
Opinion

SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD: A short guide to a joyful, green holiday season

By Jen Roszell

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'Tis the season of Amazon boxes stacked on porches, and mailboxes stuffed with catalogs inviting us to buy the latest shiny new things. Yet, more stuff doesn't always equal greater happiness, and a cluttered home can be a significant source of stress. And eventually, many of those shiny new things will end up in the landfill, polluting our environment and adding to our town's disposal burden.

There are so many ways to spread holiday cheer without buying lots of extra stuff. The key is to reduce what you bring into your home and lessen the burden of unneeded gifts on your family and friends. With a little advance planning, you can have a joyful holiday season, save some money, and lighten your footprint on the earth — all at the same time.

An experience is always at the top of my list of gifts to give and receive. Gift cards to the movies, live theater, music venues or a local restaurant are a great choice, and a trip to the skating rink, trampoline park or bowling alley can be perfect for the kids. My active family members love the gift of a round of golf or ski lift tickets. Maybe you know someone who would appreciate a yearly membership to a museum or some cooking, sailing, gardening, yoga or art classes.

If you decide that you'd rather give something tangible, ask what they want or need before you buy. The consumables route can also be a crowd pleaser: gourmet food and wine, bath and body products, seeds for the garden, and beeswax or soy candles are easy-to-find gifts that will be used up and won't create a lot of clutter. Also, consider a living plant or herbs in lieu of cut flowers for a host/hostess gift.

It's almost always more sustainable to shop local and buy from small businesses, crafters and artisans than buying online. According to eMarketer, holiday online sales in the U.S. soared from \$80 billion in 2015 to \$123 billion in 2018, with all of these packages needing to be delivered. Since transportation has become the No. 1 source of carbon emissions in the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), shopping local prevents these emissions along with all the packaging that comes with online shopping.

You can also help reduce carbon emissions by visiting consignment, antique and thrift stores for one-of-a-kind gifts and deep discounts on holiday decorations. When buying new, look for items packaged in paper, cardboard or glass, and avoid plastic packaging. If you do shop online, search for ethical and sustainable brands that source materials for their products responsibly. Also, buying quality over quantity keeps more stuff out of the landfill.

Everybody loves a pretty package, but did you know that most store-bought wrapping paper is made with dyes, shiny coatings and glitter that usually make it impossible to recycle? Instead, you can reuse gift bags or wrap your gifts with plain packing paper, newsprint or paper shopping bags. Cover logos on bags with old greeting cards and embellish them with small evergreen branches or colorful tape. Use twine, yarn or scrap fabric ribbon instead of plastic bows and ribbons. You can even try wrapping your gift in a scarf or cloth tea towel.

The best holiday decorations can be the ones you already own or are free. I love decorations passed down from family members. Bring the outdoors inside and decorate with natural materials instead of synthetic. Evergreen boughs, pine cones, holly berries, cinnamon sticks and fresh mistletoe are inexpensive or free, healthier for the air in your home, and can be composted. Also consider the ambiance in your home when celebrating the holidays. Special music, diffusing essential oils for a relaxing scent, and baking holiday treats add to holiday cheer without costing much or cluttering your home.

The holidays can feel overwhelming — and trying to practice sustainability during this busy time of the year can often feel like adding one more thing to a long list. But by following these simple tips, you can save more than a few dollars and feel good about helping our earth this holiday season. May yours be joyful and green.

Jen Roszell is an artist and nature lover on a journey to live a more simple, eco-friendly life in Marblehead with her husband and two children. Read more on her blog at <http://ecosimplelife.com>.

Upcoming Sustainable Marblehead events

Marblehead Christmas Walk: Cheer us on as we march in the parade on the morning of Dec. 7.

Speaker Series: Join us as Barbara Erickson and Tom O'Shea of the Trustees of Reservations speak about "Protecting Our Vulnerable Coastline" from 7-8:30 p.m. Jan. 23, at the Old Town House. To purchase a ticket, visit <http://sustainablemarblehead.org>.