

Homes & Real Estate

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EcoConsumer | Shop your home for holiday ideas

By using household waste, leftover materials and trimmings from plants in your yard, you can create your own holiday decorations, gift wrap and even gifts.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

These days, holiday shopping at home often consists of tapping your smartphone or tablet computer to make a purchase. But there's another way that is nearly as convenient, more eco-friendly, less expensive and more fun.

Shop your home instead.

By using household waste, leftover materials and trimmings from plants in your yard, you can create your own holiday decorations, gift wrap and even gifts.

Thanks to free resources available on the Internet and changing sensibilities, shopping your home this isn't just a quirky, oddball thing anymore. Also known as mining your home, the practice has become a legit "green" and money-saving holiday strategy.

Make a rough mental inventory of your available materials. Whether you have a bucketful of corks, a pile of scrap wood or a huge holly tree full of berries, you can plan your projects around those resources. "Use what you've got" are words to live by.

For any creative holiday project, start with an Internet search for examples and tutorials. Videos, blogs and Pinterest.com provide fertile sources of inspiration.

Put your own stamp on borrowed ideas. Experiment and make a prototype if possible, especially if you plan to give the item as a gift.

When foraging in your yard for holiday trimmings, don't limit yourself to tried-and-true trees and shrubs such as cedar, pine and holly. Bare branches from Northwest native plants such as red-twig and yellow-twig dogwood provide a dramatic effect. Trimmings from the big rosemary bushes that flourish around here make fantastic aromatic decorations.

Always ask before you trim branches from neighbors' plants, and don't use plants on public property. Never remove all the berry-bearing branches from a plant, since birds rely on those. Trim carefully to maintain the shape and health of the plant.

If you buy a professionally-made wreath, save the frame and use it to make your own wreath next year.

Broken Christmas-tree ornaments can be rejuvenated using other materials. For example, take an old, scratched music CD and break it into small pieces. Glue those shiny fragments all over a cracked globe ornament, and voilà, you have a cool little disco-ball ornament.

Gather all of your new and used gift bags, wrapping paper and ribbons in one place. Make them available to everyone in the household. You may already be set for the season.

Unleash your imagination and use practically anything you have on hand to wrap and pack gifts, recommends local green-gift-wrapping expert and blogger Charissa Pomrehn. She once transformed a plastic bottle from her recycling bin into a decorated shipping package for a child's small gift.

With Christmas rapidly approaching, make sure any homemade gift projects that you start now are quick and simple. Here's one that small kids could help with: Make a stylish eyeglasses case for a parent or grandparent by gluing your nicest fabric scrap over a couple of cardboard toilet-paper rolls. You don't have to tell people what it's made from.

For more elaborate homemade gifts, or to make lots of gifts, it's best to start early. Make a note on your 2014 calendar to start working on them in September.

Make sure you have the right adhesive for the job, whether it's craft glue, wood glue or another type. Test the durability of your finished items, since you don't want your homemade gifts to fall apart.

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