

Columnists

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EcoConsumer

Unwrap your imagination to make Christmas really green

If you give numerous gifts and do lots of decorating and entertaining for Christmas or other winter holidays, it's still early enough to decide this year will be different. You can maintain the same level of holiday celebration, but instead of buying everything new you can make some gifts and decorations yourself.

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

The annual holiday train has started to roll. We can jump on board, or get run over, or simply refuse to ride.

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But there's another option: We can change tracks. If you give numerous gifts and do lots of decorating and entertaining for Christmas or other winter holidays, it's still early enough to decide this year will be different.

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You can maintain the same level of holiday celebration, but instead of buying everything new you can make some gifts and decorations yourself.

Making stuff certainly has pitfalls, but if you're realistic about it you can potentially save time and money, add a personal touch and reduce the environmental impact from the holidays.

Q: I'm not the artsy-and-crafty type. How could I possibly make holiday gifts?

A: Expand your concept of making a gift. It can include repurposing, repackaging, repairing or restoring. Use your talents such as writing or drawing. Create decorative or edible items from plants growing in your yard. Unbridle your imagination. Small and simple are OK, too.

For inspiration or practical how-to advice, the Internet is your best friend, offering multiple tips and videos for nearly every project imaginable.

Q: How exactly would this fit into my gift-giving routine in real life?

A: If you normally spend \$50 or more per person on several family members and friends, for example, you could make something small and personal for them and combine that with an easy-to-buy, low-impact gift, such as an online-charitable donation or a gift card for their favorite restaurant.

Get started on making gifts by the end of November to avoid the dreaded mid-December holiday

freak out.

Q: How about some examples?

A: Consider these homemade holiday gift and decoration ideas:

- Make your gifts from reused materials whenever possible. You could turn colorful salvaged kitchen tiles into coasters or trivets or have your kids paint old light-switch cover plates. The RE Store, a local nonprofit used-building materials store, shares these ideas and others here: seati.ms/sCxeeJ.
- Decorate a small pot with paint or decoupage, and put a houseplant in it.
- Find picture frames at thrift stores, decorate them (or not) and add a special photo.
- Write something meaningful about your family for your parents or children, embellishing it with photos, ticket stubs and other memorabilia.
- Many of us have plants in our yard such as a rosemary bush or holly tree that make great trimmings for gifts or decorations. Whack away!
- If you celebrate Hanukkah, make a menorah from salvaged or natural materials as a fun family project. That symbolic nine-branched candleholder lends itself to creative interpretations.
- Give homemade or homegrown food, a practical present that many on your list would surely appreciate. Or creatively repackage ingredients for soup or cookies, with a favorite recipe attached.

Q: How can I make sure this doesn't turn into the project from hell?

A: Remember that making something for the first time will nearly always take much longer than you expected. It may require several tries, but once you produce a suitable gift you can then make versions of it for other people, improving it and getting faster each time.

Don't try to persuade friends and family members (or even yourself) to make gifts if they really aren't into it. Also carefully consider whether the recipient will actually want and use what you make.

When we do embrace gift-making and other alternative ways to celebrate, we seldom turn back. The winter holidays, especially Christmas, have become so consumption-oriented that many of us yearn for relief.

Saying that the holidays are about more than just buying and receiving stuff seems obvious, but to make that a reality we need to make concrete changes in our own circles of giving.

Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services. Reach him at tom.watson@kingcounty.gov, 206-296-4481 or www.KCecoconsumer.com