

I'm Dreaming of a Green Christmas

By Nancy Spann

Christmas is a time for giving and a time for sharing. But all the seasonal celebrations create an enormous amount of extra waste. Sanitation departments estimate that between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, Americans throw away six million tons of EXTRA waste, including holiday wrapping and packaging. Following are a few tips on reducing the waste and having an environmentally conscious holiday:

Gifts

The biggest trash generator is gifts. Many gifts have extra packaging that goes straight to the landfill. Gift wrapping also adds to the amount of trash. Giving gifts such as theater tickets and gift certificates are usable and do not require any packaging. There are also plenty of environmentally friendly gifts. Some of these save the recipient money, such as low-flowing shower heads and fluorescent light bulbs that use much less energy than incandescent bulbs. Rechargeable batteries are an especially thoughtful gift for kids whose toys require batteries that are thrown away on a regular basis. Other meaningful gifts include donations to the recipient's favorite charity; handmade gifts; gifts to land conservancies; organic food baskets; gift certificates for massages, manicures, and pedicures; car washes; restaurants; baby-sitting; a homemade dinner; and other gifts that can be experienced. Not all gifts need wrapping. Often our favorite memories are those that involve time spent with family and friends.

If you have your heart set on wrapping gifts, consider using recycled wrapping paper, brown paper bags (decorate them yourself), the comics section of the Sunday paper, and beautifully decorated gift boxes and bags which can be reused. Reuse bows from year to year or use recycled twine or raffia.

Christmas Cards

The 2.65 billion Christmas cards sold each year could fill a football field 10 stories high or circle the planet 10 times. Consider sending electronic cards to save money, trees, and waste or send cards made from recycled paper. Recycle Christmas cards by donating them to preschool programs for craft projects. Cut them up and use them to make gift tags, tree ornaments or decorations for brown bag wrapping paper.

Low-Energy Lights

The newest energy saving product on the holiday scene are Christmas lights made with light-emitting diodes, or LEDs. First introduced in 2001, LEDs incorporate the same technology used to light calculators and watches. They are 90 percent more efficient than traditional Christmas lights. According to one US Department of Energy study, if everyone replaced their conventional holiday light strings with LEDs, at least two billion kilowatt-hours of electricity could be saved in a month, enough to power 200,000 homes for a year. LEDs release little heat and they last about 200,000 hours. In the unlikely event that one burns out, the rest of the lights keep on burning. They are also shatterproof, shock resistant, safe to touch, and present no fire hazard.

These are only a few ideas for making the holidays simple and environmentally friendly. There are many other ideas on the internet. Whatever we as individuals can do in our own lives to reduce, reuse, and recycle our waste will help our world be a better place to live, work, and play. Here's wishing you a "green" Christmas!