



GreenTip
How Do You Measure Up?



Deck the Halls with Green Holiday Decorations

As the holiday spirit moves you to brighten up your home and property with the season's finery, think about being more environmentally friendly in your decorating choices this year. There are many green alternatives to the traditional holiday trappings these days, so consider including some of these suggestions in your plans.

Lighting

Choices in energy-saving lighting for your tree and your house abound this year. Of course, the most environmentally friendly choice is solar powered lighting. Using small solar panels that store energy to power holiday lights is a very green alternative that takes your energy use completely off the grid. Solar outdoor lighting packages are available this season in many home improvement and hardware stores and are easy to install and operate. Check with your local retailer for information about cost, availability and options.

Probably the most highly touted ultra-low-energy option is LED lighting. LED (light-emitting diode) lights use up to 90% less electricity to operate and are safer because they do not generate the heat that traditional incandescent bulbs generate. LED lighting lasts longer than incandescent, so even with a larger initial investment, it can save you money in the long run.

If you have old strands of lights to get rid of, whether they're the new, high-tech LED type or the old-fashioned incandescents, please check out options for recycling instead of just throwing them away in the trash. Some hardware stores are beginning to offer holiday light recycling for their customers. However, there is also a mail-in program available nationwide. [Click here](#) for more information.

The Christmas Tree

The centerpiece of home holiday decorating is often a Christmas tree. There are many pros and cons regarding both natural trees and artificial ones. While artificial trees are reusable year after year, there are some definite down sides to consider. First, most new artificial trees are made from PVC – a plastic material that has been shown to emit small quantities of toxic chemicals into the air – and some also contain lead. Second, a very large percentage of artificial trees is made overseas, mainly in China. Transporting these trees to the US requires a tremendous amount of energy.

Natural trees can be purchased with roots balled for planting after the holidays. This alternative usually supports the local economy and introduces another oxygen-producing plant into the environment. Natural trees that are cut are also an eco-friendly choice, however. These days, most Christmas trees are grown on tree farms. Tree farms can exist in areas with poor soils that are not suitable for other agricultural production. They also provide a habitat for birds and wildlife, and produce oxygen while filtering the air.

Remember to dispose of your natural Christmas tree in an environmentally friendly way by recycling it. Burning results in air pollution and landfilling takes up valuable space that is needed for waste that is not recyclable. [Click here](#) for information about Christmas tree recycling in Guilford County.

Home and Table Decorations

Some of the prettiest holiday decorations make use of seasonal greens and flowers. Evergreen wreaths, candle rings and centerpieces are welcoming holiday traditions. These natural materials can be composted or turned into mulch when their beauty fades. Of course potted poinsettias and flowers can be kept throughout the year, and miniature evergreens can be transplanted outdoors. If you choose artificial flowers or greens, be sure they are made of renewable organic materials, such as cotton, silk, bamboo and other natural woods; avoid items made with petroleum-based fabrics or plastics. Make bows and ribbons from natural fabrics or raffia. These are a colorful and long lasting alternative to the metallic ribbons that are neither recyclable nor biodegradable.

Candles are often a big part of holiday décor. Be sure to choose non-toxic candles made from soy or natural beeswax. They burn at a lower temperature, making them safer. And they contain none of the petroleum-based chemicals, found in paraffin candles that emit that black smoke into the air and onto your draperies and furniture.

Also think about serving holiday treats with reusable tableware and flatware. Real glassware adds a festive sparkle to holiday parties. If you must have disposable cups, choose the paper variety that is biodegradable over plastic or Styrofoam alternatives that will last indefinitely in a landfill.

Reduce Reuse and Recycle

With a little planning and forethought, you can make this holiday season a lot greener in your household. Buy local produce and products when possible. Read the labels on items you're considering purchasing: look for recycled content, renewable and non-toxic materials and low-energy alternatives. You can make a difference by using less energy, reducing toxins and reducing waste by reusing and recycling.

