

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice

Canadians spend billions of dollars each year buying Christmas gifts, wrapping, baubles and bows. Most of the packaging lands in the garbage within hours of being opened. Such excess contributes to our continuing waste problems, ultimately, leaves us feeling dissatisfied. But many people are beginning to realize that Christmas can be a happy occasion without all that stuff!

This year when you are looking for the 'perfect' gift, what will be YOUR criteria for "perfect"? Must the gift be unique? Memorable? Easy on your pocketbook? Easy on the environment? This year, consider giving gifts that won't cost the earth. Whether you choose an item made from recycled materials, a treasured heirloom to give to the next generation or a gift of your time or talent, you will demonstrate your affection not only for the recipient but for the environment as well. Here is a list of ideas to make your celebrations less consumption-oriented and more joyous.



Give Your Time

Lend a helping hand before the festivities. Offer to baby-sit for a frazzled friend. Get out the ladder and hang the lights for a neighbour. Help an older relative with their holiday shopping.

Give a "certificate" or "coupons" for a service to be performed by yourself such as babysitting or a massage, gardening for a month, cooking a meal, giving lessons on the internet, or by someone else, like a diaper service. Or give a gift certificate to the movies or a restaurant. Put the certificates in a basket, jar or envelop that you've decorated with festive trim.



Make a Memory

Take a friend to a concert or special festive event. Take kids ice-skating or onto the hills to play in the snow.

Give a gingerbread house kit to young friends and spend an afternoon making it with them.



Give Earth Friendly Gifts

Fashion Christmas stockings out of fabric scraps, leftover ribbons, bows and other trinkets. Make them for adults as well as kids. Fill them with unwrapped gifts such as homemade cookies or candies, bottles of shampoo and other smelly stuff, soaps in the shape of animals, dried herbs from your garden, a used book.

Choose stationary -- writing paper, cards, and envelopes -- with recycled content. Or try your hand at papermaking.

Give your own art. Paint a picture. Write a poem or story. Put it on paper you made yourself and illustrate it. Make earrings or other jewellery out of found objects. Get kids in on the act. They're thrilled to give gifts they have made or decorated themselves such as t-shirts with one-of-a-kind designs, sculptures made from found objects, or handmade paper.

Prepare some homemade goodies such as jams, chutneys, flavoured popcorn or home baking, all presented in reusable tins, baskets or jars.

Give a set of plain white, red or green cloth napkins and a roll of festive ribbon. The napkins can be dressed up with the ribbon for the holidays, then used plain the rest of the year.

Gardeners will love an assortment of seeds, bulbs, gardening books or catalogues presented in a new planting pot.

Give the "brown bagger" on your list a new reusable lunch kit complete with reusable containers.

To teach the meaning of charity to young people, give a donation in their name to a charitable organization. Better yet, let them choose the organization.

"Buy" an acre of tropical rainforest or a hectare of Canadian wilderness from the World Wildlife Fund (416-489-4567). Or you can "adopt a grizzly" or support the trail building projects of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (1-800-661-9453).

Give a plant that you have grown yourself along with a package (reusable, of course) of your own compost.

Promote an environmentally benign mode of transportation by giving transit tickets or bicycle equipment such as a helmet or a wicker carrier.

Purchase an "environmental" product such as a vermicomposter, clothing made from hemp or organically grown cotton, a purse or belt made from recycled inner tubes or a book binder made from computer circuit boards.



Wrap it All

Save wrapping paper and bows for reuse. Or, if the paper is beyond reusing recycle it.

Use the comics or other colourful sections from your newspaper as wrapping.

Make reusable cloth bags out of brightly-coloured fabric.

Find imaginative ways to employ used objects - nails, thumb tacks, bits of foil, dried leaves - to decorate your packages.



Time To Decorate

Buy a potted tree that can be decorated according to the season and will be around for many years to come.

Decorate your home - mantles, mirrors, door frames - with lights or wreaths and forgo the tree.

Make tree decorations from food or used materials. Some ideas: cranberry wreaths, dried apple ring clusters tied with a bright bow, gingerbread ornaments.

Check with the Lion's Club when you should set your tree out for curbside tree recycle collection or drop off at Foothills Landfill for composting.

Put outside Christmas lights on a timer and set them to turn on only when it is dark, and turn off before you go to bed.