

Greening the Holidays

What does “greening” the holidays mean – Finding a saner, simpler, more sustainable way of celebration.

Greening from the Inside Out

Gift to Self – Be truly present during the holiday season. Take care of you so you can share more with others and stay mindful of what really matters.

- Give yourself time to breathe with the “ [Prayer](#)” (or see). To create your breath prayer: Sit quietly in a comfortable position and recall a situation that brings you comfort, peace, joy; Imagine a kind and loving voice calling you by name and asking you what you want; Answer with what you wish to experience to increase that sense of peace and joy, or to give you strength, or health or anything you need in order to experience ease of well-being (You may choose a focus for your wish – Creator, Teacher, Light, Spirit, God – or a quality – Loving-kindness, Deep compassion ...) Your wish and your focus for that wish gives you your mantra or prayer of 6 to 8 syllables – Examples: Loving-kindness, fill my heart; Master Teacher, show me the way; Let me know deep peace, O God. Then use your prayer often during the day.
- Give yourself the gift of relaxation and stress-relief with cardiologist Herbert Benson’s [Relaxation Response](#). To quiet the fight or flight response, you need: 1) A quiet environment; 2) An object to dwell upon – word, sound, visual symbol, or breath (Dr. Benson suggests ‘one’); 3) A passive attitude – allow thoughts, imagery, feelings which arise to pass on without clinging; and 4) A comfortable position.
- Give yourself the gift of Gratitude (for the gifts you already have received) - Write down 5 each evening, and you’ll tend to spend the day looking for them ... instead of concentrating on the day’s difficulties. (From [Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy](#) by Sara Ban Breathnach)
- Receive piece of mind by setting a realistic budget of time, energy, and money that is clear and stick to what you can and can not do. See [the Holidays](#) at [for a New American Dream](#).
- Check out Jane Treschel’s book, [Morning Cup of Yoga](#) and CD, [Just Relax](#).

Greening Our Giving and Receiving – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Greeting Cards – According to [Green, Live Rich](#), by David Bach, almost 300,000 trees are harvested annually to produce holiday cards sold in the U.S. Americans purchase and send enough holiday cards to fill a 10-story football field. There are a couple of options to help reduce the environmental impact of holiday cards:

- Send e-cards – , [Greetings](#), and [Mountain](#) have websites where you can send free e-cards.
- Order cards from [for Causes](#) or [Cause Greetings](#) for recycled paper cards with a portion of proceeds going to the charity of your choice.
- Reuse your cards – especially for family events like birthdays and anniversaries – by writing the date and re-giving it each year. It becomes a family heirloom and a memory-keeper.

Gift Ideas – According to [.com](#), if 10,000 people have to return one less gift to a nearby store, we’ll avert the CO₂ caused by driving from NYC to North Pole, AK, and back again six times.

- Instead of buying one gift per person, each person within a family or group of friends can draw one name and concentrate on giving a thoughtful gift – quality rather than quantity.
- To prevent gift returns, exchange holiday wish lists. Doing so will prevent us from buying and receiving more stuff we will never use. Besides, spending time with family and friends is much more fun than standing in line to return gifts after the holidays. There are free gift registry services such as [.com](#) and [.com’s](#) wish list.
- Check out [American Dream’s Alternative Gift Registry](#), which emphasizes eco-friendly gift-giving.

Gift of Giving:

- Reduce consumption, eliminate gift wrap, and support work to better Alabama’s environment by giving gifts in honor of friends and family to local non-profits:
 - [Environmental Council](#)
 - [Rivers Alliance](#)
 - [Wildlife Federation](#) ([Wildlife Federation](#))
 - [Birmingham Audubon Society](#)
 - [Warrior Riverkeeper](#)
 - [River Society](#)
 - [Foundation of Greater Birmingham](#) – Parknership: [Mountain](#), [Reservation](#), and [Mountain Nature Center](#)
 - [Alabama](#) (and DVDs as gifts)
 - [Air Family](#)
 - [Land Trust](#)
 - [Resource Center for Alabama](#)

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- [International](#)
- [Nature Conservancy](#)
- [Environmental Center](#)

- [Club](#)
- [Wildlife Fund](#) - Adopt an animal

These are just a few of the many non-profits, and the same idea can be applied to any philanthropic organization, not just environmental groups. To find out more information about local non-profits, contact the [-Profit Resource Center of Alabama](#). By giving honoraria, your gift is multiplied beyond the individual(s) to whom you give.

