

# Greening the Holidays

## How to Celebrate Sustainably

by Sandra Yeyati



**W**ith every record-setting storm and catastrophic fire, more people are realizing that we are embroiled in a climate crisis. Consider this holiday season as an opportunity not just to make sustainable choices, but also to take strategic action that positively impacts the planet and inspires friends and family to join the environmental cause. Whether that means modifications to the holiday dinner, eco-friendly decorating tactics or responsible gifting, every environmental choice can be a teaching moment or conversation starter. Together, we can make a difference.

### Eco-Friendly Holiday Dinner

Growing fruits and vegetables is generally kinder to Earth than the industrialized production of meat, which pollutes the environment and mistreats animals. Hosting a vegetarian holiday feast with locally sourced, organic produce is a great way to support regenerative farming systems, slash transportation emissions and introduce guests to new culinary traditions. If meat is a must, opt for sustainably wild-caught salmon or shrimp and pastured, organic turkey or chicken over beef, as cow production leads to significant methane emissions.

To conserve energy, use the oven or stove sparingly, opting instead for recipes that employ crockpots, air fryers, pressure cookers, outdoor barbecues or the microwave. For both health and environmental reasons, gently encourage smaller meat portions and fill

the plate with scrumptious side dishes. After the party, leftovers can be sent home with guests, turned into next-day lunches and soups or frozen for later use. Compost scraps to keep them out of the landfill.

### Responsible Gift Wrapping

Eliminating wrapping paper, bows, ribbons and greeting cards from the holiday equation is a great zero-waste lifestyle choice. Gifts can just as easily be wrapped in fabric, scarves and cloth napkins, or presented inside a reusable shopping bag. Another alternative is to use wrapping materials and greeting cards that are biodegradable, from recycled origins or certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council ([FSC.org](https://www.fsc.org)) to ensure they did not contribute to deforestation. Avoid papers with glitter, foil and other

decorations that may contain nonbiodegradable, petroleum-based elements. Glitter is usually made from plastic, contributing to the microplastics problem. When recycling, remove tape, bows and ribbons.

## Earth-Friendly Holiday Decorations

The most eco-friendly Christmas decoration is a potted, living tree that can be decorated and exhibited indoors during the holidays and planted in the garden afterwards. A mini-rosemary tree is also a fragrant tabletop alternative. Opt for LED string lights, which use a fraction of the energy that traditional lights do.

With the help of online instructional videos, families can come together to craft decorations out of biodegradable, recycled and consumable materials, including tree ornaments made of reclaimed wood or soda can tabs; garlands of popcorn, dried fruit slices or cinnamon sticks; wreaths and centerpieces studded with pine cones, herb branches and flowers from the garden; and candles made with essential oils and soy wax. The home will smell festive, fresh and healthful.

## Thoughtful, Life-Affirming Gifts

Environmentally responsible holiday shopping takes many forms. Some people pledge to buy nothing during Christmas and instead donate their holiday budgets to families in need. Others set out to buy gifts they know the recipient wants or needs to avoid waste. They shop at local, small businesses and choose durable, repurposed, easily repairable and upcycled items.

Thoughtful gifts that affirm a commit-

ment to the planet are electric bicycles and comfortable hiking shoes to encourage slow transportation and healing walks in nature; solar-powered devices and chargers in support of renewable energy; consumable items and foods that won't clutter the home or landfill; services and experiences that don't need to be gift wrapped; and environmental charities that are meaningful to the recipient.

Consider gifts that encourage loved ones to grow their own fruits, vegetables and herbs; plant shade trees in their backyards; and nurture flowering plants that support bees, butterflies and other pollinators—green-thumb gifts like herb planters, wildflower seed packets, garden tools, utility gloves and vegetable-growing instruction books.

## Reusable Gifts that Ditch the Plastic

These reusable gifts make it easy and fun for recipients to be kind to the planet year-round by reducing our devastating dependence on single-use, nonbiodegradable plastic that pollutes the environment and harms aquatic wildlife.

- Straws made of stainless steel, organic bamboo, silicone, biodegradable paper or glass
- Water bottles and insulated containers made of stainless steel or glass
- Food bags, wraps and bowl covers made of beeswax, silicone, cotton or canvas
- Stainless steel plates and bamboo utensils for sustainable picnicking
- Zero-waste shampoo, conditioner and body wash bars

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