

## Holiday Waste Reduction Tips

Raleigh residents generally average about 3,000 tons of garbage each week. That's a lot of waste, but during the holiday season – from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day – the waste jumps up to about 3,750 tons each week! A dramatic increase! Raleigh Recycling hopes you and your family will use this document as a guide in to avoid excess holiday waste.

### HOLIDAY DECORATIONS

- Decorate your home, tree and centerpiece with holly, cedar, berries, cranberries, popcorn, fruits and nuts, all of which can be composted or used for bird food after use.
- To add a special touch to your decorating consider using memorabilia such as a child's first shoe or teething ring, old jewelry, mementos from vacations, small stuffed animals and toys, holiday card ornaments, miniature toy cars, cookie cutters, dressed up dolls, or edible cookie ornaments.
- If a tree is part of your celebration, buy one that can be replanted in your yard. If you can't replant your tree, compost it after the holidays along with wreaths and other live decorations.
- Go outside and trim a tree in your yard with biodegradable treats for the birds.
- Consider buying a potted Norfolk pine, fig tree or indoor houseplant that can be used every holiday season as your evergreen tree.
- Purchase a tree from a tree farm rather than cutting one down in the wild.
- Use trimmed branches from your tree for decorating around your home or making wreaths.
- Skip the tree and decorate your home with clippings from local evergreens and holly bushes.
- If you buy a cut tree please recycle it.
- Consider buying an artificial tree that can be reused every year. Remember, you'll save a tree for every year that you reuse your artificial tree!
- Decorate your tree with natural ornaments such as pinecones, dried flowers, nuts and fruits and Sweetgum spurs.
- Use edible decorations on your tree and feed them to the birds after Christmas.
- Buy good quality decorations that will last. Store carefully after Christmas for use the following year.
- Use plants as part of your decorations. The poinsettia is a favorite at Christmas time. Keep it in a warm room next to a bright window. Instead of discarding the plant once it has faded, prune it back severely and place it in a shady place. Allow it to dry out. Start watering again in May and the plant should be ready for the next holiday season.

### PARTIES

- Bulk purchase Thanksgiving cooking items and use the extra for Christmas menus. This eliminates extra trips to the grocery store and reduces excess packaging.
- Email invitations making it clear that the invitation is in lieu of a traditional card.
- Ask those invited to bring a reusable container thereby coming prepared to take home some leftovers and leave you with less chance of wasted food.
- Instead of a full out you-do-it-all dinner, make it a potluck brunch or dessert party – less stress for you – and less waste.
- Eliminate disposable plates, cups and napkins from your party. Use "real" dishes and cloth napkins that can be washed and reused. Everyone loves hanging around the kitchen. Make cleaning up part of the party.
- Have clearly marked recycling containers at your party for your guests to recycle their cans and bottles.
- Also provide a kitchen compost pail where food scraps can be captured to be taken to your compost bin later.
- Point out ways your party demonstrates waste reduction and recycling to spread the word. .

### HOLIDAY FOOD

- Make your holiday meals with as many locally grown and/or organic foods as possible.

- Don't let the "Grease Goblin" spoil your holiday fun. To send him on his way be sure to place excess amounts of oil and grease from holiday cooking and cleaning in collection containers.
- Scrape oil and grease off kitchen utensils and equipment, and keep grease out of wash water. Never pour oil and grease down the drain, and avoid using hot water to wash the grease away from substances.
- With deep-fried turkey fast becoming a Southern tradition, the proper disposal of deep-fryer oil is essential. Be sure to pour or scrape the oil into cans or bottles and apply lids. Bottles of oil can be taken to Wake County's Household Hazardous Waste Facility. Cans of grease can be put in your garbage cart.
- Avoid placing food scraps such as turkey bones, potato peels and celery down the drain. Potato peels swell when wet, blocking the drain, and celery strands can jam the blades of in-sink garbage disposals.
- Compost your food waste. It's easy and provides a wonderful natural fertilizer for next year's garden.
- Plan meals wisely and practice portion control. If faced with leftovers, place them in plastic containers and bags and send home with guests or save them for later.
- Use reusable plates, cups and silverware instead of disposable ones.
- Remember to recycle extra aluminum foil and cans that come with holiday feasts.
- Give home-baked goodies in reusable holiday tins.
- Recycle all beverage and food cans and bottles from your holiday gathering.

