

Keeping Sustainability in Mind During the Holidays

Over 70 billion pounds of food waste reaches our landfills every year, contributing to methane emissions and wasting energy and resources across the food supply chain ([epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov)). Keep these tips in mind on how to reduce waste and keep the environment in mind during the holiday season.

Wrapping Gifts:

Most wrapping paper, ribbons and bows are not recyclable! Here are some sustainable alternatives:

- Reuse what you already have: wrap presents with newspaper, cartoons, old maps, or other paper products.
- Incorporate a "wrapping" gift: use a useful cloth item that is a gift in and of itself to wrap other presents (i.e. - dish towels, scarfs).
- Buy recyclable/biodegradable alternatives:
 - [Wrappily | Eco-Friendly Wrapping Paper | Shop Sustainable](#)
 - [Wrapping-Paper-Biodegradable-Recycled](#)

Trees:

Live/cut Christmas trees make excellent shelter and habitat for birds and other wildlife once they are finished in the home. Rather than putting on the curb to be hauled away in January, throw it out in the garden or behind the shed. The birds will thank you!

Other sustainable options include:

- Curbside pick-up for recycling: Many providers will collect trees during regular pickup schedules on the two weeks following Christmas.
- Take your tree to a drop-off recycling center: Most counties have free drop-off locations. Usually, you may take up to two trees to a drop-off location at no charge.
- Tree recycling/mulching programs: Tree recycling and mulching programs are a fast-growing trend in communities throughout the nation.

Check with your local department of public works for more information about recycling your holiday tree!



Christmas tree from the 2019 holiday rotation, photographed by Brian Searby

Food Waste and Single-Use Plastic Consumption:

Reduce your food waste:

- Try to make "just enough food;" do not over prepare.
- Ask friends and family to take leftovers home.
- Put leftovers in the freezer to enjoy at a later time.
- Make new recipes with your holiday leftovers.
- Compost your fruit and veggie scraps.

Reduce your single-use plastic consumption:

- Save glass jars and reusable containers to pack up leftovers.
- Skip plastic plates, cutlery and cups to help eliminate some of the 6 million tons of non-durable plastics, like spoons, forks and knives discarded each year.

Reduce and reuse by heading to your local Goodwill for low-cost dishes your guests can use for leftover!

A Few Final Ideas:

- Keep the environment in mind when you choose what to gift. Focus on gifts that are meaningful and last.
- If your holiday lights are old, switch them out for energy-saving LED ones. They use 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs and last years longer.
- Consider sending a virtual holiday card instead of using paper.
- Shop local to reduce your environmental impact.