

## “Green Up” Your Holidays By Sustainable Belmont

According to *Newsweek* magazine, Americans will send nearly 2 billion cards and use more than 38,000 miles of ribbon this holiday season. That’s enough ribbon to encircle Earth 1.5 times with extra left over to connect Boston and Los Angeles. Fortunately, you can enjoy the festivities of the holiday season while being kind to the environment. Here are some suggestions for gifts and decorations that reduce your consumption and waste and saving money.

When celebrating the “season of light,” consider using LED (light-emitting diode) lights. They not only use 80 to 90 percent less energy than traditional strings of conventional incandescent bulbs, but also are cooler to the touch, making them safer to use. LED lights cost more up front than conventional light strings but because of their long lifetimes (up to 20 years of continuous indoor use) and low energy use, they quickly pay for themselves. Additional energy savings are possible when holiday light displays are coupled with a timer.

Shopping presents opportunities for reducing waste as well. If you shop at local stores, plan your trip in advance to make your driving route as efficient as possible, and bring your own bags to carry gifts home. If you shop online, try to purchase as many items as possible at one time through the same retailer to minimize packaging. Some retailers also offer gift certificates redeemable online, which eliminate the need for plastic gift cards.

The holiday season is synonymous with paper consumption, so consider ways to minimize waste in this area. Deluged with unwanted catalogs? Remove yourself from more than 1,000 mailing lists by visiting [www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org). For gift-giving, you can reuse wrapping paper and bags whenever possible, make fabric gift bags, or make your own gift wrap from the Sunday comics, glossy magazine pages, or even your child’s artwork. If you need to buy new wrapping paper or gift bags, look for those made from recycled paper. You can also cut down on excess paper use by wrapping certain items (such as clothing) without a gift box or giving gift certificates in envelopes instead of in wrapped boxes filled with tissue paper. Holiday cards can be created and distributed online as well; your virtual cards will save paper and postage and can still be personalized with family photos and greetings.

If you are throwing a dinner party, avoid using disposable paper products and use regular flatware, dishes, glassware, and table linens instead. For larger parties where these reusable items might not be feasible, choose disposables made from environmentally friendly materials such as paper, bamboo, or even biodegradable corn-based plastic. And for the holiday feast, buy local products when possible. A locally raised organic turkey will taste great, encourage sustainable farming practices, and cut down on the unnecessary pollution created when food is transported long distances.

When it comes time to pick out a Christmas tree, consider buying a tree that can be planted in the spring; if you buy a cut tree, you can bring it out during the month of X on

your regular recycling day to have it recycled for mulch. Artificial trees are usually petroleum-based and while reusable are not recyclable or biodegradable if they end up in a landfill. If you buy an artificial tree, choose a high-quality one that will last many years, and if you prefer a pre-lit tree, be sure to choose one with energy-efficient LED lights.

For many more ideas on greening up your holiday season, visit the New American Dream website at [www.newdream.org/holiday/index.php](http://www.newdream.org/holiday/index.php). And to learn how you can make a difference year-round, contact Sustainable Belmont at [sustainablebelmont@gmail.com](mailto:sustainablebelmont@gmail.com). From our families to yours, happy holidays!