decorations and ornaments. Make your own ornaments and decorations from discarded materials, like luminaries made with soup cans. For tree trimmings try edible decorations like strings of popcorn or gingerbread. Decorate your home with natural items like, holly, cedar, pinecones, and fruits.

Add organic and local foods to your holiday meals. Support local family farmers who grow sustainable meat and produce and choose organic ingredients from your grocery store.

Host a waste-less celebration. Hosting a holiday party? Entertain with real dishes and glassware. It's more elegant and will help you avoid disposables. Cut back on electricity with candles and once guests have arrived, turn down the thermostat. Send leftover food home with your guests and recycle everything you can.



For more information about recycling and waste reduction, visit www.kansasgreenteams.org.

