

Skagit Valley Herald
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Making Green a Holiday Theme

Although it is cold outside, wintertime always has something special to offer. The season features mugs of hot cocoa around the fire, warm meals, love, and gratitude. This goes to say, with the help of our family and friends; we have enjoyed another year. Moreover, what better way to show your appreciation for life than to prepare for holiday events in earth friendly ways! Here are a few tips to get the snow falling:

To Market to Market

Planning a winter party? Grab your reusable shopping bag and head out with a mission to support local family farms by adding fresh, organic foods to your seasonal feast. Most stores now carry locally grown turkeys and hams. Read labels of origin and ask your grocer for details or visit www.localharvest.org to learn more about where you can buy sustainably grown food in Skagit County. As you continue to set up your holiday menus, read over appropriate serving sizes in your cookbooks and be sure all your guests RSVP so you know exactly how much food to cook in advance. By doing just these two things you can significantly reduce the amount of food that goes to waste, not to mention save money. Have leftovers? Compost them in your worm bin or if they're too good to toss send the extras home with your guests!

C'est Très Eco Chic!

Set your holiday table by using recycled glassware, reusable cloth napkins and beeswax candles. Recycled glassware can be purchased as a vintage set from a second hand store or artistically revived from the melting pot and sold in Green online catalogs. Cloth napkins reduce paper waste while adding textile flare to your silverware and the benefits of beeswax go beyond the scent of honey: it does not contain many of the toxic additives like *acrollyn*, a known carcinogenic commonly found in petroleum-based paraffin wax candles. Looking for a centerpiece? Rather than buying a fake plastic set of pilgrims from the local discount store, go outside and pick a sprig of holly berry or gather some colored leaves, a short walk and some imagination will undoubtedly add *la touche finale*.

Think Outside the Box

Most mass produced wrapping paper you find in stores is not recyclable and ends up in the landfill. What better way to get creative than to wrap your gifts in colored comics from leftover newspapers, old maps, this year has finished calendar or your children's artwork. If every family wrapped just three gifts this way, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields! Paper can also be saved from year to year if stored properly and kindly treated during the unwrapping process. If you do

decide to purchase wrapping, try to buy paper made from recycled content.

Pesticide Free Zone

Not only is the demand for organic food growing across the Skagit Valley, so is the demand for organically grown Christmas trees. Some growers use up to 40 different kinds of pesticides, as well as chemical colorants. Flocked trees or trees sprayed with fire retardant aren't only moderately toxic to you; they end up going in the landfill due to their chemical costuming. Not to worry, you can still hang your baubles unabashedly! A number of local tree farmers now sell pesticide free trees! Ask your local Christmas tree sellers for details.

Dazzling Ideas

Cut the cost of your traditional holiday lighting bill by outfitting your house and Christmas tree with energy-saving LED (light emitting diode) string lights. Not only do these lights give you more bang for your buck after a season or two, they reduce pollution from power plants, last longer than regular Christmas lights, stay cooler and don't contain mercury, unlike fluorescent bulbs. So as you add glitz to Rudolph on the front lawn, think of using LED's as stocking stuffers for friends and family. The technology in these eco friendly bulbs has taken a giant step forward in recent years and they now come in an array of different shapes and sizes. You can find a great selection by visiting one of three websites: www.amazon.com, www.homedepot.com or www.EnergyFederation.com and entering "LED Christmas lights" in the search box.

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