

Tips for making the season bright—and eco-friendly

It's the most wonderful time of year, with not only visions of sugarplums dancing in your head, but also last-minute shopping lists, decorating ideas and holiday meal preparation. If you believe it's hard to integrate the environmental green with your holiday green, think again. Experts at askHRgreen.org have put together a sleigh-full of no-fuss, fun tips for making the season bright—and eco-friendly!

"It's easy to celebrate the holidays while being environmentally aware," said Julia B. Hillegass, public information and community affairs administrator for the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, which oversees askHRgreen.org. "Every little bit you do, from shopping with reusable bags to recycling your Christmas tree, contributes to a healthy Hampton Roads community."

Shopping and Gifting

- Keep reusable shopping bags in your car. You never know when you'll have to dash away for more eggnog, flour or that last minute gift.
- Get creative and make your own wrapping paper using fabric, maps, your child's artwork or reused tissue paper. Use twine to secure fresh sprigs of holly and pinecones for a festive natural look.
- As a gift alternative, consider making a donation in honor of a loved one.
- If you give electronic gifts, include rechargeable batteries. If you receive electronic gifts, make sure to properly recycle your old electronics.
- Shop at your local farmer's market for fresh, seasonal produce and flavors.

For Parties

- Send e-cards and e-vites rather than paper cards.
- Place a recycling bin next to your trash can where it will be easy for guests to find.
- Choose reusable plates, cups and utensils when entertaining. If you have to use paper products, make sure these are made from recycled paper and plastic.

In the Kitchen

- Don't use the garbage disposal. It does chop up organic matter, but bits and pieces of food particles still pass through, which can clog up your drain.
- Don't put food particles directly down your sink either! Use a strainer in your sink drain to catch food scraps, then toss in the trash or compost.
- Remember, never put kitchen fats, oils or grease down the drain. Stay clog-free for the holidays!
- If you have gallons of fryer oil to dispose of, recycle it at your community's transfer or recycling center. We have a list of local fryer oil recycling locations.
- Be a greener cleaner by using a vinegar and water solution instead of harsh cleaning products.

The Tree and all the Trimmings

- Fill your house with the fresh scent that only a live tree can deliver.
- Decorate with fewer lights or put your lights on a timer. Replace older lights with energy efficient LED strands.
- After Christmas, reuse your naturally grown Christmas tree by taking the decorations off (including tinsel) and placing it in a quiet corner of your yard as a wildlife habitat area. Or, recycle it. Check back with www.askHRgreen.org for a list of pickup times and drop-off locations in each locality for naturally grown Christmas trees.
- If you're thinking of getting rid of your artificial Christmas tree, but it's still in good shape, donate it to a good cause.

You'll find a wealth of more green tips to implement any time of year at askHRgreen.org!