



Green Tips for the Holidays!

The holiday season is a significant event for many people in many lands.

It is a spiritual time, a family time, and a time of celebration. It also has a significant impact on the environment. Let's look at some of the suggestions from the David Suzuki Foundation for celebrating this festive season more sustainably.

Between late November and early January, household waste increases by more than 25 per cent, from extra food waste (up to 40 per cent of festive food is wasted), packaging and trashed old items replaced with newer versions received as gifts. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the result is more than one million tons per week in landfills across North America.



Research from the Center for Global Development estimates that holiday lights use 6.6 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year. Increased travel boosts greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

Here are some tips to maximize your holiday cheer while minimizing environmental impact.

Gifts

- **Shop local** Reduce your footprint and support the local economy.
- **Get creative** Instead of buying things, give experiences — concert tickets, screenings, spa services, restaurant certificates, gym memberships, even cleaning services!
- **Buy quality** If you're going to buy, choose what will last. Avoid non-recyclable plastics. Look for ethically made products. Don't get sucked into "holiday gift packs" they are mostly wrapping and made up of stuff that didn't sell.
- **Do it yourself** Take advantage of your time off! Knit, draw, bake — put your love into homemade gifts.
- **Donate** Support causes your gift recipients care about most, in their honour. Consider animal shelters, environmental organizations wildlife protection agencies or social justice groups.
- **Don't rush** Choosing rush delivery often means that cargo planes and trucks go out half-empty. Shop in person or online ahead of time to give shipping more time and reduce emissions.
- **Recycle:** Regifting is OK — just give your regifted item to someone who'll appreciate it. If you get new tech gadgets, donate or properly recycle your old items.

Wrap

- Erase single-use wrapping, and unleash creativity! Sew your own reusable cloth bags. Wrap with newspapers, maps or posters, and decorate with markers. Avoid plastic ribbons, bows and glitter.

Cards

- Choose e-cards to save paper and postage. Personalize them by adding pictures, music and graphics. If you love writing cards, use homemade or 100 per cent recycled paper.
- Take the time to write a note to a special friend letting them know how much you are thinking about them.

Food

- Ditch tinfoil and plastic. Opt for reusable beeswax food wrap, stainless steel or glassware for leftovers.
- Choose local, seasonal vegetables. Shop farmers markets, organic stores, co-ops and your own garden.
- If you can, eliminate meat. If you are eating meat, eat less and buy what's local and ethically raised.
- Avoid disposables. If you don't have enough reusable items, have guests bring their own!
- Turn down the heat before people arrive. You'll save energy and your guests' extra body heat will warm up the room.

Christmas Trees

- Opt for potted trees that can be replanted outside. If you want a cut tree, buy from a local, organic tree farm. Contact your municipality about proper recycling or composting programs.
- Avoid fake trees. While they can be reused, studies show you would have to use one for 20 years before it's "greener" than a real tree.

Lights

- Choose LED lights. They have a longer life span and use less energy, only about four watts per strand. Regular lights use about 34 watts per strand.
- Properly recycle old incandescent lights.
- Use a timer so your lights are only on when needed. Turn them off whenever possible!

Travel

- If family lives across distances, reduce travel miles by choosing a central location to come together.
- If you must travel by air, buy carbon offsets.

Start New Nature Traditions

Look for ways to enjoy family time together that aren't focused on gifts, and over consumption of foods and treats that are often not very healthy. Use this time as an opportunity to truly connect with each other in meaningful ways.

Suggestions include:

- **Conversations** - Playing games that ask questions designed to get to know things about each other that you might not otherwise know. Conversation starters like Icebreaker, Table Topics, and Moments are games for all ages.
- **Annual Christmas bird count** - Take your binoculars, a field guide to local birds, a small pad or journal for each participant and walk a course through your neighborhood, local park or countryside. Try to identify and count every bird you see, and make a note of it in your journal.
- **Family nature hike** – A peaceful walk-through nature on Christmas day will be remembered and valued more than the score of the football game. Fortunately, we live in a climate that makes outdoor adventures in the winter enjoyable.

Although they are full of merriment, reflection and fun, the holidays can also be a time of unnecessary excess and stress. This time of year should be about family, friends, food and fun — not stuff!



from all of us in the North Shore Unitarian Church's
Environmental Action Team.

References:

David Suzuki Foundation, Queen of Green, Your Guide to Green Holidays
<https://david Suzuki.org/queen-of-green/your-guide-green-holidays/>

Earth Easy, Tips for Sustainable Giving

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/tips-for-sustainable-giving>