

“Green” Holiday Ideas with Mother Earth in Mind 2019

The holidays can be a time of great excess...food, gifts, travel, decorations, etc. For example, studies show that Americans generate 25% more trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve than during the rest of the year! However, everyone can take steps to make the holidays more eco-friendly without taking anything away from the spirit of the season. Sustainability is possible when we all shop, gift and celebrate with the environment in mind. Consider the following ideas:

1. Shop smart--buy locally and consolidate shopping trips to save fuel. Many downtowns have special holiday nights...they are fun and create a sense of community. Search local stores for items that are organic and/or free trade. For example, check out Taza Chocolate locally produced in Somerville, MA.
2. Say no to receipts if you don't need them---at stores and at ATMs---to save trees.
3. Shop online. Think of all the gasoline you can save by comparison shopping at your computer! Consolidate online orders to save on delivery fuel and cardboard shipping boxes and ask that packaging be made of recycled materials that you can recycle again. (*For MA garden club members, if you shop at Amazon, go through Amazon Smile and choose GCFM to receive a % of your purchase at no extra cost to you. You can use it to donate a percentage to any nonprofit organization.)
4. Give gifts that do not use batteries or give a battery charger and rechargeable batteries with/as a gift.
5. Consider giving the gift of indoor plants. A two-year study showed that many philodendrons, dracaenas, and snake plant may be effective at reducing indoor air pollution and most can be found at local nurseries or florists.
6. Buying water in plastic bottles may be convenient but it is wasteful, unnecessary and harmful to the environment. Give a gift of a stainless-steel water bottle that can be filled with tap water. If you have taste or safety concerns about tap water, give the gift of a water filtration system or Brita pitcher along with the stainless-steel water bottle. Give a family a set of the SS bottles for adults and kids! Add a set of stainless-steel straws!
7. Give a programmable thermostat so the thermometer can be turned down in the winter when you are away from home or asleep. They also work in the summer to turn up the temperature to save on A/C electricity.
8. A tire pressure gauge makes a great stocking stuffer for less than \$10. Correctly inflated tires can save 20% at the pump! Drive slowly to Grandma's house.... less than 60mph saves gas. And, don't idle while waiting for a parking space at the mall or at the ATM.... turn off the car if you are idling for longer than 30 seconds. Or, pay to have someone's tires aligned and balanced which saves on MPG, too.
9. Theme baskets are fun to put together and to receive:
 - a. Programmable thermostat and silk long underwear and a heavy fleece shirt and a draft snake.
 - b. Omnivore's Dilemma and a vegetarian cookbook and a canning jar filled with a layered bean soup mix (check online for the recipe)

- c. A polyester shower curtain liner or cotton shower curtain to replace the vinyl one (which off-gases chemicals that pollute indoor air), a low-flow shower head, and some natural bar soap to replace the anti-bacterial ones that come in plastic containers.
- d. Free trade coffee and chocolates and organic teas.
- e. A HEPA vacuum cleaner and a shoe rack and slippers to keep by the door to keep outdoor pollutants outside.
- f. Glass storage containers to replace plastic ones and a Brita pitcher and stainless-steel water bottles.
- g. A rubber or stainless-steel hose (to replace the phalates in the vinyl ones) and seed catalogues and a soil test kit.
- h. A tire pressure gauge and certificates to a car wash----saves lots of water over the do-it-yourself at-home version.
- i. A gift certificate to a garden center and a list of native plants to buy there.
- j. A small LED flashlight and LED lightbulbs.

10. Give the gift of a countertop compost crock or pail and/or a compost bin. Include a Compost Aerator/Turner. (This tool plunges into the compost bin or pile and as it is pulled out, "wings" open and the compost is turned---a great strength training exercise!) Give a certificate for a soil test or a soil test kit to help someone get started on organic lawn care. UMASS does the tests for a modest cost. Give a rain barrel to help save and conserve water. Give a book about organic gardening or native plants. * See the list at the end for suggestions.
11. A very nice holiday gift is a set of napkins rings the family will use and cherish. Add a nice set of cloth napkins which are much better than using paper napkins. Find napkins rings that can be personalized...children especially like this. Heirloom napkin rings can be passed down through the generations...start the tradition now! Or make some: nail 4 wine corks together in a square to make an interesting "ring" for a wine lover. (The Museum of Modern Art sells a set of 6-Fold-by-Number Cloth Napkins that are fun for the whole family.)
12. Reuse and Recycle! Consider gifting quality not-new items purchased from local consignment shops, yard sales, antique shops, thrift shops, and your own attic and basement. For example: combine a set of glass beer mugs you never use with a 6-pack of a specialty beer and some coasters from a favorite pub; flower pots from a yard sale potted with cuttings from your own garden or house plants; a nearly-new bicycle from a children's consignment shop for a 4-year old; a set of Kosta Boda cordial glasses and a silver plated tray from an antique shop; a cast iron frying pan from a thrift shop, cleaned and seasoned, with a recipe for a favorite frittata; fly-fishing flies from a yard sale; antique tools from a church white elephant sale, etc. OR arrange to have someone's treasured item refurbished or repaired.
13. When wrapping gifts, use recycled wrap. Especially, do not use foil paper...it can't be recycled. Avoid glitter...it is toxic to the environment. Buy or make fabric gift bags to reuse over the years...go online for directions or sources. Recycle the fronts of holiday cards from past years to use as gift tags.
14. Give activities and events rather than "stuff." Gift certificates for shows, movies, cooking classes, dinners out, and sporting events are great ideas! Memberships to museums are welcome, too.
15. Purchase a membership for/donate in someone's name to a conservation or environmental organization such as Mass Audubon, Sierra Club, Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, Natural Resources Defense

