

Creating More Green and Less Red

IIT Campus Sustainability's Suggestions for Celebrating the Holidays This Year

During the season of celebration we need to show extra care for the environment. The holiday season don't have to be a burden on the environment. With a little effort and imagination, we can reduce the environmental impact of gift giving.

Buy Less

- **Not All Gifts Have To Be Store-Bought**

You can give more while spending less by giving gifts that are personal and unique. While young children may favor the bright, shiny store-bought item, most adults appreciate anything that shows thoughtfulness.

- **Participate in a "Secret Santa" Gift Exchange**

Gather all of your family and friends and write everyone's names on slips of paper. Throw all of the slips into a hat or bowl and take turns drawing the slips out, one by one. You are the "secret santa" for whomever's name is on your individual slip of paper... but don't tell them who you are, that's what makes it a secret! Your list of gifts for all of these people has now dropped to one, as it has for everyone who is participating. You can also participate in the yearly RedditGifts exchange which links gifters world-wide to another individual to give a gift to. As a participant, you will also have a "secret santa" who will send a gift to you! Take a look here to sign up! <http://redditgifts.com/page/secret-santa>

Buy Smart, Think "Green"

- **Look For Locally Made Gifts**

Many gifts in today's marketplace come from halfway around the world, and the impact of transportation contributes significantly to greenhouse emissions and global warming. Local craft fairs and artisan shops are a good source for gifts that come without the added costs of transportation. And gifts made locally often have a story which goes with the gift, since the artisan and the origin of the gift are known. Try searching for gifts at Chicago's Christkindlmarket, which runs from November 26 - December 24 during 11:00am - 8:00pm (Sun-Thurs) and 11:00am - 9:00pm (Fri-Sat) in Daley Plaza downtown!

- **Choose Gifts Made From Recycled Sources**

Many individuals and small businesses have developed great products using recycled materials. Supporting these businesses helps reduce the waste stream while promoting the concept of making best use of available materials. Visit companies like Terracycle (www.terracycle.com) for bags and other products made from recycled materials.

- **Give 'Battery-Free' Gifts**

According to the EPA, about 40% of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Discarded batteries are an environmental hazard. Even rechargeable batteries find their way into the waste stream eventually.

- **'Re-Gifting' is OK**

Re-gifting makes perfect sense. If you receive something you really don't need, look for ways you can reuse this gift by passing it on to someone who can use it. Of course, re-gifting needs to be done with care so as not to offend the original giver, but keeping a gift you don't need is wasteful.

Lower The Impact Of Holiday Lighting

- **Reduce The Size Of Outdoor Lighting Displays**

A smaller presentation of lights can still be attractive, and more appropriate in the 'season of giving'. Saving electricity is also a way of giving, since conserving resources benefits everyone.

- **Use Led Lights For House And Christmas Tree Lighting**

LED holiday lights use up to 95% less energy than larger, traditional holiday bulbs and last up to 100,000 hours when used indoors. LED holiday lights use .04 watts per bulb, 10x less than mini bulbs and 100x less than traditional holiday bulbs. Over a 30-day period, lighting 500 traditional holiday lights will cost you about \$18.00 while the same number of LED lights costs only \$0.19. As an added bonus, if one of the LED lights burns out the rest of the strand will stay lit.

- **Outdoor Mini-Lights Will Also Save Energy**

A 100-light string uses only 40 watts. If you're buying a new set of lights, compare based on equal 'lighted lengths'. Some higher priced brands have 100 mini-lights for only 8 1/2 feet of length, while some 100 mini-light strings cover up to 40 feet in length.

- **Turn Tree Lights And Outdoor House Decorative Lighting At Bedtime**

It's simply a waste of energy to leave the holiday lights on at night after everyone's gone to sleep.

Choose a Live Tree

Although plastic Christmas trees are reusable from year to year, real trees are the more sustainable choice. Plastic trees are made of petroleum products (PVC), and use up resources in both the manufacture and shipping. While artificial trees theoretically last forever, research shows that they are typically discarded when repeated use makes them less attractive. Alternatively, live trees are a renewable resource grown on tree farms, that are replanted regularly. They contribute to air quality while growing, and almost ninety percent are recycled into mulch. Live trees are usually locally grown and sold, saving both transportation costs and added air pollution.

- **Live Potted Trees Can Be Used For Years**

If you buy a small tree in a large pot, you may be able to reuse the tree for 2- 3 years without having to plant or re-pot the tree. If you have the space, replanting your tree outdoors is also an option. Be sure to anticipate the full-grown size of the tree!

- **Chip And Mulch The Tree**

Many communities now have free chipping service for trees. This is useful since the chips are used as mulch for municipal landscaping or sold at low cost to gardeners.

Homemade Cards

Store-bought holiday cards consume a huge amount of natural resources for a disposable item. The amount of cards sold in the US during the holiday season would fill a football field 10 stories high, and requires the harvesting of nearly 300,000 trees. Homemade cards may not be as professional, but they are more personal and just as appreciated.

Alternatives to Wrapping Paper

- **Use environmentally friendly wrapping paper**

Choose wrapping paper made using fibers such as hemp or paper using recycled content.

- **Avoid buying glossy foil or metallic wrapping paper**

This kind of 'paper' is difficult to recycle and it has no value for use as mulch since there are heavy metals used in the foil paper. Foil gift wrap is also harder to reuse, since it wrinkles and creases easily when the gift is being unwrapped.

- **Reuse gift wrap where possible**

Large wrapped presents usually have large enough uncreased sections to be reused for wrapping smaller gifts. If you open large gift packages with care, the paper can be set aside for re-use for other gift-giving occasions. Fancy ribbons and bows, of course, can be stored in a box till next year when you'll appreciate having them around and not having to buy new ones.

- **Use tape sparingly, or not at all**

If you're going to use ribbon to finish off your wrapping, you may not need to use tape. By not using tape, more of the wrapping paper can be reclaimed, and it's easier for the recipient to save the wrapping for reuse.