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EcoConsumer **Trim your waste**

By Tom Watson
Special to the Seattle Times

You'd think the holidays would be the worst time to be an EcoConsumer. All the waste! The consumption!

But it's actually the best time. No other season provides so many opportunities to make an environmental difference. And today, due to both the Internet and increasing eco-awareness, you'll find a growing array of choices for "green" holiday gift-giving and celebrating.

Holiday waste does reach staggering proportions: Americans produce 5 million extra tons of trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, according to Bob Lilienfeld, a solid-waste expert and co-author of "Use Less Stuff." And think of all the toxic material used and disposed of over the holidays, in batteries, electronics and other items.

What's an EcoConsumer to do? Follow these tips for less waste over the holidays:

- **Help yourself** while you help the planet. You don't need to do things that are just better for the environment. Make changes that are also fun and save you money or time. For example, you can send at least some of your cards electronically (for free holiday e-cards, see www.hallmark.com, or for arts-oriented friends go to "new e-cards" on www.moma.org). Get a discount on "experience" gifts instead of stuff (www.wastefreeholidays.com). Instead of everyone in your extended family getting something for everyone else, ask them if they would like to switch to a "draw a name" system.

- **Think simple.** In November, an empty cardboard box was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame, which described it as "endlessly adaptable by children for creative play." I loved that — it showed they really understand kids and toys. Most of the hot new battery-powered toys and gizmos will quickly fade away, but simple, natural gifts never go out of style.

- **Many years ago** I was on an Indian reservation around the holidays, and watched a woman make a clove orange. She stuck several dozen cloves in a navel orange, and then ran a colorful ribbon through it so you could hang it up. It smelled great. Now they are one of my favorite gifts to make and give.



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- **For general affirmation** of a less wasteful holiday, look for the book "Hundred Dollar Holiday," by Bill McKibben. Or check out www.buynothingChristmas.org, a project started by a Canadian Mennonite group. Next year, plan to attend one of the local alternative holiday gift fairs in November, held in Kirkland, Woodinville and other communities.

- **Make the first move.** Suggest to a close friend (who you know will understand) that you forgo gifts this year, or make donations instead (see www.justgive.org). Need a gift for a gardener? Buy a bucket of composted "zoo doo" from the Woodland Park Zoo store (206-548-1535). For a gift that fits everyone, give the Chinook Book, a local eco-coupon book (www.chinookbook.net/choose_edition.asp).

- **If you want new decorations** but already have eight boxes worth, trade some with a friend, or hit the thrift store. For the big holiday dinner, avoid huge amounts of leftovers by going to www.cce.cornell.edu/schuyler, a Web site that allows you to plan the portion of food you'll need to feed each person at the table.

You could get a living Christmas tree. Or buy gifts made from recycled, reused or organic materials. And don't forget to clean your chimney, so Santa doesn't ruin his outfit. It would be a waste to have to replace that fancy suit.

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Watch for more EcoConsumer resources from King County at www.KCecoconsumer.com

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