

Eco-Friendly Tips for the Holidays

By Anna Churchill

Consider these simple ideas for a greener holiday this year. Shop local! Get out into your neighborhood and see what's available there before driving to the mall. You may find a unique gift and support your neighborhood business. Even if you don't find the gift you were looking for, you may find something special for yourself! Another idea is to give a gift that will get the recipient out into his/her neighborhood. Use the Internet to find restaurants, shops, spas, or salons near the recipient's home. Then you can call the business to inquire about purchasing a gift certificate by phone or via the Internet. If you have something specific in mind, before buying it new, do a quick search on www.craigslist.org and see if you can get it used. This is especially useful for children's toys and equipment. Also, a gift membership to a local museum or nature center is often appreciated and lasts all year.

Want to reduce the number of unwanted catalogs filling up your recycle bin? Check out www.catalogchoice.org. You can set up a free account and then search for the catalog that you would prefer not to receive. Catalog Choice will contact the company on your behalf. You can also sign up for email notifications from retailers and link to their websites to do some paperless shopping.

Gift-wrapping? Avoid using new paper. Last year's gift bags will work a second time. Other ideas: make the wrapping part of the gift, such as a towel or a blanket; use old maps or a colorful newspaper story; or purchase biodegradable paper that's embedded with flower seeds at www.realgoods.com. In the spring, plant it and let your garden grow! If you must use conventional wrapping paper, look for paper that contains recycled content.

Anna Churchill is a member of Sustainable Belmont.