

SEARCH

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A blue banner advertisement for Allstate. On the left, it says "PEOPLE SAVED \$503" in large, white, 3D-style letters. To the right of this, in smaller white text, it says "a year when they brought their home & car to Allstate." On the far right is the Allstate logo, which is a globe with a hand holding it, and the word "Allstate" in white. Below the logo is a yellow button with the text "QUOTE NOW" in black.**Tracy Hepler**

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Waste Free Holidays: Can Such a Thing Exist?

What's Your Reaction?

For as much as we enjoy the holidays, they certainly can create a ton of waste. So when I decided to work on a holiday guide, I wanted to know if the holidays could possibly be waste free. It turns out some things can sans scraps, and you can certainly waste less if you make a few changes to your routine. Check out these tips to help you cut your debris and celebrate the holidays as green as can be.

Holiday Cards and Thanks You's

Whether you love them or hate them, holiday cards and Thank You's are standard protocol for many during the holidays. A great way to streamline waste from your card routine is to go electronic. According to Creative Citizen, you'll save five pounds of waste, 1,000 pounds of emissions if you forgo sending 50 cards or invites in a year. E-cards are a great solution to save paper, gas, emissions and money (you can find many online for free).

Make Them Waste Free: E-Cards: We're big fans of Care 2's e cards, which generate donations to nonprofits that support the rainforest and other environmental causes. They have a lovely holiday selection (and you can even customize yours with a photo). Other environmentals that offer free e-cards include the Ocean Conservancy and the Nature Conservancy.

While Care 2 does have some invitation e-cards, there aren't as many choices, which is why we like Pingg for party invitations.

Reduce Your Waste Post-Consumer and Tree Free Paper: Now when you can't send an e-card (grandparents that don't email or you appreciate the art of hand writing a card) using cards printed with soy or water based ink (that are low VOC) and printed on post consumer recycled paper or non tree paper choices such as cotton, hemp and others are the way to go. Here are a few companies that meet our criteria.

- **Copper Willow:** A women-owned venture in Culver City, California that takes great care to not only create beautiful holiday cards but takes great environmental care with everything they craft. They also use antique printing machines and calligraphy and specialize in custom creations. www.copperwillow.com

- **Verde Paperie:** This online L.A.-based boutique carries adorable boxed sets from designers and artists. Each

item has a description to qualify its "greenness." www.verdepaperie.com

- **Green Field Paper Company:** This San Diego based company specializes in tree free paper options such as hemp, java or even denim. They can do bulk orders as well. www.greenfieldpapercompany.com.

DIY Tip: If you receive paper holiday cards there are some crafty options for next year such as creating placemats for the table or holiday collages. You can always recycle or compost them rather than tossing them in the trash too.

Holiday Lights: To LED or not to LED -- That is the Question

Remember the days when the house on the street with the most of lights and décor was considered the best on the block? Times have certainly changed, and nowadays those homes are viewed as energy guzzlers. Holiday lights, simply put, cannot be considered waste free. The energy they use is not necessary for day to day living, so using them means that you're always "wasting energy." But they are so festive! So, there are certainly ways to decrease the amount of energy you use/waste when using twinkle lights.

In the last few years holiday LED lights have hit the market and proven to be quite popular. LED lights use 95% less energy than traditional Christmas lights and can be used both indoors (on a tree) and outdoors. Over the month a string of 500 traditional holiday lights would cost about \$18.00; if you are using LED lights instead, the cost is only be \$0.19. Clearly there is a big savings. Another perk about LED strings is that the whole string won't die out just because one bulb calls it quits.

Reduce Energy Waste, GO LED

LED lights are available almost everywhere these days. Even big box retailers like Target are carrying them. We like the selection at Holidayleds.com, which carries a full selection including pink or purple. Plus it's got replacement bulbs and the lights come with a lifetime warranty.

Solar LED lights are even more efficient. They use solar power to recharge batteries that power the lights for up to six hours each night. We found a nice selection [here](#).

Save Energy, Even With Incandescents

Now, what to do if you already have a set of working incandescent or traditional holiday lights? We advise you use those first before switching to LED. Buying LED lights still means creating production and manufacturing waste (watch the Story of Stuff if you have any questions). So use up what you've already got before you go out and buy new.

There are additional things you can do to save energy even with traditional twinklies. For starters, don't leave them on as long; definitely don't leave them on after everyone has gone to bed. Second, consider downsizing your display. The fewer lights shine, the less energy you guzzle.

As with all electronics, once you can no longer use your lights, do not throw them away in the trash en route to the landfill. Contact your city or county to find out where your local hazardous waste drop off location is to be sure you dispose of them properly.

The Real, the Artificial and the Living Christmas Trees (+ Other Holiday Plants)

There has been a longstanding debate over which is the more environmental alternative between real trees and artificial versions. The truth is there is no real clear cut answer, unless you participate in a tree recycling program similar to the one at the Living Christmas Company in Southern California that rents out trees each holiday season and collects them afterwards to maintain until the next year. Or if you buy your own live tree with the intention of planting and caring for it after the holidays.

