

SUSTAINABLE HOLIDAYS 101

The ISK Climate Change & Health Series is taking a break this month. In the meantime, enjoy this guide to sustainable holidays and gift giving, which can be used for this year's last minute holiday needs, referenced on other holidays or gift-giving occasions throughout the year, or saved for next holiday season!

Wishing you a restful, fruitful holiday season with love aplenty. ❄️



Some of our holiday habits can take a toll on the environment. Whether you're celebrating Christmas, Ashura, Hanukkah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, the Solstice, or others, we can work together to make our holidays more sustainable.

TURN OFF THE LIGHTS

More and more, researchers are finding that natural light cycles are crucial in dictating behavior (and survival) of life on earth. Everything from coral reefs to bats and birds to moths and plant species rely on the darkness of night to hunt for food safely, reproduce, and even navigate using the moon and stars. The length of days and transitions from day to night are essential cues for many species to begin reproductive cycles, begin their migration, or send forth their flowers. Human beings also need darkness and natural light cycles for optimal health and mental health. You can help protect the darkness—and those who rely upon it—this holiday season by turning your outdoor lights off and switching off or covering (i.e. with curtains) your indoor lights before going to bed. Saving electric energy can also help reduce emissions (and save money!).

USE RECYCLED GIFT WRAP

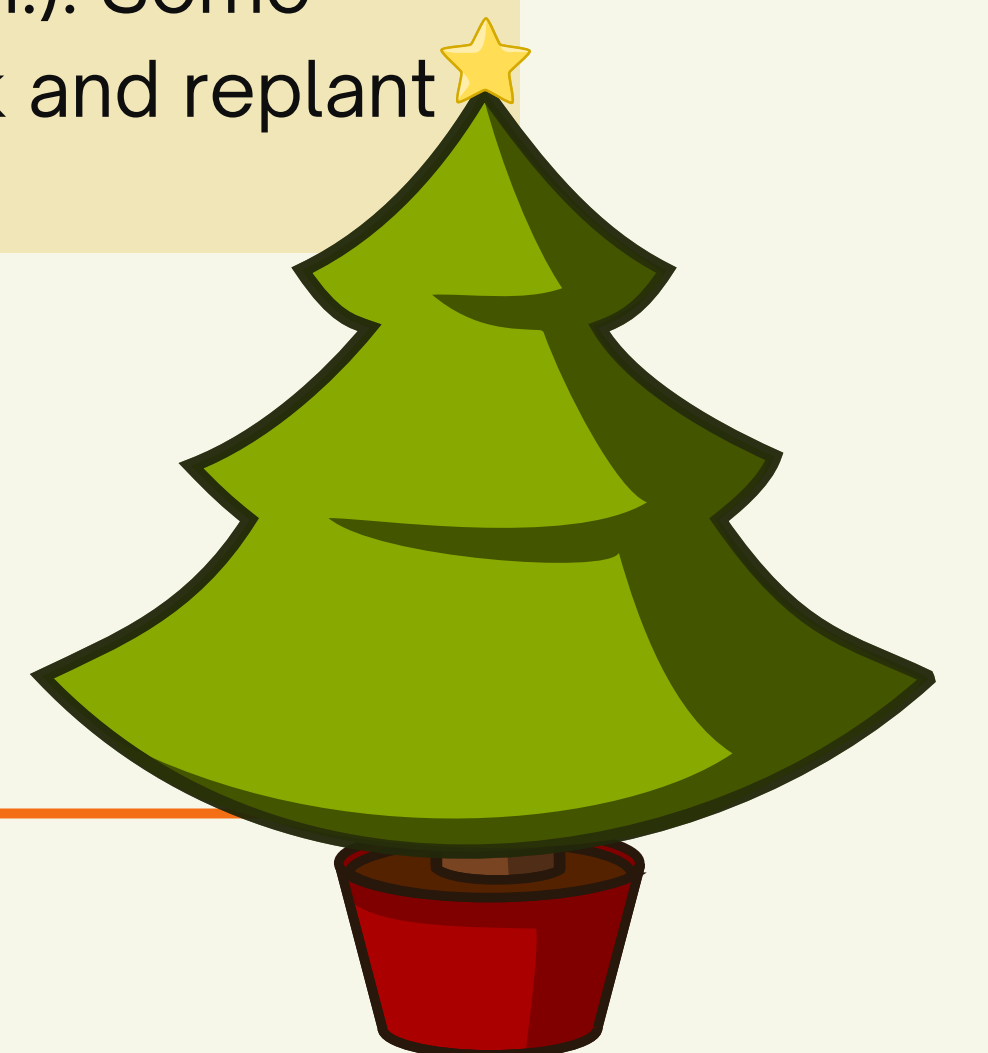
Rather than buying new, buy gift wrap made from 100% recycled paper. Better yet, cut up your brown paper grocery bags and use them with twine instead of ribbon for a sustainable, biodegradable, rustic wrap! This year's gift wrap can also be reused next year to wrap small items or to make cards or gift labels!

