



GREENING THE HOLIDAYS!

The holidays come but once a year, but it's not just the memories that can last a lifetime. Unfortunately, the season of generosity and merriment can leave a lasting impact on the environment too. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Americans discard 25% more trash than they do during the rest of the year. This totals 2 billion extra pounds of garbage each week.

In addition to the increase in waste, our holiday traditions also lead to an increase in energy use and greenhouse gas emissions as we travel and entertain more.

Fortunately, there are many things we can do to retain the spirit of the season while being conscious about the environment. Find simple eco-friendly tips throughout this guide to incorporate into your holiday routine. Follow these and you'll help ensure a bright and memorable holiday season for generations to come.

Happy Holidays!

ECO-FEAST

Already seeing visions of sugar-plums dancing in your head? Like many you associate the holidays with the traditional foods you eat. Be eco-conscious about your holiday feast without removing any of its sentiment with these helpful tips.

► Try vegetarian substitutions for traditional holiday dishes.

Between feeding, processing and transporting livestock, the meat industry hits the environment hard. A study by the University of Chicago shows that in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, changing from a meat eater to a vegetarian is like downsizing from an SUV to a mid-sized sedan. If it's unfeasible to replace the traditional turkey or brisket this year, try choosing non-meat alternatives for the sides.

► Buy locally raised and produced foods.

Research shows that choosing local foods greatly diminishes greenhouse gas emissions due to the shortened transportation distance. Search Local Harvest to find nearby farms offering fresh and seasonal foods. www.localharvest.org.

► Join a CSA.

Support local farmers by joining a community-supported agriculture program (CSA). Members receive a share of the harvest while providing the farmer with a constant stream of income. Find a CSA in your area. www.CSA.org.

► Purchase fair-trade chocolate, tea, and coffee.

These popular holiday items should be purchased fair-trade and organic when possible. Although these products come with a higher price tag, items certified fair-trade ensures just practices including equitable pay, healthy workplaces, and environmental sustainability.

► Buy organic.

Safeguard your health and the environment by purchasing foods that are organic. Produced without pesticides, fertilizers, genetic engineering, antibiotics, hormones, sewage sludge or irradiation, organic foods carry the label that reads "Certified Organic." Buying organic food prevents toxic chemicals from seeping into the soil and groundwater.

If buying organic for your entire holiday meal is not in the budget, consider limiting organic produce options to the "dirty dozen" and purchasing eggs, meat and cheeses without hormones.

► Use natural elements to create a tablescape.

Decorate your table with dried leaves, pinecones, acorns or fresh fruit such as pomegranates, pears and apples. Make sure to eat the edibles and compost the rest.

► Toss the disposable habit.

Opt for reusable table ware and cloth napkins instead of the disposable paper or plastic options. If reusable items are unavailable, choose products that are made from corn or potatoes and are compostable.

► Don't overcook.

According to an EPA study, Americans throw away more than 25% of all prepared food. Cut down on this waste by cooking less or sending leftovers home with guests in glass jars.

► Choose eco-friendly alcoholic beverages.

Serve festive spirits from local wineries and breweries. Check out the Chicago winery Wild Blossom www.wildblossomwines.com or Goose Islands' organic Lamar Street Pale Ale, sold exclusively at Whole Foods Market.

WHEN TO BUY ORGANIC: THE DIRTY DOZEN.

According to Environmental Working Group, these items contain the highest level of pesticides and should be bought organic:

Peaches
Apples
Sweet Bell Peppers
Celery
Nectarines
Strawberries
Cherries
Pears
Grapes (imported)
Spinach
Lettuce
Potatoes

Decking the Halls

There is no better way to warm up a cold, dark Chicago December than with a house adorned in festive décor. “Green” your decorating routine by keeping it simple, reusing the old and incorporating these ideas to help reduce waste and cut energy consumption.

* choose the right tree

Determining whether a real or a fake Christmas tree has a smaller environmental impact is about as difficult as the debate behind paper vs. plastic bags. Do your research to determine the best choice for you by considering place of origin, method of production and disposal, presence of chemicals and length of use.

If you choose a real tree, be sure to drop it off after the holidays at a participating disposal site. www.cityofchicago.org/Environment

Another tree option becoming popular on the West Coast is potted Christmas trees. Keep the potted tree inside for the holidays and then transport it outside until the ground thaws to plant in the spring.

* use LED light strings

LED holiday lights use up to 95% less energy than larger, traditional holiday bulbs and last up to 100,000 hours when used indoors.

* hang compostable decorations on the tree

String popcorn and cranberries to create garland for the tree. Hang hardened gingerbread cookies for added decoration.



six-pack snowflake

Tools and Materials

12 plastic six-pack holders
Invisible tape
Fishing line
Scissors

Directions

1. Fold the plastic six-pack holders in half, lengthwise. Tape the top and bottom sections together in the center of the outer edges of the rings. Repeat with the 11 remaining six-pack holders.
2. Tape the 12 prepared six-pack holders together, side-by-side, at the edges of the middle rings.
3. Run about 1 foot of fishing line through all of the bottom rings, cinch them tightly, and knot. Trim excess fishing line. Connect the final outer edge with tape, completing the snowflake shape
4. Optional: Alter the shape of every other holder with scissors to create unique designs.
5. Use additional fishing line to hang snowflakes from ceiling or in a window.
(Courtesy of the Martha Stewart Show)

* create earth-friendly holiday scents

Using paraffin wax candles can pollute your air. Instead, opt for soy or beeswax, which burn much cleaner than paraffin, a petroleum product.

Make your own potpourri by combining two cups of water, orange peels, a cinnamon stick and cloves in a small pot and simmer. The fresh holiday scent will warm up your home within minutes.

* opt for sustainable foliage

To add extra warmth to your home, choose house plants such as Christmas cactuses, cyclamens or amaryllis over poinsettias as they will bloom again the following holiday season.

* get crafty

Reuse items from around your house to make these easy holiday-inspired crafts.



toilet paper tube crackers

Tools and Materials

2 toilet paper tubes
13"x6.5" piece of used wrapping paper
Glue stick
Yarn
Candy
Scissors

Directions

1. On the used wrapping paper, run a glue stick along one of the 13-inch sides. Center tube on the opposite end of the wrapping paper and roll. Secure edges with fingers and allow to dry.
2. Carefully slide half of the second toilet paper tube into one side of the roll. Wrap a piece of yarn around the paper between the two tubes. Slowly tighten and knot to secure. Remove the second tube.
3. Fill the wrapped tube with candy and repeat Step #2 on the open end of the cracker.

tin can votive

Tools and Materials

Empty 15 oz. tin can
Marker
Soy candle
Water
Large nail
Towel
Hammer

Directions

1. Wash and dry the empty tin can and remove the label. Fill tin can almost to the top with water and freeze overnight.
2. Remove tin can from freezer and lay on towel. With the marker, draw a festive design on the side of the can.
3. Place a nail along the design and tap with a hammer to create a hole. Continue tapping holes until the design is complete, spacing each hole about a centimeter apart. The block of ice will prevent the can from denting.
4. Allow the ice to melt and remove. Add the candle and light.



The Chicago Conservation Corps mission is to recruit, train and support a network of volunteers who work together to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods through environmental service projects that protect our water, clean our air, restore our land and save energy.

www.cityofchicago.org/Environment/C3