

Sustainability Tip #7:

The spirit of giving is at its peak during the winter holiday season. Unfortunately, so is our environmental impact. Between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, we generate 25 percent more landfill waste than during the rest of the year, and buy enough greeting cards to fill a football stadium 10 stories high! There are simple ways to "green up" your holidays that may even save you money and spark new gift ideas.

Keep these considerations in mind.

Materials: Try to purchase products made from organic or recycled materials, in minimal, recyclable packaging. If you're buying electronic or household items, look for the most energy-efficient models. You can ask store clerks for this information or research products online.

BYOB: Bring your own tote bag to carry gifts, avoiding the waste of paper and plastic bags.

Plan ahead: Consolidate your shopping trips to save gas. Shop locally, or skip driving altogether by shopping online.

Creative gift wrapping: If each American household wrapped three gifts in reused materials, enough paper would be saved to cover 45,000 football fields. Reuse old wrapping paper, gift bags or boxes, and Sunday comics, or make cloth bags in which to present your gifts.

Cards: Purchase cards made from recycled paper, or cut the picture side off of old cards and send them as postcards. Better yet, skip paper altogether and wish a happy holiday to loved ones via the Internet ("e-cards"), telephone, or in person.

Stumped for gift ideas? Here are just a few specific suggestions:

Food: Make cookies, breads, or jams and present them in reusable tins and jars, or give a pre-made, frozen gourmet dinner right in the baking dish.

Gift certificates: Offer to do yard work, shovel snow, babysit, walk the dog, or cook dinner.

Donations: Make a donation in someone's name to a charity he or she would appreciate.