

'TIS THE HOLIDAY SEASON -- REUSE, REDUCE, RECYCLE

From Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, household waste increases by more than 25 percent. This extra trash — mostly food, shopping bags, product packaging and wrapping paper — adds up to an additional 1 million tons of waste a week that's sent to U.S. landfills, according to the EPA. Luckily, there are many steps you can take that will help you reduce your holiday trash — and even save some cash.

CHRISTMAS TREES

Live, potted trees are reusable. After the holidays, you can plant your tree or leave it potted in your yard and use it again next year.

Freshly cut trees are recyclable. Usually a few stores in our area sell cut trees. Better yet, if you can, chop down your own. Avoid artificial trees that are made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC). After the holidays, your tree can be placed in your backyard for nesting birds, or call 863-1212 for the sites where trees can be dropped off or days Solid Waste will pick up trees. The trees and other evergreens will be turned into mulch for community parks and public areas. Residents may also take advantage of these materials for free by calling 863-1275.

Tumbleweed Trees are a creative alternative. Look for them rolling by outside.

NATURAL HOLIDAY DECORATIONS AND FRAGRANCES

Instead of buying decorations, go for a walk. Look for berries, dried flowers (even weeds), pine cones, and evergreen branches can make beautiful decorations.

Add seasonal scents by making potpourri - simmer ingredients such as lemon and/or orange slices, cinnamon sticks, cloves, cardamom, and nutmeg.

Instead of buying new decorations, reuse ornaments from your family attic or a thrift store. Make ornaments from homemade clay, scraps of fabric, old holiday cards, and nontoxic paints and glue. Children will enjoy making the ornaments and also snow globes in watertight recycled jars. Instructions can be found online. Several snow globes displayed together make an attractive winter wonderland.

Americans generate a lot of garbage during the holidays. Entertaining is a big reason. Plastic cutlery will last

in a landfill for thousands of holidays to come, and paper plates aren't earth-friendly if they're coated in petroleum-based wax.

What to do? Buy **biodegradable cutlery and plates**. Better yet:

Use cloth instead of paper napkins. Reusing is always better than recycling, and napkins won't take any more energy, soap, or water to wash because you can throw them in with your regular laundry. If you use paper look for napkins made from recycled paper.

Use Ceramic or Glass Plates / Metal Flatware. Borrow or rent plates and silverware if necessary. If you use paper make sure it isn't petroleum wax coated.

Come party time, keep recycle containers in clear sight to make it easy for guests. Use microfiber cloths or tea towels instead of paper towels to clean up spills.

Send Green Greetings - Conserve Resources and Reduce Pollution

This is the time of year many will reach out to an extended network of family and friends to send best wishes and give a yearly update. After a few weeks, most of those greeting cards will be trashed. **Send electronic greetings** using an online service. Often, you can add photos or even video to the message.

Buy greetings **cards made from 100% recycled paper**. You can even find options that have seeds embedded in the fibers. Your recipients can plant the cards and the resulting flowers will remind them that you care.

What to Give

Gift giving is an essential part of the season, but minimize the store-bought items. Get crafty - make some presents. Try your hand at homemade candy, fudge, cookies, breads, jams, dry soup mixes, powdered drinks and other holiday treats.

Wrapping It All Up

Most mass-produced wrapping paper is not made from recycled paper, and if it has metal fibers or foil, it can't be recycled. If you buy wrapping paper, make sure it's recycled and recyclable. Better

yet, use old maps, newspaper comic pages, or pieces of fabric, towels or other linens that are can be re-used. Finish off gift-wrapping with a sprig of berries or leaves from Nature's bounty instead of ribbon. If every family in the United States wrapped just three presents this way, we'd save enough ribbon to tie a bow around the earth. What a great gift that would be! And when receiving a wrapped gift carefully unwrap to use the paper, ribbon and other decoration another day.

Where to shop

The easiest way to cut back on what you're throwing away is to reduce the amount of stuff you bring home. A good place to start is with product packaging. Packaging makes up 30 percent of America's trash — the largest portion of municipal solid waste generated. Package-free Christmas shopping (or anytime) may seem impossible, but there are ways to cut back on unnecessary packaging. Shop at stores where you can buy unpackaged goods, purchase used items from thrift stores, shop at the remaining seasonal arts & craft shows and area flea markets, even [craigslist](#).

Be a more caring and responsible citizen of the Earth by Going Green this Season.

For more information on how to Green your holidays check out these sites, among others:

WebMD.com
Conservancy

Mother Nature Network

The Nature

For more information on how to recycle in Gallup-McKinley County go to the McKinley Citizens' Recycling Council web site www.recyclegallup.org or call 722-5142.