Give memories: – In his book, Make Today Count: The Secret of Your Success Is Determined by Your Daily Agenda, John C. Maxwell recounts the exercise of asking people to write down all of the holiday gifts they received each year growing up. As you might guess, not many are able to do so. Then he asks people to write down all of the family vacations or getaways they experienced. This list is much easier for people to generate, because shared memories last a lifetime. Therefore, give the gift of spending time with loved ones and nature.

- State and National Park Passes - One of the best and easiest ways to remind your loved ones to get outdoors and enjoy nature is to buy them a park pass for state and national parks. The \$626 million birding industry in Alabama is a good example of ecotourism, and there are numerous birding trails throughout the state. Exceptional water, land and wildlife riches are found in every region of the state. Alabama has 22 state parks. You can purchase a state park gift card at [.alapark.com](#). Also, [Air Family](#) offers outdoor adventures for families; however a gift donation honoring your friends or family is always welcome. Alabama also has incredible canoe trails throughout the state, including the [Canoe Trail](#) on the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and the [Canoe Trail](#) in the Blackbelt. You can make a contribution to the [River Society](#) to reserve a spot on a guided canoe trip on the Cahaba River.
- Buy a membership to one of Birmingham's many attractions such as the [Zoo](#), [Botanical Gardens](#), [Museum of Art](#), the [Science Center](#), [Park](#), and [Mountain Nature Center](#).
- [Expeditions](#) – The World Leader in Nature Travel is based in Helena, and offers a wide-array of nature travel opportunities.
- Pitch in for summer camp tuition so children can gain an appreciation for Mother Nature first hand.

Wrapping Paper - According to [Green, Live Rich](#), by David Bach, Americans spend \$2.7 billion dollars annually on gift wrap – more than the GDP of some countries in Africa and Asia – on GIFT WRAP!

- Use gift wrap made from recycled paper or better yet use items from around your home such as the funny pages, pages from old magazines, old maps, excess fabric (for those who sew or from old cloths that are un-wearable – Wearable clothing can be donated to [Foundry](#), [Sister's Closet](#), [Ranch/Hannah Home](#), or [Army](#).)
- Cut the pictures from your holiday cards and re-use them as gift tags.
- Re-purpose orphaned earrings or a broken necklace by tying them on to a gift you've wrapped in an inside-out grocery bag.

Consumable Gifts:

- Baked goods – For those who like to cook, homemade baked goods are always an eco-friendly option. Remember, try to purchase from local farmers' markets and wrap the goods in recyclable aluminum foil rather than petroleum-based plastic wrap. Better yet, give baked goods in re-usable containers.
- Homemade Bath Salts – Re-use large beverage bottles (think blue Arizona Iced tea or Tazo bottles) to package bath salts. A simple recipe from [.com](#) calls for: 1 part Epsom salt, two parts sea/rock salt (Morton Kosher is the easiest to find), a few drops essential/fragrance oil, and if you choose, a few drops of food coloring. Stir it all up in a glass bowl (fragrance can stick to some plastics), pop it into your recycled bottle, add a ribbon and a tag suggesting using 2 tsp. to 1/2 cup in bath water for a muscle-soothing soak. This is a thoughtful, yet easy and inexpensive way to gift co-workers and family friends.
- Shop at local stores that feature green gifts – such as [Rain](#) in Homewood, downtown, [Foods](#) or [Market](#).
- For children, check out [Toys](#) for battery-free, eco-friendly, paint-free, kid-powered toys. These toys are available at [Express](#) in Cahaba Heights, [Kids](#) in Crestline, and [Toy and Hobby](#).
- Pre-Order Beth Maynor Young's book, [: A Journey on Alabama Rivers](#) and receive now, [the Presence of Light: A Portfolio of Southern Rivers](#).
- Subscription to [Geographic's Green Guide Magazine](#), [Magazine](#), [Good Magazine](#), [On Earth Magazine](#), or [Stewart Living's Body and Soul Magazine](#). Each of which has an online subscription option.
- Give the gift of plants – Local nurseries and flower shops can help you choose native plants that can be given and planted for a long-lasting gift. Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are gasses such as benzene and formaldehyde which are released by some fabrics, building materials, fuels and chemicals. A mixture of plant species — including the Spathiphyllum (Peace Lily), Howea forsteriana (Kentia Palm), Dracaena marginata (Marginata) and Dracaena deremensis

