



## City of Big Lake Environmental Education Newsletter

December

December may be the most wonderful time of the year, but it can also be one of the most wasteful. According to the EPA, the volume of household waste in the United States generally increases 25% between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, which is equivalent to about 1 million extra tons of waste. In this month's newsletter we have included some tips on how to make the holiday season a happy one for both you and the environment!

1. Give experiences, or gifts with little packaging
  - People often value experiences more than material goods, so why not give them the gift of experience this holiday season? Tickets to movies, concerts, museums, festivals etc. make great gifts; as do certificates for a massage or spa day. Another option is to offer your time (perhaps in the form of cooking, babysitting, or gardening) to relieve some stress from the lives of your family and friends. Print out customizable gift cards here: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-rrr1-06.pdf>
  - For more information on how to "give green" visit the MN Pollution Control Agency website: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/featured/give-green-gifts-year>
2. Illuminate your house this season with energy-efficient bulbs
  - The holiday season, for many of us, is synonymous with light, be it in inside on a tree, menorah, or kinara, or outside illuminating the darkness. When decorating this season, use LED lights which require 1/50<sup>th</sup> the electricity of conventional lights and last for 20-30 years. Another good idea is to put lights on a timer and to be sure to turn them off when no one is around to enjoy them.
3. Utilize public transportation
  - If you are traveling to a big city for the holidays, this may be easier. But even in Big Lake there are ways to reduce our vehicle emissions: utilize the Northstar if you need to do some shopping in the Cities, carpool with family and friends to holiday parties, and run multiple errands in one trip.
4. Reduce the use of shopping bags
  - For many people, it is now common practice to carry reusable shopping bags. One thing that is less common however is simply telling the cashier you don't need a bag at all. Even if you forgot your reusable bag on a shopping trip (which happens to the best of us) carry your small items without a bag, or put as many items as possible into one. It is unlikely you need a new bag at each store you visit.
5. Cook a sustainable feast
  - When preparing your holiday meals, think about sustainable consumption. First, buy as many products as possible locally (MN Grown's website offers a comprehensive guide), then think about buying and consuming sustainably-raised meat and seafood, and organic fruits and vegetables. At the end of the meal, recycle and compost any leftover food (or send it home with guests)!
6. Use reusable dishware



- If you are having a formal holiday meal, it is a great time to utilize your neglected dining set or china pattern. If there will be children in attendance (or some clumsy adults) opt for reusable plates, cups, and utensils rather than disposable ones. If disposable dishes must be used, look for recyclable or compostable options and have the compost/recycling bins easily available to your guests.



7. Look for cards with recycled content or go electronic
  - When sending out holiday greeting cards consider making your own. If you have kids, this could be a fun family activity. But not all of us have time for that kind of creativity; if that is the case, look for cards with the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content. Another great option is to opt for holiday e-cards which will save both time and money.

8. Reuse gift wrapping

- Wrapping paper is one of those things my Grandma used to tell me to save to use next year, but as a kid, I just wanted to open my present as quickly as possible. Assuming many of you feel the same, some good options are to reuse old paper bags, newspaper, or posters. Another trend taking off this year is tying up old scarves to use as wrapping and then reusing them the next year.



9. Buy a local tree and then compost it

- There are so many tree farms in Minnesota, especially in the central region, that it is almost more difficult to *not* buy local. But if you are struggling, MN Grown's website allows you to search by product, and has a list of 25 local tree farms. After you pick the perfect tree and enjoy it during the season, remember to bring it to the compost facility to be broken down as brush. The compost facility is located near the Big Lake Public Works building.

In modern society, the holidays are often driven by consumerism. But, as Dr. Seuss reminds us, consumerism is not inherent to the holiday season, and the season may be more enjoyable without it (the environment will definitely thank you):

*“It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes, or bags! Maybe it doesn’t come from a store. Perhaps it means a little bit more.”*

Happy Holidays from the City of Big Lake!

These tips were taken from the EPA website: <https://www3.epa.gov/region9/waste/recycling/>