



YOUR GUIDE TO A ZERO WASTE HOLIDAY

If your trash can is already feeling fuller than usual, you're not alone; according to the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#), our household waste increases by 25 percent between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day – this translates into an additional 1 million tons each year. That is a tremendous amount of trash in the name of good tidings. To combat this, we have provided a few tips that will help you towards having a zero waste holiday.

Rethink your Gifting

In terms of holiday giving, I recommend that you give gifts that have a lasting impression, help reduce waste, and ideally support local businesses. I personally love to receive "experience" gifts (massages, concert tickets, tea for two). But what about for people who are more into "things"? You can give homemade gifts in reusable containers, pre-loved and upcycled goodies or even regift something you no longer love.

- **Experiences & Services:** The sky is the limit here. You are supporting local business and reducing waste. Whether it is tickets for a show or sporting event, or gift certificates for a spa treatment or a home-cooked gourmet meal – these will always bring a smile. If you have a fellow greenie in your life you can pass on the green spirit by giving a gift certificate to your local [Habitat ReStore](#), [creative reuse center](#), thrift shop, or other reuse organization. If they have little ones, you can give the gift of a [reusable diaper service](#) for a month, [toddler music classes](#) or a gift certificate to a local indoor play space.
- **Pre-Loved:** Gently used items at thrift stores are great ways to give a zero-waste gift. You can find amazing items at your local thrift or consignment shops, antique shop or reseller/swap site. Whether it's an antique jewelry box, a vintage chess set, or some funky art pottery – it will be cherished. Remember that if you buy something online remember to ask the seller to ship in recyclable materials rather than plastic or styrofoam shipping materials.
- **Reusable:** Help you're loved ones eliminate disposables from every part of their lives – from bags and bottles to lunch kits, household items and beyond. Practical, innovative and high-quality, reusables give consumers alternatives to a wide range of use-and-toss items. One of my favorite places to find the "best of the best" reusables is [Reuselt](#).
- **Upcycled:** Whether you call it creative reuse, upcycling, or repurposing – this is one of my favorite aspects of reuse. Whether it is furniture made of scrap wood, or jewelry made of old tin cans – I love upcycling and your friends and family will too. One of my favorite places to find amazing upcycled gifts is [Eco Etsy](#).
- **Regifted:** Regifting is another fantastic option. There's one caveat – be sure you really know the person is going to enjoy the item you're regifting, you don't want to just pass on your unwanted stuff.

- **Homemade:** Who doesn't love fresh baked cookies, cakes, and candies in a reusable tin? And homemade crafts and home décor are easy and fun to give, too. Your loved ones will certainly appreciate the time and effort you put into these special gifts.
- **Opting Out:** This is where you have to be proactive. Let your loved ones know you're happy with what you have and you would rather they take the money they'd spend on "stuff" and come visit you instead – since time with them is much more valuable to you. If you can tell they won't "buy" this option, you can always tell them that an experience the whole family can take part in (e.g. movie tickets, bowling passes) would be nice too.

Green your Gift Wrap

When it comes to wrapping your good tidings this year, be resourceful.

- **Scrap Wrap:** Reusing leftover wrapping paper, gift bags and ribbons that people gave you last year is one option. Another tried and true method is by wrapping gifts in newspaper funnies, old calendars, or colorful magazines that you have collected over the year.
- **Reusable Wrap:** If it's in your budget, I highly recommend [reusable cloth gift bag sets](#). And if you're really creative, you can also try [furoshiki](#), which is the traditional Japanese method of using colorful pieces of cloth as gift wrap. While the method generally uses a specific type of cloth, I don't see why you can't go to your [local creative reuse center](#) and find some colorful scrap fabric. You can also consider reusable containers such as baskets, wood boxes, cookie tins, decorative jars - and reuse them yearly.
- **DIY Wrap:** You can decorate scrap paper, paper grocery bags, or left-over tissue paper with ink or poster paint using cookie-cutters or rubber stamps.

Eco-Friendly Holiday Parties

Whether you're hosting or attending a holiday party this year, there are simple ideas to eliminate down waste.

- **Invitations:** You can email your invitations, use an online system like [Evite](#), or just phone your guests instead of mailing invitations.
- **Menu Planning:** By planning your menu ahead of time and buying in bulk you can save time, money, and avoid excess packaging. Be sure to pre-cycle by making sure what packaging there is, is in recyclable or returnable containers. Minimize food waste by getting a good headcount, and planning meals carefully.
- **Service Ware:** Avoid disposables at all costs. If you're throwing this year's party and you need extra serving dishes, glasses, or linens, consider borrowing them from friends (the sharing economy is becoming more prevalent around the country). You can also rent reusable plates, cups and cutlery from a party company for just pennies a guest. The best part of this option is that you won't have to wash any of it before it gets returned. Remember to also use cloth napkins instead of paper, they're elegant and cheaper in the long run.
- **Leftovers:** Encourage guests to bring reusable containers to take home extra goodies (and have a stash of them to provide your guests in case they forget). Think of how many trash bags you won't be filling with "disposable" plates and cups - not to mention all that leftover food.
- **Host Gift:** If you're attending a holiday party, put a little extra thought into what you bring your hosts. A bottle of wine in a reusable wine bag is the perfect gift. Or, you can think about a waste-free gift such as a gift certificate to your host's favorite restaurant.

Waste-Free Holiday Wishes

Another potentially wasteful tradition this time of year is holiday cards. Some people save each one they get, but most folks simply toss them in the trash or recycling bin after the festivities.

- **E-Cards:** This year, try something new. Electronic holiday cards are becoming much more common and they come without all the waste. There are a wide variety of online sites that will help you create the perfect card in any design you can imagine. You can visit Care2.com for a range of great e-cards.
- **Phone a Friend:** Another idea is to skip the card sending all together, and call your friends and relatives to wish them "Happy Holidays". Spending a few minutes catching up with loved ones is probably the best gift you can possibly give them.

Planet-Friendly Holiday Décor

Home décor is one of the biggest places to reduce your environmental impact.

- **Trees:** Rather than having a paper or plastic debate (i.e. cut real trees vs. fake trees), why not go natural and reusable? I recommend buying a small pine tree transplanting it into your garden next spring, or using a potted topiary that can be stored on your patio when not on holiday duty. If you're set on a cut tree, I would make sure your city/town offers a tree recycling program first.
- **Decorations:** And instead of buying a cheap plastic ornaments, try strings of popcorn and cranberries (which can feed birds or be put in the compost bin afterwards), origami ornaments made of repurposed magazines, or scour your local thrift shop for some pre-loved ornaments. Remember to pack up your decorations well at the end of the holidays, with newspaper, reused packing peanuts, or old clothes to ensure they last a lifetime.
- **Center pieces:** Use potted plants or evergreen cuttings from your yard, instead of buying cut flowers to make center pieces. Whichever you choose, be sure to use the greenery as mulch in your garden or compost it.
- **Lights:** If you're going to put up outdoor lights make sure you use LED Christmas Lights, which are up to 90 percent more efficient than their incandescent counterpart. Remember to put your lights on a timer, don't let them burn all night, and recycle old lights. As you're sorting through your old decorations, remember that both incandescent and LED holiday lights are recyclable. By recycling your broken and outdated lights, you'll keep the toxins in the electric cables from polluting landfills. You can mail in broken or obsolete lights to a number of retailers, including [Christmas Light Source](http://ChristmasLightSource.com) in Fort Worth, Texas and HolidayLEDs.com in Jackson, Michigan.

During the hustle and bustle of the season, you can save time and money, and the planet by embracing these fun and easy zero waste tips.

Happy Holidays!



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