Council, Nature Conservancy, Environmental Working Group, Mothers Out Front or Silent Spring Institute.

*See list at end.

16. Give the gift of a pass to the National Parks...the more time folks spend outdoors at our parks, the more they care about the environment. Outdoor time in nature is good for everyone's health, too!
17. Avoid gag or useless gifts that the recipient cannot or will not use...these often end up in the trash.
18. Give the gift of your time. Give an IOU to bake and deliver a special food or meal, teach someone to knit or crochet, talk someone through converting to organic lawn care, groom someone's dog, drive someone to an appointment or to get their car repaired, offer to baby sit or to weed a garden. Drive someone to/from the airport. There are many ways you can share your time.
19. Give the gift of information this holiday. Have the whole family watch together a DVD about an environmental issue, such as Gasland, The Chemical Reaction, The Story of Stuff, King Corn, or An Inconvenient Truth and discuss.
20. Share an activity together over the holidays. Have everyone gather around a computer and calculate the family's Carbon Footprint. To find the calculator, go to <https://www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator/>. Then, decide on a carbon diet goal for your New Year's resolution. Or use Low Carbon Diet: a 30-Day Program to Lose 5000 Pounds to work on a family plan.
21. Arrange for a free energy audit for your partner or friend...contact MASS SAVE at www.masssave.com
22. Christmas trees...it's best to buy a live tree and plant it in the yard after the holidays. Or, a locally grown cut tree to be collected after the holidays by your town and mulched, not tossed whole into a landfill or burned in an incinerator. Avoid artificial trees---they are made from fossil fuels, produce lots of CO2 getting here from China, never break down and usually come without LED lights. If you have an artificial tree, replace its standard bulbs strings with LED strings and never throw it out...pass it on to another family or donate it when you no longer use it.
23. Decorate your tree with salt dough ornaments or cranberry/popcorn garlands you make at home rather than plastic ornaments shipped from far away made of plastic from petroleum. Go online for directions.
24. Use greens from your own yard to decorate the house. Give gift certificates for plants that can provide these greens in future years. For example, holly, yellow and red-twiggged dogwood, evergreen trees, Japanese Andromeda, or Yellow Chamaecyparis.
25. Use LED lights for your holiday decorations...these use 90% less electricity. Even though they cost a bit more up front, you save that cost and **much more** on your electric bills in the very first year. LED candles are a good idea, too. To light your outdoor walkways, consider solar lights as well as solar spotlights to highlight door and yard decorations. Make natural decorations such as salt dough ornaments, cranberry and popcorn strings, and wooden outdoor figures for the lawn. Avoid the lighted air-inflated plastic figures.
26. Use candles made from beeswax or soy with natural fragrances. Regular candles are petroleum-based, and the fragrances are artificial chemicals that add to indoor air pollution. Use home-made potpourri of spices and orange peels and boil in a pan on the stove to scent the air rather than using purchased air fresheners or heavily scented holiday items.

