

Reduce waste and save money this holiday season

Giving and sharing during the holiday season can add up to additional waste with extra gift wrap, extra packaging, disposable dishes, leftover food and more. But we can make small changes in some of our holiday habits to reduce additional waste and save money.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the volume of household waste increases by 25 percent between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. That's about one million extra tons being sent to landfills across the country each year. Consider these suggestions to prevent that extra waste this holiday season.

Holiday decorations and parties

- Have lights that no longer work? Many companies accept used light strings for recycling and may even offer a discount on new lights. Check with your local retailer or search online for details. Check with your local recycling program, too – they may take string lights for recycling during the holiday season.
- Replace old string lights with energy-efficient LED lights.
- Use a timer to turn off holiday lights when no one is awake to enjoy them.
- At holiday parties, use washable plates, cups, silverware, tablecloths and napkins instead of disposables. Divide leftovers in reusable containers among guests so extra food is eaten and not wasted.

Recycle your old holiday lights.



Gift-giving and wrapping

- Give your family and friends state park or trail passes, gift cards for a lunch out, or tickets to a concert or sports game. Giving experiences, rather than things, creates memories that last and creates much less waste.
- Look for gifts with little or no packaging, or packaging that can be easily recycled or reused.
- Bring your own reusable bags when you go out to shop.
- 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.
- Wrap gifts in Sunday comics or old maps. Reuse brown paper bags from the grocery store as gift wrap dressed up with colorful ribbons or bows.
- 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.
- When gifts are being opened, have a bag ready to collect wrapping paper for recycling (most is recyclable, except for the foil type).

- Save gift boxes, gift bags and bows to wrap future birthday presents or to use next holiday season. Recycle the boxes that are torn or no longer useable.

Holiday cleanup

- Save holiday greeting cards to use as post cards or gift tags next year. If you do toss them, make sure they go into recycling.
- Put cut trees in a corner of the yard to provide winter cover for rabbits and birds. In the spring, chip the tree and use it for mulch.

For additional ideas that kids can do to help green the holidays, visit EEK! Environmental Education for Kids! [Trash to Treasures for the Holidays](#).