

## Reducing Waste During the Holiday Season

Americans generate an extra 5 million tons of waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day each year. Make [recycling](#), [waste-free parties](#), and [holiday tree and light recycling](#) a tradition in your family.

Holiday gifts can be a source of joy but also a source of stress and/or waste. The following tips may help inspire a new twist on an old tradition:

- **Draw Names.** This simplest concept ever and the benefits are never ending! The greatest advantage to drawing names is that you only have to buy one gift. That means you can shop locally for one gift and you only have to figure out how to do a waste-free wrap job on one gift. It also means that you'll be receiving fewer gifts. If you were nine, this would seem like the end of the world. But at a more "mature" age, this means one less pair of polyester knee-high socks from Great Grandma Jean. It also means you'll have a lot less wrapping paper to feel guilty about when you're done opening your gift (singular).
- **Make a Donation.** Have friends or family members that are big theater fans? How about sponsoring a show in their names, or donating to their favorite theater company? Know of someone who recently lost a loved one? A donation to the hospital or hospice house where they received their care would make a very thoughtful gift. What about that kid whose room is bursting with more toys than you could possibly fit in any closet or toy chest? Try a donation to their school for books or art supplies. Still struggling with that person who has everything? The Heifer Project, an organization that uses donations to provide livestock to underprivileged people around the world, is a feel good option that goes a lot further than a knick-knack shelf.
- **Make Your Own.** Homemade gifts are always well received. You can make wreaths out of sticks and branches that were scavenged from your yard. Homemade tree ornaments are great mementos that will be used year after year. Not crafty? No problem! The level of cuteness is stepped up one hundred fold whenever a child is involved. Instead of putting all the pressure on yourself when decorating personalized picture frames, set up a few kids with some brushes and paint, and voila! Insert a picture of your family and you're all set.
- **Give the Gift of Experience.** A night out on the town with a friends or family is a perfect waste-free alternative to a giant tin of assorted popcorn flavors. Choose a few favorites that you think that certain someone would enjoy- Movie tickets for the family, a comedy show, a play, or symphony tickets are all great options.
- **Give a Membership.** If you know a person or family is already a big fan of a local attraction or service, why not give a membership? Choose from the Zoo, Aquarium, YMCA, NPR, and the list goes on. Memberships are great because they get used over and over.
- **Regift!** The holidays are the perfect opportunity for you to share the joy of your 19<sup>th</sup> pair of polyester knee-high socks from Great Grandma Jean. Just because you can't use them, doesn't mean your cousin Johnny isn't just dying to have them! Put a bow on those babies and pass them on, along with last year's plastic punch bowl set.