

Trash to Treasures for the Holidays



The holiday season is full of good times with friends and family, with lots of food, treats, gifts, decorations, and more. But, have you ever thought about how much trash gets thrown away and how much energy is used during this time of year? What happens to the wrappers on all of the candy you get, the food scraps from your turkey dinner, the bows and gift wrapping from presents, the used up tape dispensers, the dried up wreaths and Christmas trees? Most of it gets thrown away and there's no getting around it, it's a lot of waste.

You can help the environment this holiday season by using less stuff, less energy, and turning trash into treasures for your friends, family, others in need and yourself. This is also a good way to save some money if you're looking for simple and inexpensive gift ideas. Use this list to help you reduce waste, conserve energy, save money, and get rid of some of your unwanted stuff.

- [Holiday Preparation Ideas](#)
- [Shop Smart!](#)
- [Holiday Trees](#)
- [Gift Ideas](#)
- [Wrap it Up and Reuse](#)
- [Holiday Decorations from Trash](#)
- [After the Holidays](#)



Holiday Preparation Ideas

- Buy and use decorations that can be used more than once.
- Make a gift bag by sewing together scraps of fabric, decorating an old pillowcase, or drawing a design on a paper bag.
- Use washable plates, utensils, napkins and tablecloths for holiday parties.
- Don't waste food! Divide up holiday leftovers in reusable containers between guests so that the leftovers are eaten and not wasted. [Compost](#) leftover food scraps.
- Use some decorations that don't require electricity.
- Use a timer on your house and Christmas tree lights to turn off when no one is awake to enjoy them.
- Purchase LED (light emitting diodes) Christmas lights. They come in all shapes, sizes, and colors and use very little energy.

[Shop Smart!](#)

- Do all of your shopping with reusable cloth bags, or reuse your paper and plastic bags.
- Look for gifts or treats with little or no packaging.
- Buy gifts that will last and can be used over and over again. Avoid disposable items.
- Look for rechargeable batteries for holiday gifts requiring battery power.
- Buy items made with recycled materials.
- Look for presents that are locally produced. In general, local products reduce energy costs and greenhouse gases because they don't need to be shipped long distances.
- As you head out to shop, carpool with family and friends.



Holiday Trees

- Buy a "live" holiday tree that can be planted in the yard in the spring.
- Place your "used" tree in the yard to provide cover for rabbits and birds during heavy snowfall, then cover it with strands of popcorn and cranberries, and place [pine cone feeders](#) on it to feed the birds.
- Turn your tree into mulch to help make the garden nicer this summer. (You must keep the tree clean and free of tinsel or decoration hooks.)
- Watch for tree collection days in your city or town and get your tree out in time for pick-up. Don't forget to remove all your ornaments and don't put the tree in a plastic bag.
- Decorate your tree with LED lights and turn off lights when you go to bed.

Gift Ideas

- Put your old, unwanted dress clothes, shoes, and jewelry in a box and give it to your sister or brother as a "dress up" kit or for a costume. Or, donate gently used clothes to a charity organization for someone else to wear.
- You can avoid giving your friends a sugar overload by giving fun crayons, pencils, unique shaped erasers, sidewalk chalk, or other creative art supplies instead of candy.
- Give gifts like tickets to the movies, concerts, or your favorite sporting event. A gift certificate to a favorite store, or ice cream shop is a fun gift.
- Give a gift that lasts throughout the year. A [DNR State Park sticker](#) gives you entrance to year-round outdoor experiences at Wisconsin State Parks.
- Make a tasty treat and/or ornament with decorated cookies or candies.
- Give an environmental gift like a refillable pencil and lead, cloth bag for shopping or for carrying school books, a lunch box with reusable food containers, a rechargeable battery charger, or a can crusher and fun recycling bin.
- Make your own stationery and give it to a friend.
- Buy living gifts. Try a house plant, seeds for spring gardening, potting soil, or even a coupon for your help with summer gardening.
- Give holiday gifts that are made from recycled or organic materials or that support the environment.

- Give the gift of time. Create a gift certificate for mowing the lawn, emptying the dishwasher, taking out the trash, brushing and walking the dog, or other chores above and beyond your regular ones.



Wrap it Up and Reuse

- Wrap gifts in Sunday comics, old maps, or your own artwork drawn on the back of scrap paper.
- Save gift boxes, gift bags, bows, and ribbons to wrap upcoming birthday presents or for use next holiday season.
- Make your own cards or wrapping paper by [making paper](#).
- Make post cards or gift tags from used holiday cards.
- Decorate old shoe boxes to use as gift boxes.

Holiday Decorations from Trash

- Make a [luminary](#) from a plastic milk jug.
- Make origami ornaments from used wrapping paper.
- Decorate milk or juice cartons to make a holiday village.



After the Holidays

- Don't throw away your holiday or greeting cards, use them to make new cards.
- Save your bows, ribbons, gift boxes and gift bags to use for wrapping future holiday gifts.
- Recycle your unwanted wrapping paper (most are recyclable except for the foil type).
- Wash and reuse party tableware.
- Recycle and reuse whatever you can.