## HOLIDAY CARDS

Green alternatives to traditional holiday cards:

- Buy the highest content post-consumer recycled cards you can find. They're becoming easier to find in stores. Look for the recycling symbol inside the circle, or a statement the specifically says the cards are made from recycled paper.
- Make recycled cards yourself. Most major craft stores sell beautiful recycled papers. If you're crafty and have time, you can draw, paint, collage, or stamp simple designs. If you have children, this is a great way to harness their creative energy and showcase their artwork. You can even glue the fronts of past greeting cards on new cards—a classic thrifty trick.
- Skip the cards and call people. Tell loved ones you're not sending cards this year, and that you prefer to personally wish them happy holidays. The idea here is simply that the well-wishes are what matter, not the bits of paper.
- If you prefer photo cards and have a home printer, try printing your pictures on regular paper instead of paying for photo paper — it won't look as shiny, but unlike the fancy stuff, the results are recyclable, and cheaper, too.
- Reuse Christmas cards that you received last year. Cut the front off and use as nametags on gifts, or draw a line down the middle of the back and use as post cards. They are less expensive to mail than traditional cards. You can also make placemats or coasters by cutting out designs and laminating.

## GIFT WRAPPING

- Reuse wrapping and ribbon when possible, or purchase gift bags that can be reused as an alternative.
- If you must buy paper, make sure it has recycled content.
- Use reusable items such as hair bows, ornaments, shoelaces, toys or holiday corsages to decorate your packages.
- Stencils or pictures from holiday cards pasted onto a plain brown paper bag or box adds a nice homemade touch.
- Be creative in wrapping gifts; make reusable cloth bags from holiday print material that can be tied with yarn and reused year after year.
- Create your own colorful "ribbon" cut from outdated maps. Want it dressed up? Around the map strips, tie a fuzzy bit of yarn left over from knitting projects.
- Skip the ribbons and bows. Instead try reusable items such as hair bows, ornaments, shoe laces, neckties, toys, bows and holiday cards cut up from previous years, scrap fabrics, lace yarn, rickrack and seam tape, scarves, combinations of beads and buttons, and dried or silk flowers.
- Save paper by wrapping gifts in paper bags decorated with markers, rubber stamps, or homemade art. You can also wrap presents in topographic maps, old posters, old sheet music, wallpaper scraps, the travel or comics

sections of the newspaper, children's drawings, artwork from old calendars, or other unconventional materials you have on hand.

- Still want regular old wrapping paper? Check your local thrift. They're usually swamped with it charge very little for rolls that are still in plastic. Avoid foil and coated paper, as they are not recyclable.
- Spices, such as bundled cinnamon sticks or cloves in a mesh cloth, add a wonderful element to your gift package.
- Try reusable containers like baskets, tins, hatboxes, cake pans, baskets or a wooden box. The wrapping will become a present in a present!
- Use Christmas stockings to wrap small gifts in, they can reused year after year.
- Use scarves, handkerchiefs, or bandannas to wrap a gift.
- A kitchen gift can be wrapped in a colorful towel. Kitchen utensils can pop out of an oven mitt.
- Consider giving gifts without packaging, or maybe attach a real satin ribbon that can be used many times over.
- For larger gifts, use one large bow rather and save the wrapping paper for smaller gifts.
- Use last year's holiday cards as gift tags.

## ENVIROSHOPPING

- Call the toll-free numbers on unwanted holiday catalogs and have your name taken off of their mailing lists.
- Consider useful gifts that won't end up in the attic or the back of the closet. Create family wish lists. Don't feel pressured to give lots of gifts — saves money and waste too!
- Take your tote bags along on your shopping trip to avoid plastic and paper bags.
- Do all your shopping in one trip. Save on gas and keep your stress to a minimum.
- Buy products produced locally by small businesses and artisans. Reject sweatshop-made goods.
- Know the store's return policy and remember to ask for gift receipts so that the gift will be able to be returned or exchanged.
- Look for gifts that are: not over-packaged, energy efficient, made with recycled materials, and are recyclable.
- Think durability and length of warranties! Consider how long an item will last before you make a purchase. Often, a cheaper item will wear out long before its more durable equivalent.
- If you're buying electronic or household items, look for the most energy-efficient models.

