

A Cleaner, Greener Holiday

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It's that time of the year when we celebrate and enjoy time with family and friends. Holiday traditions vary from family to family. Maybe your family exchanges gifts or has special recipes or meals you only make during the holidays. Perhaps you decorate your home, visit loved ones, and share other special experiences together. Whatever traditions you use to celebrate the holiday season, here are a few tips that can help you save energy and reduce waste while still having a fun and festive time.

If you wrap gifts:

- Many wrapping papers with shiny or foil designs cannot be easily recycled. Look for wrapping papers that can be recycled or are made from recycled paper.
- Wrap gifts in the comics section of the newspaper, old maps, or blank newsprint decorated with festive stamps or drawings. All of these options are easily recycled.
- Wrap gifts in bandanas, scarves, decorative dish towels, or bright pieces of fabric that can be part of the gift or reused for other gifting opportunities.
- Wrap and decorate gifts using ribbons made of satin, grosgrain, taffeta and other materials besides plastic and acetate. These can be reused for wrapping or be used later in craft and sewing projects.

If you decorate your home:

- Consider changing to LED lights if you use lights to decorate. LED lights produce very little heat and use about 90% less energy than conventional lights. That adds up to big savings on your electricity bill.
- If you use trees, wreaths, or other plants to decorate, try to find ones that are grown with few to no pesticides. This is healthier for the environment and for the people in your home.
- If you put up a tree, look for a living tree that you can plant outside after the holidays are over. Your tree can provide beauty and memories for years to come while serving as a home to birds, squirrels, and other wildlife.
- If you need to dispose of your tree or wreath after the holiday season, consider turning it into wood chips or mulch and using it in your flower beds. Visit the website of the National Christmas Tree Association to learn how your tree can be used as a bird feeder or recycled to help wildlife.
- Look for recyclable, natural alternatives to decorations like tinsel and acetate garlands that are difficult to recycle and often end up in landfills. Try live plants, garlands of popcorn, dried

orange slices, and evergreen branches, homemade paper garlands, or handmade paper snowflakes or other decorations.

If you share food with family and friends:

-Consider using homemade treats as stocking stuffers and gifts. Not only are these items minimally packaged, they can help create treasured memories of time spent together.

-Support our hometown businesses by sourcing ingredients locally. This reduces the distance your food travels to get to your table, which saves gas and is better for the environment.

If you want to reduce plastic/cardboard waste from packaging:

-Consider handmade items like ornaments, framed photos of loved ones or pets, and other crafts.

-Try giving a reusable water bottle or a set of reusable shopping bags if someone is trying to find small, easy ways to live greener.

-Give an experience. This requires little to no packaging and offers memories to last a lifetime! Consider memberships to your local zoo, aquarium, or museum; tickets to concerts, plays, and sporting events; lessons for cooking, music, or dance; or a yearly pass to visit our national parks.

-Donate in a loved one's name to a cause or charity they support.

-If you have an animal lover in your life, adopting one of our animal residents at Lee Richardson Zoo for a year might be the perfect gift. Check out the Lee Richardson Zoo website for details or visit our Safari Shoppe on your hunt for the perfect holiday gift. Proceeds support improvements at the zoo as well as conservation efforts for wildlife.

The holiday season is all about traditions shared with friends and family. We here at the Lee Richardson Zoo hope that one of these energy and waste saving tips will become a new family tradition. Sometimes it only takes one small change to make a big difference in the world around us. If everyone did one thing to make their holiday season a little greener, the world we live in would be a little cleaner and healthier for everyone. What a wonderful gift to give our loved ones!