

Go Green for the Holidays Conservation Corner – December 2015

Make "green" holiday choices when you are shopping, traveling, sending cards, decorating, and choosing gifts. When you save energy and resources, you protect the environment and safeguard health both now and for the future.

The winter holidays are nearly here! You may be ready for the festivities, or you may still be planning holiday gatherings and shopping for decorations and gifts. Most of us want to enjoy the fun and spirit of the season without spending too much money or using too many resources in the process. And most of all, we all want to enjoy quality time with those we love.

The good news is that you can participate in all these holiday activities and still manage to conserve resources. In doing so, you also protect the environment, and protecting the environment can safeguard your health both now and in the future.

Even if you already reduce, reuse, and recycle, browse through the suggestions below for more ways to bring those practices into your holiday activities. If all of us make even a few eco-friendly choices, we will save energy and resources and send less trash to the landfill during this busy time of year.

Decorate with items that are energy-efficient and durable.

- Research the most energy efficient choice for your holiday tree. The choice will vary depending on your location.
 - o Use other types of decorations besides trees.
 - o Find out about trees grown in your area or trees grown in ways that keep forests healthy and safe.
 - o Buy a living tree that you can plant outside after the holidays
 - o Buy a smaller tree so that you have less to recycle.
 - o Dispose of your tree at a chipping facility or return it to the environment in other eco-friendly ways.
- Use energy efficiently.
 - o Consider using few or no lights in your holiday decorations.
 - o Decorate with more energy efficient LED strings.
 - o Plug your decorative indoor and outdoor lights into a timer to save electricity.
- Decorate creatively and inexpensively with natural materials from your yard or with items you already own.
- Choose durable ornaments from wood, metal, or cloth.

Save resources by giving cards that are eco-friendly or homemade.

- Make your own cards.
- Buy cards made from recycled paper (look for "post-consumer" content) and printed in non-toxic inks.
- Buy cards and envelopes that can be recycled. Choose cards printed on white stock without metallic or plastic coatings.
- Buy cards wrapped in the least bulky or most recyclable packaging.
- Substitute postcards for cards that require envelopes.
- Reuse the fronts of old holiday cards as gift tags.

Use fewer resources when you shop, give presents, and wrap gifts.

- Take your own bags on shopping trips. Keep them in the car so they're always available.

- Shop locally whenever you can. Shop online as an alternative when your item can't be found without driving too far.
- Conserve energy when shopping. Use mass transit if possible. If you have to drive, combine several errands in one trip or carpool with family and friends.
- Give gifts that are durable, energy-efficient, recyclable, or made of natural products.
- Buy from local shops and craft shows or from companies that use fair-trade practices.
- Search antique and second-hand stores for unique gifts.
- Make your own gifts: knit, sew, bake, build, or create art from reused items.
- Make calendars using your own photographs or a recipe book with your favorite recipes.
- Give a membership or an experience—tuition for a class or a visit to museum.
- Give of your time—coupons for providing a meal, planting a garden, cleaning, or using another talent or skill.
- Plant a tree in someone's yard.
- Use creative materials for gift wrap:
 - o Scarves, fabric, handkerchiefs
 - o Old maps, sheet music, advertisements
 - o Reusable tins
 - o Usable baking pans or other home or garden items

Eat sustainable food and avoid disposable containers and extra packaging.

- Research sustainable food choices in your area and buy locally if possible.
- Buy snacks and beverages in bulk to avoid extra packaging.
- Serve food with washable utensils, plates, and glasses, rather than disposable items.
- Make homemade eggnog, hot chocolate or iced tea in large quantities, and prepare pitchers of ice water in advance to reduce waste from water and soda bottles or cans.

Why not choose a few of these ideas that will be easy for you to incorporate into your holiday celebration? Not only will you conserve energy and resources, but chances are you will also simplify your life. And you may get more of what we all need at this time of year—time to enjoy your family and friends and to focus on the joys of the season.