

Put Low- and Zero-waste Gifts at the Top of Your Holiday Wish List

Give wisely with items and experiences to enhance hearth, home and community

(Hampton Roads, Va., Nov. 16, 2023) – ‘Tis the season for giving, and what could be better for friends, family and the Earth than to give gifts that enhance rather than deplete the planet? Low- and zero-waste gifts that conserve resources and reduce waste are top of mind for the people who power the askHRgreen.org public awareness and education campaign.



There are good reasons behind that. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, household waste increases by more than 25% between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day.

“Being a conscientious consumer during the holidays could be the single greatest gift you give to the environment,” said Rebekah Eastep, an askHRgreen.org team leader. “Think about giving thoughtfully by choosing presents that will give back to hearth, home and community, or that will make living a green lifestyle more attainable.”

For the kitchen and home

Put kitchen waste to work with a counter-top compost bin for stashing fruit and vegetable peels, eggshells, coffee and tea grounds, old spices, dryer lint, stale bread and shredded paper. When it is full, empty it into a designated compost area in the yard. For small spaces, look for compact, single-chamber compost tumblers available through home improvement and garden stores.

The options for other useful kitchen gifts are wide open, from beeswax bowl covers and wraps to reusable straws, water bottles and cutlery sets (for enjoying waste-free meals on the go). For baking enthusiasts, homemade goodies packed in reusable food containers make this delicious gift twice as nice. And for practicality, consider chemical-free cleaning products and energy-efficient wool dryer balls for the laundry.

Gift your community

Many wonderful ways exist to bring joy to your neighborhood through community-sharing projects, such as building Little Neighborhood Libraries; organizing Little Free Pantries with shelf-stable food for neighbors in need; and starting a community garden to benefit everyone.

While you are at it, do not let the neighborhood go to the dogs. askHRgreen.org offers free pet waste stations through a regional grant program. If your Hampton Roads neighborhood/HOA/community association is ready to make scooping the poop a priority, apply online for a free pet waste station, [click here](#).

Be a thrifty shopper

With the variety of well-stocked thrift, consignment and reuse stores in Hampton Roads, shoppers will find excellent bargains on everything from clothing, furniture and home décor, to building materials and art supplies. There is no need to resort to fast-fashion for a gift or overspend your holiday budget.

“From an environmental aspect, it’s great that people are choosing to consign or donate their gently used items—and that people are buying them,” Eastep said. “This is far greater than having them end up in the landfill, and it saves on the resources required to generate new products.”

In addition, many thrift stores are operated by and benefit local nonprofit organizations, including CHKD, Hope House Foundation, Goodwill, The Salvation Army, For Kids, and Habitat for Humanity. Knowing one of these groups will benefit from a purchase makes this the gift that keeps on giving.

Experiential giving

The gift of an “experience” also aims to please, such as tickets to a live performance, cinema, museum, restaurant, spa treatment or local attraction. It can be practical, too.

“One of the best gift ideas I’ve seen lately is handmade coupons for a skills exchange,” said Eastep. “Recipients can cash them in for home repairs, babysitting, organizing a closet, yard work or a coffee date.”

Make this the year to gift teens and young adult family members with a cherished heirloom or keepsake: jewelry, timepieces, a vintage camera, a musical instrument and family recipes—or any special item they can enjoy now. Seeing their expression will bring joy to you, too.

Wrapped with care for the environment

When presenting treasures like these, forego traditional wrapping paper and bows and use what you have on hand. Fabric, maps, thrifted baskets, your child’s artwork and gently used

scarves are fun, unexpected alternatives. If you do find yourself with used gift wrap at the end of the season, keep this “naughty or nice” guide handy to see which materials are recyclable, or not.

Naughty – the following holiday items are not recyclable:

- Greeting cards with glitter or metallic accents
- Gift wrap and gift bags made of foil or plastic
- Ribbons and bows
- Plastic product packaging
- Tissue paper

Nice – these items can be recycled:

- Paper greeting cards and envelopes
- Paper gift bags
- Non-coated plain wrapping paper (without glitter or foil)
- Gift boxes
- Cardboard shipping boxes

Here’s hoping your holidays are green and bright! For more seasonal tips and info, visit askHRgreen.org.

About askHRgreen.org askHRgreen.org is your go-to resource for all things green in Hampton Roads – from recycling tips and pointers for keeping local waterways clean to water-saving ideas and simple steps to make local living easy on the environment. Launched in 2011, the region-wide public awareness and education campaign is administered through the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and powered by the following members: The cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton, Surry and York; the town of Smithfield; and HRSD. Like askHRgreen.org on [Facebook](#), follow on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), tune in to [YouTube](#) and catch the “Let’s Talk Green” [blog](#), written by a team of local experts.

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