

Low Waste Ideas for the Holidays

Tips for celebrating with less stuff and more cheer!

Provided by your Recycling Block Captain, Fall 2014



Consider this: According to the U.S. E.P.A, between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, household waste in the US increases by a whopping 25%. Food waste, shopping bags, packaging, gift wrap, bows and ribbons, and more all add up to about 1 million tons a week! And while the average person in the US spends over \$800 in holiday gifts, a national survey commissioned by the Center for a New American Dream found that most people would prefer a holiday with less emphasis on stuff and spending.

The following is a list of tips and tricks for reducing holiday waste. **We challenge you to try at least one idea from each category this holiday season.**

Entertaining



- Send electronic invitations** – Evites are the simplest. To personalize the invitation, send a simple email invitation, and follow up with a phone call. For more formal occasions, purchase post-consumer recycled paper for the invitations.
- Plan your menu carefully** – Three times as much food waste is produced during the holiday season. Decide how much food is right for the occasion, and purchase local, in-season fruits and vegetables, as well as meat, eggs, and dairy products, from the Farmers' Market or other local sources. They're fresher, taste better, require less packaging, and don't involve long-distance shipping.
- Make the refreshments yourself** – Baking and cooking from scratch eliminates a lot of packaging.
- Use durable plates and serving ware** – Rather than purchasing disposable paper and plastic, borrow extra dishes and flatware from friends and neighbors, or buy them from local thrift stores.
- Serve beer from "growlers" rather than from individual bottles** – Refill "growlers" at local breweries or brew pubs.
- Use cloth goodie bags** – For children's parties, use fabric scraps to make reusable cloth goodie bags.

Decorating



- Decorate with ornaments and other holiday items purchased from thrift stores or garage sales.**
- Be resourceful** – Use common items from your own kitchen and backyard to create unique and unexpected decorations.
- Buy a live tree** – After the holidays, plant the tree in your yard, or repot it for use over several years.
- Reuse cut trees** – If you have a cut tree, add it to your yard after the holidays. Use clippers to create mulch, and use the trunk to create a border around planting areas.

Gifts

Gift Certificate

- Give the gift of time, talent, or an experience** – Rather than purchasing items that require resources and energy to produce, offer to do something special that will enrich the recipient's life.
- Consider alternative gift giving** – Make a donation to a favorite charity in the person's name.
- Make your own gifts** – Examples are baking, sewing, knitting, woodworking.
- Select gifts that are reused or environmentally friendly** – A few examples are second-hand toys and sports equipment, a battery charger, food (fruit, nuts, preserves, or breads), and plants.
- Choose gifts with minimal packaging** – Before purchasing a gift, ask yourself how much of what you're buying will end up in the landfill.
- Host a DIY Gift Party** – Get friends together to make gift items such as soap, lotion, or reusable cloth grocery bags.
- Host a White Elephant Party** – Invite everyone to bring a used item or a gift they received but never used. Make a game out of the process of gift selection.

Gift Wrap



- Save gently used gift wrap and ribbons for reuse.**
- Recycle gift wrap that cannot be reused** – Remove tape before recycling.
- Avoid buying wrapping paper with non-paper additives** – Paper with foiled or glitter accents, glossy or metallic coatings cannot be recycled.
- Wrap gifts in reusable cloth bags.**