

Remember the 4 R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repair

As the Christmas season approaches we often find ourselves caught up in the hustle and bustle of activities. It is important to be thoughtful about energy saving purchases. I have made most of these suggestions before but feel that they may be worth repeating.

Plan to purchase a living Christmas tree with roots attached. Later you can plant it in your yard or donate it to your local parks department. If it's a cut tree, recycle it. Shred the live tree and use the mulch in the garden around evergreen shrubs and trees.

If purchasing new holiday lights, consider seasonal light emitting diode, or LED, strings of lights. These can use up to 95 percent less energy than conventional bulbs, and they last seven times longer and this can lower power consumption. Timers and photo cells will also help reduce power usage by turning the lights on at dusk and turning them off at a desired time. Avoid leaving lights on all night. More strings of lights means more energy used - try reducing the number this season. Tinsel can be used to amplify lighting.

Be financially responsible: Overspending during the holidays will not only increase your stress now, but will leave you feeling anxious for months afterward as you struggle to pay the bills. Step back from the excessive gift-giving and practice simplicity, creativity and basic human kindness

Going green is the way to go when planning gifts. - When you give someone a "green gift" it means you went the extra distance for someone and for everyone - It means you have taken the time to consider the environment. It also means you have given a gift that shows something about you and you have created a ripple effect whose final result is too significant to calculate.

1. Make a gift from scratch. A personal effort to create something is always appreciated. Be conscious of the materials you choose and create something to show someone you care. Picture frames and mirrors are perennial favorites and people tend to keep them.

2. Buy a gift that adds a lasting element to someone's life. A houseplant or a live organic herb garden can be wonderful gifts, which live on and bring joy (and oxygen) into someone's home. Buy a calendar printed on 100% recycled paper with daily affirmations and uplifting quotes. These will remain with the person for a year at least, and can make a difference every day.

3. Buy a stress-reducing present for someone. Get your best friend a gift certificate for a one-hour massage, facial or acupuncture treatment. How about a free week of yoga classes, Pilates or personal training sessions? You will be doing more for the recipient of these gifts than initially meets the eye.

4. Give to a charity. Instead of giving something directly, consider giving to a

charity on behalf of a friend or family member. Many charities now allow you to track the progress being made as the result of your contribution. By doing this you are setting up a powerful connection for someone that can go way beyond a simple donation.

5. Buy something educational and entertaining. *A book, CD or DVD can make a fantastic present especially when the content is uplifting.*

*Does the holiday have you feeling depressed? **Help others** not because you should, but because it is the best antidote to seasonal sadness. Find someone who is struggling more than you are, lend them a helping hand, and remember the real meaning of the holidays. **Jesus is the reason for the season!***

Don't forget, "together we can make a difference!"

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