## GIFT GIVING

- Give non-materialistic "green" gifts that do not require wrapping, such as gift certificates for massages, to restaurants, cooking classes, sailing lessons, hot air balloon ride, a day trip on a train, or French lessons etc. Experiences are remembered long after other presents wear out.
- Give a gift of time or talent. Take someone to a play, concert or movie. Make gift certificates for a special dinner, pet sitting or house cleaning. Offer your talents at gardening, photography or financial planning — or better yet, teach someone a skill you possess such as knitting, woodworking or playing an instrument.
- Consider giving season tickets to a sporting event.
- Antiques and collectibles make excellent gifts and are environmentally friendly because they are recycled! Check out local markets and antique shops for some real bargains.
- Gourmet dinner for a busy couple.
- For students on your list, buy a textbook needed for the next semester or a long-distance phone card.
- When giving toys that require batteries, make a gift of reusable batteries and a battery charger for the parents.
- Help someone recycle by buying a can-crusher, recycling or compost bin, or a tote cart to help get the bin to the curb.
- Give a membership to a museum, environmental or other nonprofit organization.
- Reusable lunch bag and travel mug.
- Refillable pens.
- 100 percent cotton dishtowels or sheets; look for unbleached cotton.
- Cloth shopping bags.
- Reusable food storage containers.
- Cloth napkin and rings.

- Plants make excellent presents and help to reduce indoor pollution. Herb-growing kits are also a great idea.
- Give a garden: seeds, gloves, tools and gardening book. It helps grow green thumbs.
- Rain barrel.
- Solar watch or calculator.
- Reusable razor.
- Programmable thermostat.
- Bird feeder and seed.
- Water-saving showerhead.
- Bat roosting box — bats keep insect populations down.
- Quilts and comforters for energy savings.
- Shutoff timer for watering the lawn.
- Gift basket filled with non-toxic household cleaners along with a book on safe natural alternatives.
- Personalized “coupons” such as a night off from dish duty, foot massage, or “maid for a day.”
- Durable hand tools.
- A subscription to an environmental magazine.
- A ceiling fan, look for the Energy Star.
- Warm slippers, nightgown or pajamas, helps keep the thermostat set a little lower!
- Reusable coffee or tea mug.
- An old tricycle, bicycle, rocking chair or other piece of furniture, fixed up and refinished to pass along as and heirloom.
- Recycled textile or canvas shopping bag.
- Use a digital camera instead of those that require film. That way you can delete the pictures you don't want and print only those you like.
- Give the gift of green power generated right here in North Carolina. A [NC GreenPower Gift Card](#) tells them you care about the environment in which they live and the future.
- Offset your carbon footprint. Buy carbon credits to help support carbon offset projects. [Carbonfund.org](#) will explain how.

## GIFTS OF TIME

- Special activities with a loved one — a candlelight dinner, massage, or picnic.
- Give a gift of time. For new parents, offer a free night of baby-sitting service or a diaper service for a month.
- A month of taking out the garbage, doing the dishes, shoveling the snow, cleaning the cat box, or performing other household chores.
- A monthly lunch date with an elderly relative or friend
- Car washing
- An outing to a zoo, museum, or park
- A canoe, boat or train ride
- A hiking, camping, biking, or swimming trip
- Dog walking or pet sitting
- Box of Dates. Get a small box and fill it with pieces of paper, each with something fun for the recipient and you to do together written on it. When you present the gift, tell the person they can “cash in” one date a day. Tailor the dates to the recipient – you can make them romantic (dinner by candlelight), day trips (visit an art museum), pampering activities (a home facial; a foot rub), etc. This takes some effort, but is very special and fun to do, and guarantees you quality time this winter with someone you care about. You can make your date ideas platonic, family-friendly, or child-appropriate, depending on the recipient.
- A collection of family recipes. Food is at the center of many holiday traditions - often an important piece of a family's history too. Many times special recipes are lost forever when a family member dies unexpectedly. Call up relatives and request those special recipes, jot down instructions for your own best-loved dishes, and put it all in a binder. This makes a great gift for a young adult just starting to cook. It's also a great welcome gift for new spouse or partner into your family.