27. Fireplace fires allow warm air to escape the house...enjoy them sparingly. And, skip the wood...the mold and particulate matter can aggravate allergies and pollute indoor air. Instead, use Duraflame or other manufactured logs...they are much more environmentally friendly! Remember to close the dampers after things have cooled down.
28. When cleaning ahead of holiday parties and guests, use natural cleaning products that do not contain harsh toxic substances such as bleach or ammonia, so you do not pollute indoor air. Use white vinegar, water, liquid soap and essential oils of thyme, lemon, grapefruit, and sage to make your own all-purpose cleaner (not for granite, though). Use white vinegar and water for cleaning glass and mirrors. Use baking soda for scrubbing toilets. Google to find non-toxic recipes or use Seventh Generation or other non-toxic manufactured cleaning products. Avoid "anti-bacterial" products...use plain soap and water instead. Avoid hand sanitizers made with alcohol and synthetic fragrances. CleanWell is one brand that is effective without those additives.
29. To clean sterling silver, place items in a stainless-steel sink or glass bowl, add a piece of aluminum foil and 1 tablespoon baking soda, 1 tablespoon salt, and 1 quart of boiling water. Tarnish will disappear...no need to use harsh silver polishes.
30. Decide to deemphasize meat in holiday meals and highlight all the wonderful vegetables and fruits abundant this time of year, as well as grains and breads. Serve locally raised chicken or turkey rather than beef, lamb or pork, which are more likely to have antibiotics and hormones added and which contribute much more to global warming in their production. Move the traditional "side dishes" into the spotlight. Yum!
31. Prepare food in smaller quantities to cut down on food waste. Food waste is the largest component of landfills: eat leftovers! We can all significantly lessen methane-emitting landfill material. Compost what isn't edible in your own bins or sign up for a compost collection service in your area.
(Offbeet Compost and Black Earth Compost offer such services in the Merrimack Valley area.)
32. If serving fish for holiday meals, check the Monterey Bay Aquarium website for environmentally friendly seafood choices. Order their pocket guides for stocking stuffers.
33. Plastic containers and wrap can leach toxic substances into food. Store holiday leftovers in stainless steel, glass or ceramic containers and never reheat in plastic containers in the microwave. Use paper towels to cover when reheating. Give the gift of glass or silicone storage containers and beeswax food covers to replace plastic containers and plastic wrap.
34. For holiday meals, use cloth napkins and napkin rings rather than paper napkins, or at least use paper napkins made from recycled paper. Use paper towels and bathroom tissue that are made from recycled paper, too. Use real dishes, glassware and flatware rather than single-service paper or plastic. For cleanup, a full dishwasher conserves water better than handwashing in the sink. Don't pre-rinse the dishes....it wastes water and isn't necessary.
35. When grocery shopping, use mesh draw-string bags for produce rather than the plastic bags in the produce section. They are available online and in housewares stores.
36. When dressing for holiday parties and events, pick your personal care products carefully so you are not using ones containing toxic substances. Look for fragrance-free items. Consider not using nail polish. Check the Environmental Working Group's website for a list of safe cosmetics, moisturizers, and sunscreens. Or, check the Silent Spring website.

37. Carpool when possible to holiday events.

38. There are many organizations that sell offsets as gifts for the carbon emissions people generate via various activities, such as flying. Purchasing offsets as part of an overall effort to reduce a carbon footprint is a good idea.... but not to justify ignoring making modifications to a carbon-intensive lifestyle. It can be challenging to make sure the offsets chosen are legitimate and not “greenwashing.” Two sources that have received the highest certification as legit are The Gold Standard (goldstandard.org) and Terrapass (terrapas.com). Others may also be ok.... ask if they have received certification through Green-e.

39. Suggested environmental organizations for gift memberships

Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow www.healthytomorrow.org Reduce use of toxic chemicals

Mass Audubon www.massaudubon.org

Sierra Club MA www.sierraclubmass.org

Mass Interfaith Power and Light www.mipandl.org

Environmental Working Group ewg.org Safety ratings on health/beauty products, food

Clean Water Action www.cleanwateraction.org

Natural Resources Defense Council www.nrdc.org

Nature Conservancy, www.nature.org

Mothers Out Front <http://www.mothersoutfront.org/>

Silent Spring Institute <https://silentspring.org/>

40. Books for gift-giving

1. Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis by Al Gore.
2. Cooler Smarter: Practical Steps for Low-Carbon Living by the Union of Concerned Scientists
3. The Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan.
4. Low Carbon Diet: a 30-Day Program to Lose 5000 Pounds, David Gershon
5. How Bad are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything, by Mike Berners-Lee
6. A Better Planet: Forty Big Ideas for a Sustainable Future, by D. Esty
7. Secondhand: Travels in the New Global Garage Sale, by Adam Minter
8. The Rough Guide to Green Living, by Duncan Clark
9. The Parents' Guide to Climate Revolution by Mary DeMocker
10. Native Plants for New England Gardens, by Richardson and Jaffe
11. Bringing Nature Home by Doug Tallamy
12. Roses for New England: A guide to Sustainable Rose Gardening, by Mike and Angelina Chute
13. Good Bug, Bad Bug: Who's Who, What They Do, and How to Manage Them Organically by Jessica Walliser

41. Resources

Local curbside compost services for Merrimack Valley:

Offbeetcompost.com (formerly Roots)

Blackearthcompost.com

www.masssave.com To request a free home energy audit for someone (or yourself)

www.montereybayaquarium.org For Safe Seafood pocket guides

<http://www.wikihow.com/Sew-a-Cloth-Gift-Bag> Directions for sewing a cloth gift bag.