The 29 million American families who opt for real trees usually have these trees shipped in from long distances and the trees are often treated with pesticides (these trees are typically a farm product so deforestation is not an issue). After the holidays these trees are often discarded in the landfill as well.

70% of Americans are opting for artificial trees these days. The problem with the fakes is that most are shipped from China and are covered in dangerous materials such as PVC or even lead. Plus, these trees will last for hundreds if not thousands of years in the landfill where no one will be caroling around them.

Reduce Your Waste: Buy Local and Organic

If you're going the fake tree route, be sure to buy one made in America. Not only are you supporting the local economy, you will lower the emissions from transporting it while decreasing your risk of having chemicals and other toxins in your yuletide. If possible, buy a used American-made tree so you're not adding to the production waste chain. If at any point, you need to dispose of this tree, try to donate it to charitable organizations. Most of them are not recyclable so once they are discarded they'll just rot in the landfill.

If you're going for the real deal, look for a tree that was grown organically and as locally as possible. Once the holidays are over, be sure to take your tree to a compost/mulching program. The city of Los Angeles offers a great free tree mulching program that all residents can take part in for free. Most communities have something similar.

Waste Free: Living Trees

Southern Californians should certainly consider taking part in the Living Christmas Company's Recycled Living Tree Program or buying your own organically grown living tree you can plant after the holidays.

For your other holiday plants such as Poinsettias and wreathes, use the same principles as when purchasing a Christmas tree. Look for locally and organically grown when possible. Consider planting the Poinsettias in your garden after the holidays too.

DIY Tip: Take the trimmings from the bottom of your Christmas tree and use them to create a holiday wreath.

Gift-Wrap: Think Outside the Wrapped Box

For some, the beautiful gift-wrap is just as important as the gift. However when the gift-wrap is made from virgin trees and chlorine bleached paper it's not so pretty after all. There are a lot of post consumer recycled paper gift wraps available on the market, but why not consider using what you've already got, whether it's old newspaper, magazines, shoe boxes or event gift-wrap you received from the year before. There are tons of ways to be creative about how you present your gifts.

Waste Free: Try to save the gift-wrap, bows and ribbons you receive from the year before (or other celebrations) to use next year. Often if you remove the wrapping carefully enough you can get a second or even third use out of it.

You can also try thinking small: sometimes a simple holiday ribbon is all you need to wrap a box or a set of books.

See what paper and other scraps you've got lying around: old fabric, shopping bags, maybe even a canvass bag you don't really use. Add a little flare with rescued ribbons or get creative and color or paint. This could be a lot of fun if you've got little ones and need a craft idea (it's fine too if you want to just unleash your own inner child and play).

Food Waste

Food is one of the perks of the holidays for sure. All the food we normally don't eat year round is now available for grazing. As is often the case, our eyes can be bigger than our stomachs, so instead of tossing food into the trash, try these options.

Make To-Go Boxes For the Needy: I recently participated in a Thanksgiving food volunteer program where we got into cars and drove a bunch of meals we'd prepared to people on the street. If you have lots of edible leftovers and don't want to eat them your self consider packing em up and donating them to people in need. Also inquire at your local Food Banks and Soup Kitchens to see if they take these types of donations.

For food that can't be given away, Compost, Compost, Compost! Any unwanted scraps that don't include meat or dairy should be composted. If you're still not composting--all you need is \$10 and 10 minutes to get started. Seriously! Check out this simple [Download file](#)">step-by-step PDF tutorial from Astrid Design Studio that will have you composting in less than an hour.

Gift Giving

Can gift giving be waste free? Certainly, it depends on what you buy. Gift giving doesn't have to be a brand

spanking new item as there are so many things that can be given that don't add any more waste the environment.

Waste Free and Giving Back

Opting for gifts through organizations like Heifer, which provides animals to families in developing countries, or giving micro-loans to individuals through organizations like KIVA can eliminate all waste and actually provide seriously needed assistance. In fact, any donation to a reputable non-profit will do the same (check out this list of amazing non-profits doing great work right now).

If you don't feel like a donation is appropriate, you can always find things to re-gift. Clothing that you own that is in good condition but you no longer use, or a gift that someone else gave you that you don't particularly like. (My mom was so guilty of this re-gifting when I was growing up--can't blame her for being thrifty!)

Rather than discarding gifts that didn't suit you or having them sit in your closet, find them a new home . You can always donate these times to the Goodwill, Salvation Army or other local organizations if no one you know would appreciate them.

Reduce Your Waste: Support Green and Local Businesses

If you want to buy something new, try to support businesses that are environmentally conscious and local if possible. We put together a great list in our own Green Holiday Gift Guide on Your Daily Thread if you need some inspiration. Supporting companies like the ones we've featured here not only spurs green business growth, but allows these companies to continue to operate with the environment in mind.

Happy Holidays! May You Make them as Waste Free as They Can Be!

Follow Tracy Hepler on Twitter: www.twitter.com/YourDailyThread

