

## GreenUP: Dreaming of a Green Christmas

**What's the eco-footprint of Christmas?** With billions spent on Christmas gifts, air and car travel and 20.8 million Christmas trees cut in the U.S. alone, the impact of this one holiday is immense. Christmas should speak to you in the way it did as a child: full of magic, wonder and connection. Bake with your friends and kids, give to a local or global cause in the name of your loved ones, take a walk in the winter woods instead of watching TV ...you'll reduce your carbon footprint and expand your love of God's creation.



Here are a few ideas from the GreenUP ministry team to create a holiday with more joy and less "stuff":

### Decorations

- **Energy-efficient LED Lighting:**

If your strands of lights are older than 5 years, it will be more efficient to replace them with newer, LED bulbs. They can save you up to 90% or more on power costs and will last longer than traditional bulbs.

- **Use Timers:**

All your Christmas lights should be on timers, from the strands adorning your trees to the lights outside. Don't count on remembering to turn them off -- light timers are easy to use and can be found at any hardware store.

- **Christmas Tree Options**

A potted native evergreen tree is the greenest choice since it can be used for multiple years, before it's time for planting outdoors. Try to buy local. Real trees cut and transported from Canada have a big carbon footprint from transport impacts. If using an artificial tree, get one with LED lights.

### Gifts

- **Choose Natural, Handmade and Homemade:**

Whether made by yourself or a local artisan, handmade items will bring a simple, beautiful energy into your home and to others. Local and homemade food gifts are personal, easy on the environment, and not likely to go to waste. Your homemade chutney, vinaigrette, granola or spiced nuts are tasty, treasured gifts.

- **Combine Shopping Trips:**

Make your list and check it twice to reduce shopping trips by car. Find stores that sell the majority of items on that list and do as much of your shopping as you can in a compact area.

- **Ship With USPS Ground:**

When buying online, choose delivery by the postal service, who will already be in your area delivering mail. Or have gifts shipped to your work if deliveries are regularly made there by another shipping company. On line shopping saves miles on your car, but last minute shipping by air is not energy efficient.

- **Give a gift that helps someone go green**

Items such as energy-saving power strips, motion sensor lights, reusable stainless steel water bottles, and reusable cloth shopping bags are great sustainable gifts.

- **Activity Gifts**

Consider gifts that support your local community and generate minimal waste. This includes things like theater or performance tickets, or gift certificates to local shops and restaurants

- **Give 'battery-free' gifts or rechargeable batteries**

According to the EPA, about 40% of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Discarded batteries are an environmental hazard. If you must provide batteries for a gift, be sure to buy rechargeable ones.

Most hardware stores sell little wall plug-in units that will hold AAA, AA, C and D size batteries. Even rechargeable batteries find their way into the waste stream eventually.

- **Collectibles**  
Value and appeal don't always have to mean 'new and shiny'. Antiques and collectibles have time-earned intrinsic value as well as the added appeal of history and sentimental value. You might start by looking around your own home for useful collectibles for people on your gift list. A visit to a local flea market will also bring ideas. Many old tools, for example, are made of better materials than today's counterparts, and may need just a sharpening or a few touchups to make them gift-worthy.
- **Good Cause Gifts**  
Contributions to charitable or activist organizations in someone's name is a great gift, and it will be more meaningful if you write a note explaining why the particular organization and cause was selected for that person.
- **Wrapping**  
Try wrapping your presents in brown or recycled content paper, cloth reusable bags, recycled foil or newspaper, and use string or raffia (made from bark which regenerates) to tie it up.
- **Post-Holiday Recycling**  
**Tons** of clothes will be thrown away after Christmas. If you do get new clothes and shed the old ones, please donate your still wearable clothes to Thrifty Threads at UP. Recycle computers, cell phones and other electronics so the product can be reused, or recycled for the valuable materials.

### **Food, Glorious Food & Entertaining**

- **Serve less meat:**  
Chicken, pork, and, especially beef, take a heavier toll on the environment than veggies. Cows, in particular, produce copious amounts of methane, which is even worse for global warming than carbon dioxide. So instead of serving the turkey, the ham and the roast beef, consider replacing some of the meat on your menu with protein from beans or soy.
- **Natural Centerpiece:**  
Create your centerpiece from natural elements, such as pine wreaths and cones, and colorful twigs and berries you gather outdoors.
- **Cleaner Candles:**  
Paraffin candles are made from petroleum residue and are no good for your health or for the environment. Candles made from soy, beeswax or natural vegetable-based wax are more eco-friendly because they biodegrade and are smoke-free.
- **Skip Disposable Plates, Cups and Utensils:**  
Pool resources from several houses for large gatherings. Put on the carols and sing while you do the dishes together.
- **Avoid Single Use Beverages:**  
Make homemade eggnog, hot chocolate or iced tea in large quantities and prepare pitchers of ice water to reduce waste from water and soda in single serve bottles or cans.
- **Defrost your freezer before Christmas:**  
It will work more efficiently and create more space to store leftover food, so that it doesn't go to waste.

During the season of celebrating Jesus whose life modeled simplicity and sharing, let's show extra care for God's Creation. Sustainability takes just a bit of extra imagination and planning. **You can give more while spending less, and have fun bringing those you love along for the ride. Merry Christmas!**