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- (Janet Craig), and *Epipremnum aureum* (Devil's Ivy) have [shown to remove VOCs](#) and cut down on illness and absenteeism in office workers.
- For coffee lovers, buy locally roasted and organic and fair trade certified, [Ground Coffee](#). Higher Ground comes in flavors that support Alabama non-profit organizations such as [Literacy Council](#), [River Society](#), [Rivers Alliance](#), [Warrior Riverkeeper](#), and [Land Trust](#).
 - Support a local independent book store and purchase a book about sustainability (Don't forget to skip the gift wrap and simply add a ribbon and personal inscription instead.):
 - [Go Green, Live Rich](#) by David Bach
 - [Healthy Child Healthy World: Creating a Cleaner, Greener, Safer Home](#), by Christopher Gavigan
 - [In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto](#) by Michael Pollan
 - [Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder](#) by Richard Louv
 - [The Lorax](#) by Dr. Seuss and [The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest](#) by Lynne Cherry
 - [Beatrice's Goat](#) by Page McBrier and [Give a Goat](#) by Jan West Schrock
 - [The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals](#) by Michael Pollan
 - [World Changing: A User's Guide to the 21st Century](#) by Alex Stephen (Also check out [WorldChanging.com](#))
 - According to [IdealBite.com](#), Americans throw away 165,000 tons of non-rechargeable batteries annually. Despite best efforts to avoid battery operated gifts, holidays usually demand batteries for one thing or another. Instead of the single-use variety, opt for re-chargeable batteries to save money and improve health and the environment.
 - Check out the [Resources Defense Council's Great Green Gift Giving](#) web site.

Greening Our Celebrations

Holiday Decorations:

- Opt for LED Lights - LED is short for Light-Emitting Diode and these lights produce more light with less energy (and pose less of a fire risk than incandescent bulbs which put off as much as 90% of their energy as heat. According to [IdealBite.com](#), LED bulbs use 90% less electricity than traditional holiday bulbs, and with their 20-year lifetimes, you don't have to replace LED light-strings as often as conventional ones. Did you know that burning 10 strands of lights with 100 lights per strand, eight hours per day for a month costs up to \$175 for incandescent bulbs vs. about \$1 for LED mini-bulbs.
- Buy a live tree – some local nurseries carry live Christmas trees that can be replanted after the holidays.
- Recycle your Christmas tree – Ask your public works department about recycling and look for announcements regarding local partnerships for tree recycling.

- Holiday Meals** – According to [IdealBite.com](#), if 10,000 households spend their Thanksgiving meal dollars on local food, we'll invest about \$381,000 into our own communities. Most conventional foods travel an average of 1,500 mi before ending up on your plate. Buying in your own backyard saves a lot of energy. An Iowa State University study found that people who switched to buying 10% of their produce from local sources produced 5-17 times less CO₂ overall than if they'd bought nonlocal. Sociologists estimate that people who skip the supermarket in favor of farmers markets have about 10 times the number of conversations while shopping...that's 10 more chances to spread holiday cheer and connect with your community.
- Try serving food (condiments and spices excluded) produced within a 100-mi radius of your house – This will foster your creative spirit, and help save the planet while you prepare your meal. Plus, fresh food tastes much better than food that has travelled long distances.
 - Finding locally grown food is becoming easier as the slow food and eating local movements become more prevalent. One great source for locally grown foods is the Finley Avenue Farmers' Market, which is located at 344 Finley Avenue. Also, go to [.localharvest.org](#) for a complete listing of local food sources such as farmers' markets, co-ops, community supported agriculture (CSAs).
 - Cook only what you need – give leftovers to (which may also have other ways you can help), or [City Harvest](#), which rescues food, will pick up food oversupplied by caterers for special events, especially if you let them know ahead that you may have leftovers.