

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Master gardener Susan McKenna makes up arrangements using natural items to make the holiday merry and bright. Photo: S. McKenna

Waste Not

With a 25 percent uptick in waste between Christmas and New Year's, here are gift ideas and packaging ideas to help lessen your carbon footprint.

By J. Morton Galetto

Last December Stanford University's Recycling Center Peninsula Sanitary Service, Inc. (PSSI, a private Corp.) released statistics noting that our waste increases by 25% between Thanksgiving and the New

Year. PSSI reports, "The extra waste amounts to 25 million tons of garbage: about 1 million tons per week!"



Packaging and wrapping contributes to an increase in trash by 25 percent or greater between Thanksgiving and the New Year. Photo Conall, Flickr.

After that downer here is some fun information – if every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the 38,000 miles of

ribbon saved could tie a bow around the earth. If each American household wrapped three presents in reused materials, we could collectively save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields.

By the way, I like the reusable bags so much that I try to snatch them back from my gift recipients, unless they promise to reuse them. I've done this for years, to the extent that people give me their empty bags back and tell me, "Merry Christmas!" I always reply, "Thank you, I'm in."

The 2.65 billion Christmas cards sold each year in the U.S. can fill a football field 10 stories high. PSSI suggests that sending just one less would save 50,000 cubic yards of paper. Did you ever wonder what brainiac sits around formulating these stats? And did they include the envelopes and boxes the cards come in?

I send electronic cards; they are much, much cheaper, more fun, and it takes me minutes versus many days of writer's cramp. Much to my chagrin I received an email from a conservation group's CEO informing me that our email uses up electricity stored in huge server banks, so now I'm supposed to think before I send a message. Does anyone note the hypocrisy in this story? All that

aside, in my opinion my method is better for the planet.

So, girl, let's talk waste (yeah, sure, boy too! - I'm an equal-opportunity pest). First I admit to being an all-American over-consumer, but I do have some redeeming qualities and ideas when it comes to waste reduction. Some of my advice today is holiday-driven and some is year-round appropriate.

I have a weak spot for old stuff, and thrift shops offer the best opportunities for 'reuse:' antique stores, Craig's List, Facebook marketplace, eBay, yard sales, and the like. Reuse has a much smaller carbon footprint than newly-manufactured stuff. Try to shop thrifts that support organizations. Unfortunately I also love electronics, so I really have to work hard to balance my carbon footprint by being careful, or so I think. Some purchase restraint would help too.

Yard sales are great for toys. Kids grow tired of them really quickly and they often get used only for a short time, so with the exception of that "got to have" item, excellent-condition used toys are super. Don't throw away toys; hand them down or over, or give them to a charity that will pass them on.

Here's another tip today: people crave experiences more than stuff. A good idea is gift certificates or tickets to the zoo, a musical, a play, the orchestra, a sports match, the Grounds for Sculpture, the Barnes, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and lunch, a movie, a boat ride, beaches, picnics, a whale watch, an overnight, a fun sleepover, a hike, or a theme dinner at your house.

These certificates don't have to be store bought; you can create them. You can even cut the face off a favorite Christmas Card to make them. Card fronts can also be used for gift tags; one of my friends cuts the card's image to shape for this purpose. I sometimes use the card tags over, because after all my recipients are the same people – plus they find it really funny. The same friend says she and a buddy have a birthday and anniversary card, which they date and have sent back and forth for years; it's a running joke. I have used a Father's Day card over and over again for my husband for a number of years because the message is so good – I hate shopping for cards. I don't think it's a running joke because I'm not sure he remembers the card from year to year.

For kids, packaging up these offerings is easy. Take a favorite book like *Green Eggs and Ham* and make a gift certificate to a sleepover in which the breakfast menu will be of course green eggs and ham. Don a Cat in Hat stovepipe in the morning, and don't forget the green food dye.

There are lots of other books that can provide themes for an experience, such as *Give a Moose a Muffin*, and you'll be able to wear antlers! Okay, you get the idea. Also remember you can buy books used at ABE books – don't forget that our mantra is "reuse." I love to gift out-of-print books that are favorites.

