

Homes & Real Estate

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Unique ideas for giving green holiday gifts

You don't need to keep recycling the same green gift ideas. This year, let's shake it up a little and get quirky, cool and distinctive with our holiday gifts.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

Ecoconsumer

Seattle-area residents are so eco-aware that some might even suffer from "green gift-giving fatigue."

You may love to receive green holiday gifts, and you may have several people on your list who love them, too. But your sister already has four reusable water bottles, and last year, you gave your best friend a waste-reducing "experience gift" of tickets to a great play. (Two tickets actually, so she could take you.)

You don't need to keep recycling the same green gift ideas. This year, let's shake it up a little and get quirky, cool and distinctive with our holiday gifts.

Gifts for a cause

Buying regionally-made products boosts local economies and helps the environment by reducing transportation impacts. Do it whenever you can.

However, we can also help individuals and the planet with some of our purchases of products made outside the U.S., especially those from developing countries. The best way to do this is by buying "fair trade" products.

These can include home décor, kitchen items, clothing, jewelry, personal-care products, food and beverages. Look for the "Fair Trade Certified" label or other official indications that items were ethically produced.

Principles of the fair-trade movement include "fair labor conditions, trade relationships that eliminate unnecessary middlemen, community development and environmental sustainability," according to the Puget Sound-area co-op chain PCC Natural Markets.

PCC and other local co-ops offer numerous fair-trade products, primarily food and beverage items. Whole Foods Market has also increased its fair-trade offerings in recent years. Many retailers carry at least a few fair-trade products.

Local stores that are devoted entirely to fair-trade and ethically-sourced products include:

- Fair Trade Winds, which moved in August from Wallingford Center to Ballard and is part of a

small national chain. fairtradewinds.net/seattle

- Ten Thousand Villages, on Roosevelt Way Northeast near Northeast 65th Street, which is connected to a national nonprofit retail organization. tenthousandvillages.com/seattle
- Ethical Choices, an independent store in downtown Everett emphasizing “no child labor or slave labor” products, along with fair trade. facebook.com/ethicalchoicesllc

The fair trade movement has gained urgency lately, since many poverty-stricken parts of the world are severely threatened by climate change. Several West African nations have also been hit hard by the Ebola epidemic. Helping reduce poverty where it’s most dire can make a gift truly special.

Rethink green

Here are a few other ways to expand your green gift-giving horizons beyond the ordinary.

Find a new charity. Nearly any gift that doesn’t involve giving “stuff” can be considered green. And, like fair-trade gifts, charity donation gifts have additional social benefits. You can make this concept new and fresh with your charity selection. For an animal lover, for example, you could make a donation in his or her name to a nonprofit animal-welfare organization, such as Pasado’s Safe Haven (pasadosafehaven.org) in Sultan.

Give recycled. Did you know that some Seattle Seahawks jerseys — unquestionably a popular local gift item — are made from recycled plastic bottles? They may not even advertise it, but check the inner white tag on Nike jerseys to see if it states “100 percent recycled polyester.” Certain folks on your list might love the recycled-ness almost as much as they love the Hawks.

Get creative. There’s nothing wrong with standard green gifts, including stylish tote bags and reusable travel cups. But you can make them stand out with special features such as distinctive artwork. Unusual versions of classic reusable items can be found at nearly any department store, supermarket or coffee shop these days. For a wider selection, visit stores specializing in green products, such as NuBe Green (nubegreen.com) on Capitol Hill in Seattle or Recology CleanScapes (cleanscapes.com/store) at Gilman Village in Issaquah.

Christmas, Hanukkah and the other winter holidays certainly shouldn’t be all about the gifts. But at its best, creative green gift giving adds a little warmth and buzz to our holiday cheer.

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