

Tips for Creating a “Green” Holiday Season

The holidays bring joy, excitement and festivities with friends and family. However, the gift giving and merriment also come with a lot of household waste. In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that household waste can increase by more than 25 percent between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. Gifts, decorations, packaging, and food waste are major contributors to this increase. Identifying ways to celebrate the holidays in a more environmentally sustainable way is not only beneficial for the environment but can often lead to financial savings.

Here are some simple tips for creating a “green” holiday season!

Gifts

- Gift an experience such as a cooking class, movie tickets, or a fishing license instead of items that may be rarely or never used.
- Make your own handmade gifts, such as baked goods or crafts.
- Purchase locally crafted gifts and request no plastic packaging.
- Arrange gift swaps to reduce the number of gifts purchased.
- Find unique gifts and save resources by shopping at local resale or antique stores.
- Minimize gift wraps. If wraps are necessary, consider using newspaper, old maps, or fabric scraps. Avoid plastic ribbons and tags.
- Find paper products, such as cards or wrapping paper, that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). This means the paper was produced from sustainably grown and harvested trees.
- Consider making your own holiday cards out of recycled materials or send an e-card instead of a physical one.

Christmas Trees and Decorations

- Buy a real Christmas tree and support local tree farmers. This will also reduce gas emissions from transportation.
- Consider cutting a tree from your own yard to have the lowest impact.
- If you prefer an artificial tree, carefully unpack and store it each year so it can be reused. If damaged, order replacement parts rather than throwing the tree away. Reuse of artificial trees avoids the carbon impact of producing, packing and shipping a new one.
- Choose a shorter artificial tree or a “species” that has less “foliage” to further reduce the tree’s carbon footprint. Artificial trees are now more commonly made of recycled materials.
- Save money by making your own decorations from natural or recycled materials. Also, reuse artificial tree limbs from old trees to make wreaths and garlands.
- Reuse decorations for multiple years instead of buying new ones each year.
- Donate used holiday decorations and unwanted artificial trees to local charity stores or senior care centers.
- Compost real trees, pumpkins, pinecones, and dried fruit garlands after the holidays instead of throwing them away. This is much better than sending them to decompose in landfills, where anaerobic conditions will ultimately lead to the release of methane gas.
- Consider chipping real trees for mulch or use in animal stalls. This can be done by yourself or through community efforts or retailers.
- Consider using real trees as an erosion barrier for sand or soil or as fish habitat in lakes.

Meals

- Cut down on food waste by planning meals ahead of time. Check your pantry for food that you already have and be realistic about how much food you will need to minimize leftovers.
- Ask guests to bring their own containers that can be used to send home leftovers.
- Freeze leftovers and use them to make other meals after the holidays.
- Donate unused canned foods and fresh produce to local food pantries.
- Shop local farmers markets and buy locally produced food and products that support local farmers and communities.
- Cut down on plastic waste by using reusable plates, cups, utensils, and napkins.

Energy Savings

- Switch to LED holiday lights that consume 70 percent less energy compared to incandescent lights.
- Make sure to set a timer on your holiday lights to prevent energy from being wasted while you are sleeping or not at home. Also, consider using fewer lights.
- When cooking meals, use the oven light instead of opening the door. This will save heat and reduce cooking time. Also, bake several dishes at a time to reduce oven use.
- Set your ceiling fan to clockwise during cool winter months to better circulate warm air around the room.
- Put on your pajamas and turn down your thermostat to conserve energy. Cool room temperatures will also prolong needle retention and tree vigor of real holiday trees.
- Use a programmable thermostat to adjust home temperatures while you are away from home during the holidays.

Reference

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). <https://www.epa.gov>

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