## GIFTS OF CHARITY

- Sponsor a child refugee, support a homeless shelter, or protect an acre of rainforest.
- Buy renewable energy certificates to offset the carbon emissions of a friend burning fossil fuel. More information is available at [www.newdream.org/consumer/carbon.php](http://www.newdream.org/consumer/carbon.php).
- Set aside a few hours to volunteer in your community.
- Call your local social services agency and anonymously give food, clothing, and money to a particular family in need.
- Designate an amount of money to donate to charity and let your kids pick which causes will receive it. Older children can research different types of organizations and learn what kinds of projects match your family's values.
- Some charitable websites you may want to check out: [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org), [www.green-gifting.net](http://www.green-gifting.net), also local organizations including Food Bank of NC, Meals on Wheels, and North Raleigh Ministries.

## GIFTS FOR GRANDPARENTS

Grandparents often benefit the most from nontraditional gifts. For those elders who already have all the material goods and comforts that they need, consider instead a gift that honors their role in your life:

- Arrange and frame a family tree photo collage.
- Have all the children and grandchildren write stories or draw pictures of meaningful experiences or lessons they learned from grandparents.
- Give a gift that returns a present from your childhood or past. For example, if your grandmother knit sweaters for you each winter, learn to knit or crochet a simple scarf to show your admiration for her work.

## HOMEMADE GIFTS

- Give someone a personalized basket, filled with homemade muffins, cookies, and jam.
- Consider giving gifts of food in reusable containers. Drink mixes or soup mixes can be packaged in decorated glass canning jars. Baked goods can be given in reusable tins or storage containers.
- Prepare homemade soups or dinners that can be frozen for future use.
- Make a giant edible cookie card with a holiday greeting written in the icing.
- Make a rope swing, painted wooden blocks, or a sandbox for a child.
- Stationery made from recycled paper.
- Make a family calendar marked with important dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and family gatherings. Decorate the calendar with family photos.
- Put together a photo album, scrap book, or framed collage containing pictures and mementos.
- Make an emergency kit. Do you know someone with an unreliable car? Create a gift basket with a blanket, flashlight, gas can, jumper cables, and flares. Does your friend walk home from work or class after dark? Make a gift box with pepper spray, a whistle, and a prepaid calling card.
- Make homemade potpourri, candles, or soap.
- Frame one of your best photographs. What loved one wouldn't want to have it?
- Re-pot herbs and pass along plants with clippings from your favorite house and garden plants.
- Record interviews of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles on video or audio tape. You can ask them to share memories of the person you plan to give the tape to, or tell stories of your family history. Priceless!
- Buy a plain, clean T-shirt from the thrift store and customize it for your recipient with iron-on transfer paper or fabric paint (available at craft stores).
- A book honoring someone special. Make a special book for a loved one. Staple together sheets of paper and decorate each one with an adjective describing something you love about the recipient of the book. This kind of gift doesn't need to be fancy. Simply folding a few letter-sized sheets of paper in half and stapling them at the center is all you need to start - the real power is in what you say. (Note: There are many variations on this kind of gift, such

as a Letterman-style top 10 list of favorite times with a good friend, if you want something a little more silly than sentimental.)