The picnic or beach idea can be expanded upon. Put that certificate in a thermal bag, or a beach bag with a few goodies. Have an extra set of the sleep blinders from a plane ride? Package them with a pair of pjs and certificate to a Grands' sleepover.

One of my favorite, best loved, and most-enjoyed gifts to my daughters, when they were young, was a "Dress Up Box." These are a recycler's bonanza: hats, wigs, glasses, rubber noses, flamboyant jewelry, capes, magic wands, rubber chickens, foam baseball bats, stethoscope, bandages, nurse caps, chef caps, rubber snakes, t-shirts with occupational themes... you get the idea. Our

girls would put on plays or model zany outfits.



A vintage 1995 photo of the columnist's daughters after having explored the Christmas dress-up box. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.

Wrapping gifts? I used to save the comic section for the really large presents. People would sometimes take interest in reading the wrapping and sharing the ones that touched their funny bone. For small gifts you can use magazines, old maps, used recycled paper, decorative boxes, and bags (of course, save for reuse). My sister is the queen of rubber and potato stamps to make brown paper bags look amazing.



Websites like Pinterest and LizMarieBlog offer lots of great reuse wrapping ideas. Newspapers, stamps, and magazines, when imaginatively arranged, are very attractive. Photo examples: LizMarieBlog.

Necessary items that get used up are considerations, like soap, seeds, breads, cookies, jams, preserves, and the like. By the way I love homemade bread and butter pickles – hint, hint. Hey, remember, if you don't put it out in the universe at Christmas you may be SOL.



Jersey Fresh items such as a jam gift pack are always a big hit. Should you be looking for Pleasant Valley Farm Market is open daily 11 a.m.–5 p.m. through December 24th. Located at 4520

Harding Hwy. (Route 40), Mays Landing. It's the apple farm on Route 40 near the Hamilton Mall. Photo: Deborah Ein

A thrift shop basket filled with some pinecones, fresh greens, maybe a family photo, a bow etc. make a nice centerpiece for a friend or family member. I just bumped into a master gardener in Twice Loved Treasures thrift who was loaded with unblemished baskets in preparation for just that. And her purchases supported our local hospital.



Master gardener Susan McKenna collection of baskets that benefited nonprofit thrifts! Photo: S. McKenna.

Christmas trees, you ask: which is the best approach? We devoted an entire article about why a real cut tree is best. If you need the article email me at forrivers@comcast.net. And while we are on the topic, a native tree or plant makes a nice gift.

Try to avoid battery operated items; opt for solar or rechargeable gear when possible.

Books with an environmental message can keep giving to the planet – by spreading the good news, so to speak. You know I’m a big fan of Doug Tallamy’s books; you could introduce a friend by gifting *Bringing Nature Home* and then follow it up with *Nature’s Best Hope*. There’s nothing like enabling people to curl up with Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*, or how about a summer tour of our region’s bayshore with Pete Dunne via his *Bayshore Summer: Finding Eden in a Most Unlikely Place*.

Make a donation to an environmental or conservation organization that strives to protect resources. Each year local people gift memberships to CU Maurice River. Pick a group whose mission you support and set up a membership or donation in a friend’s name.

I would suggest giving someone a reusable bottle, but if you're like me your bottles runneth over, and remembering to fill and bring it along is my challenge. That being said, here are the four key rules: 1) Reduce 2) Reuse 3) Recycle and 4) Compost. By the way the sad reality is that plastics are rarely recycled, so avoid them whenever possible. In fact recycling is doing badly all around. So focus on the other rules, but don't forget to recycle when you can.

Few Americans leave a small enough foot print. Hopefully you came up with a reuseable gift idea to help you minimize your impact on the planet. Have a super holiday!

Sources:

Peninsula Sanitary Service, Inc. /Stanford Recycling.
Frequently Asked Questions: Holiday Waste Prevention.