DECORATIONS

Consider home-making your wreaths, garlands, or menorahs to reduce plastic purchases (and, eventually, plastic waste). Here is a quick guide to [DIY Christmas decor](#) and another that offers some [Christmas and Hanukkah DIYs](#), including menorahs and dreidels.

SUSTAINABLE TREES

If you celebrate Christmas and put up a real Christmas tree, try to purchase a locally-grown and potted tree—bonus points for a native species! By sourcing locally, you're supporting local tree-growing, which will ultimately benefit both your local environment and economy. Using a potted tree means you can plant it when the season has passed, either in your own yard or somewhere nearby (keep in mind, you'll need city or property owner permission to plant on land that's not your own!). Some sellers will even take trees back and replant them for you.



CONSIDER FOOD CAREFULLY

Food is a huge part of the holiday season, and how we approach food can make a huge difference in our holiday emissions. For example, many holiday meals center around meat, the production of which is a major contributor to climate change. The average person's food waste also tends to increase around the holidays, including of meat products, which also wastes the emissions it took to produce it. Here are some quick tips for being mindful about food around the holidays:



More veg, less meat

Choosing less meat can lower your holiday footprint!



Avoid waste

The [World Food Forum](#) shares some great tips for minimizing food waste during the holidays!

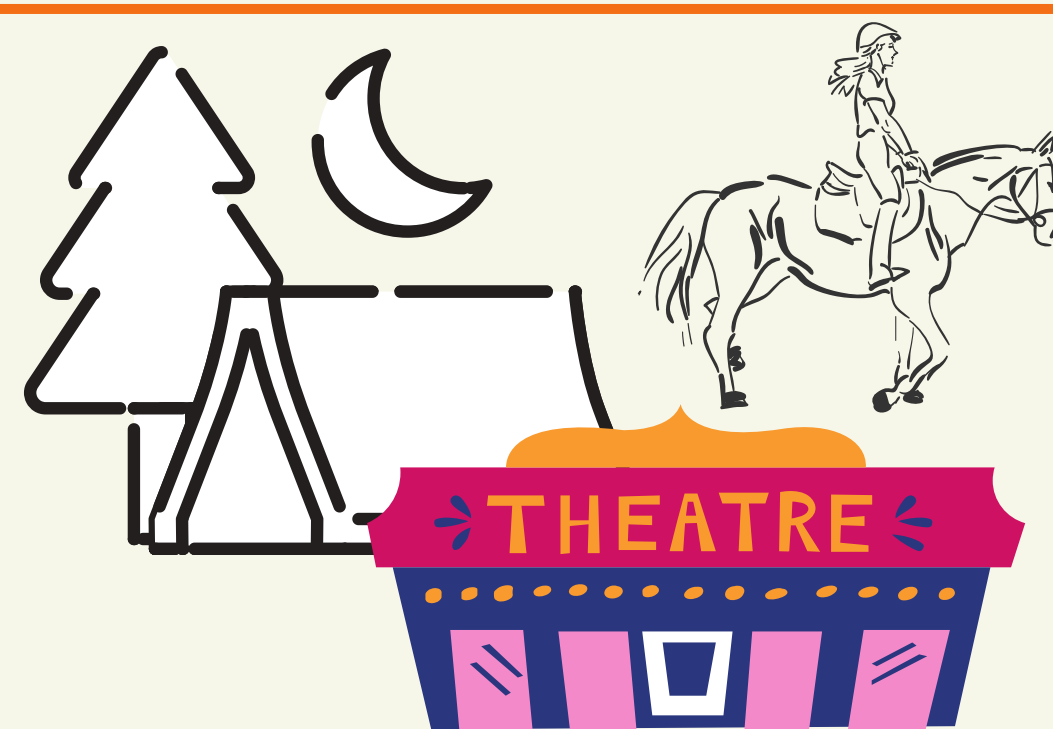


Source locally

Buy locally when possible to reduce food miles!

CONSIDER GIFTS CAREFULLY

While gift-giving is a wonderful tradition that encourages us to think of others, many of us have probably felt the unease that holiday over-consumption can cause. This over-consumption can also have detrimental environmental impacts. Shipping emissions, energy use, and waste, including from packaging, gift wrap, and toys or other items thrown away, all increase during the holiday season (waste increases by up to 30%!). Here are some ways to reduce your gift-giving footprint:



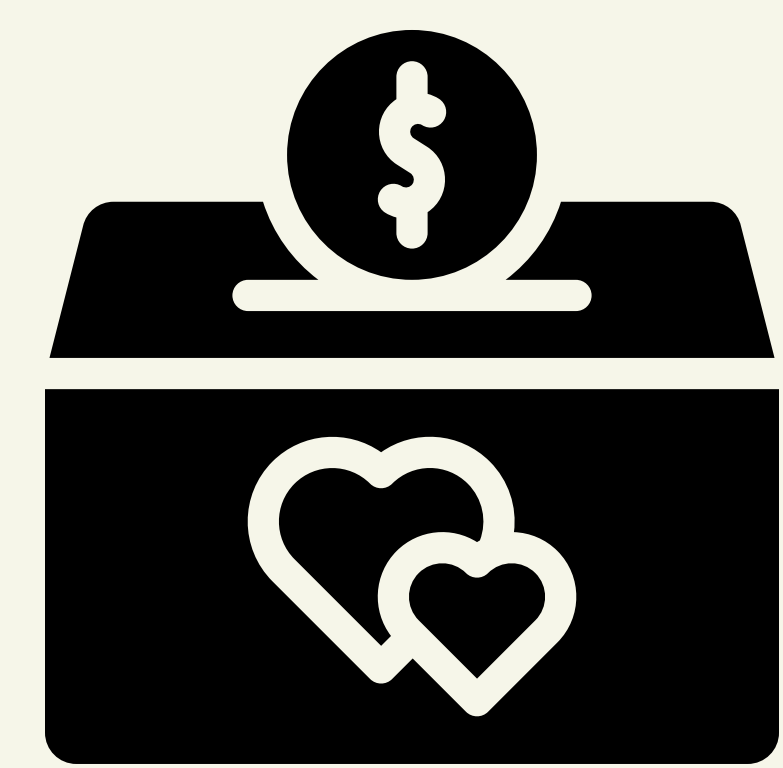
Gift experiences or homemade gifts

By gifting someone an experience or handmade gift, we can step out of the production-consumer-waste stream—and often give a more memorable gift!



Know what others will use

Support your loved ones' hobbies, interests, and needs. Knowing what others need or will definitely use can help avoid waste.



Donate instead

Try ditching gifts altogether! Pooling money with loved ones and donating to a good cause can be more affordable for you and the environment.