## HOMEMADE GIFTS, GIFTS MADE FROM REUSED MATERIALS AND DECORATIONS

- Tin can VOTIVE - Fill an empty soup can with water and freeze it. Once frozen, use a nail and hammer to create a design in the can. Allow the ice to melt, pour the water out of the can, and place a candle inside.
- Holiday CANDLE HOLDER - Remove all labels from a small jar, such as a baby food jar. Using old holiday cards, cut pictures into sizes small enough to fit on the jar. Glue the pictures to the jar and put a rubber band around the jar until the glue dries. Paint glue over the entire outside of the jar, then sprinkle on salt to make it sparkle. Let dry and put a small candle inside.
- Tin CANDY CONTAINERS - Paint the outside of tuna or cat food cans with white paint. Punch two holes near the top edge on opposite sides and use lightweight wire to make a handle, converting the can into a basket. Decorate the outside with stamps or paint. Fill rectangles of colored cellophane with a few pieces of hard candy, tie the top closed and put it all inside the can.
- Plastic BOTTLE BIRDFEEDER - Remove labels from a two-liter plastic bottle and keep the cap on. In the bottom of the bottle, drill two small holes. Thread a piece of wire through the holes and make a loop to hang the birdfeeder, then use duct tape to seal the holes and keep out rain water. Near the neck of the bottle, drill holes on opposite sides of the bottle and slide an 8- to 9-inch dowel through the holes to make a perch. Make one-quarter inch slots 2 inches above the perch. Remove the cap, fill bottle with a mixture of sunflower seeds and other birdseed, replace the cap tightly and hang the feeder where birds can enjoy it.
- Bottled ORANGE VINEGAR - In a large saucepot, place 1 quart white vinegar, 1 cup of sugar and the peel from one medium orange; bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes. Transfer vinegar to glass bottles or jars and cover tightly. This flavorful vinegar can be added to salsa or meat marinades to give it a tangy flavor, or use it as vinaigrette with light-flavored olive oil.
- Bottled OCEAN WAVES - Start with a glass or plastic bottle with a tight screw cap. Baby food jars work especially well. Mix half vegetable oil and half water. Add food coloring and glitter to create your own holiday snow globe.
- Finally, a large-mouth jar can find numerous new purposes: a vase (add marbles on the bottom and dried or fresh flowers on top), a container for candy or homemade cookies (decorate with stickers or ribbons), or packed with delicious homemade jam.

## ZERO BUDGET GIFTS

- Give away the last great book you bought and enjoyed to someone who enjoys your taste. You'll get to talk about the book later, and you can always reread a library copy.
- Perform some "random act of kindness" in your recipient's honor.
- Put together a little book of favorite family recipes.
- Have a "re-gift" swap. We all have gift-quality things in our closets we don't actually use (many left over from holidays past, still in shrink wrap). Get together with a few likeminded friends and trade them for items that fit your gift list. Or, use websites like [Craigslist.org](http://Craigslist.org), and [WakeFreecycle.org](http://WakeFreecycle.org) to barter and "shop" for gently used gifts.
- Give a gift exemption voucher, explaining that the recipient needn't feel obliged to get a gift for you.
- Give attractive and meaningful articles from your own home. For example, a sewing machine you no longer have time to use would make a wonderful gift to a teenager just learning how to sew or a new homeowner wanting to make custom decorations. Explain how the gift is significant to you and why you want the person to have it.
- List one hundred of your fondest memories with the recipient.
- Give the gift of forgiveness. Call an estranged friend or write a letter to someone you haven't seen in a long time. Making a real connection is sweeter than any other gift you can give.

## MAILING PACKAGES

- Use popcorn instead of foam peanuts and include a note explaining that birds can eat it.

- Use biodegradable starch or cereal packing peanuts that can be reused or placed in your compost bin rather than thrown away.

## CHANGE GIFT GIVING TRADITIONS

- Have a “Yankee Pot Luck” or “White Elephant Party.” Each person brings one wrapped second-hand item in good condition to the party and all the gifts are arranged on a table. Everyone draws numbers and the first person picks a gift from the table and unwraps it. The second person can either choose another gift, or take the first person’s gift (in which case the first person chooses again). Continue opening and “stealing” each other’s presents until all are opened. This shifts the focus from getting more and more to creatively exchanging just a few things in a fun way.
- For large gatherings, get everyone together in advance, put all the names in a hat, and have each person draw the name of one other person to buy for. Everyone still has the fun of giving and receiving, but not the excess and expense of every person giving to each other person.
- If you celebrate Hanukkah, shift the focus to avoid giving gifts for eight consecutive evenings. Consider having a theme for each night: hosting a family party, working on a charity project together, making homemade presents or baked goods for others, playing games, etc. — with gift-giving as only one night’s focus.

## ENERGY SAVINGS

- Consider replacing standard holiday lights with strings of LED lights. The benefits of LED lights include energy efficiency, safety, sturdiness and a long life span. LED holiday lights and strands use about 99% less energy than the larger, traditional incandescent bulbs.
- Reduce the number of lights on your tree as well as those decorating your home. Holiday light displays are best when people can appreciate them. Try to avoid leaving lights on all day. Use them only at night for maximum effect. Always switch off the tree lights before going to bed.
- Jack Frost causing trouble? Insulation, when correctly installed, can reduce your heating costs by as much as 30% and increase your comfort in your home!
- Use programmable thermostats to automatically lower the temperature 4-6 degrees at night when everyone is nestled all snug in their beds, or when you and your family are out all day visiting friends and family or shopping.
- Be sure not to block your HVAC registers when moving furniture to make room for decorations or simply more family members - this makes your HVAC system work harder.
- Don't open the oven more than necessary when baking pies and cookies, and when the eggnog starts flowing, don't let the refrigerator door stand open.
- Holiday table linens get spills. Remember to use cold water to rinse laundry, and only run the washer with full loads.
- When giving appliance gifts, look for the ENERGY STAR!
- When you're not gathered around the fireplace, close the chimney flue.
- Energy-saving fluorescent light fixture or bulb. Compact fluorescents last longer and use 1/3 of the energy of an incandescent bulb.

## FACTS ON HOLIDAY WASTE

- From Thanksgiving to New Years Day, U.S. household waste increases by more than 25%. Added food waste, shopping bags, packaging, wrapping paper, bows and ribbons - it all adds up to an **additional 1 million tons a week** to our landfills.
- In the U.S., annual trash from gift-wrap and shopping bags totals 4 million tons.
- 38,000 miles of ribbon alone is thrown out each year - enough to tie a bow around the Earth - 25,000 miles!
- 1.9 billion Christmas cards are sent to friends and loved ones every year, making Christmas the largest card-sending occasion in the United States.
- The amount of **cards** sold during the holiday season would fill a football field 10 stories high, and requires the harvesting of nearly **300,000 trees**.

- At least 28 billion pounds of **edible** food are wasted each year - or over 100 pounds per person. Putting one less cookie on Santa's plate will reduce his snacking by about 2 million pounds.
- If every American throws away just one uneaten tablespoon of mashed potatoes it adds 16 million pounds of waste to our landfills.
- Half of the paper America consumes is used to wrap and decorate consumer products.
- If each American household wrapped three gifts in reused materials, enough paper would be saved to cover 45,000 football fields.
- Each year, 50 million Christmas trees are purchased in the U.S. Of those, about 30 million go to the landfill.
- The average American spends \$800 on gifts over the holiday season.
- According to a national survey, 70% of Americans would welcome less emphasis on gift giving and spending.
- About 40% of all battery sales occur during the holiday season.
- If each family reduced holiday gasoline consumption by one gallon (about twenty miles), we'd reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one million tons.

#### **AFTER THE HOLIDAY**

- Save gift boxes, bows and ribbon to use next year.
- Remember to recycle cardboard (for curbside collection it must be reduced to 3'x3' pieces) and paper that are generated from gift giving. All white paper is recyclable even if it is printed with color. Tear the paper and if it is white inside, it can be recycled.
- Take foam peanuts to an accepting mail depot or save them for sending your own packages.

#### **NEW YEAR'S DAY**

- Start the New Year off with a "bang" and make waste reduction your number one New Year's resolution! Commit to purchasing longer lasting products such as compact florescent light bulbs and rechargeable batteries. You will save money and have less trash to get rid of.
- Score big when watching the Super Bowl by eliminating disposable plates and cups from your "tail-gate" party. Use cloth napkins in team colors to add fun to your meal as you cheer for your favorite team.
- Start a magazine club with your co-workers or neighbors. You can cut your subscriptions in half by swapping issues with other people. You'll save money, enjoy more magazines and cut back on trash at the same time.

Special thanks to Environmental Protection Agency, NC Dept. of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, SC Dept. Health and Environmental Control, New American Dream, and Earth911 for many of these excellent tips to help us enjoy a more sustainable holiday!