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Keep Waco Beautiful

## Going Green for the Holidays

The household waste of the average American family increases more than 25% during the months of November and December every year. Any guesses why? That's right, 'tis the season for giving, and gifts look best in shiny wrapping paper. All of this extra holiday waste, including decorations and shopping bags, adds about 1 million extra tons per week to landfills. What a downer. A lot of the eco-friendly advice out there suggests some big changes that would help out, but they're not exactly fun and practical. Let's be honest: no Texan, unless they're already vegetarian, is likely to give up holiday hams and turkeys to cut down meat consumption. Don't let this get you down, though. We have a pretty big population here in the States, so small changes really will add up. If every American family reused just two feet of ribbon, it would total up to 38,000 miles of ribbon. Considering that the circumference of our world is only about 25,000 miles, we could put a pretty nice bow on planet earth. Even just following a few of the tips in this article will cut down your carbon footprint, and who knows? You could start some pretty cool new holiday traditions with your family.

### **Decorations:**

#### Baker's Clay Ornaments

If you want beautiful ornaments but don't want to shell out a few dollars for plastic that will most likely end up in a landfill, baker's clay ornaments are an easy way to liven up your tree on your own. These are a great project for kids, and they are a little more durable than the standard Popsicle stick homemade ornaments. Just remember that they're not edible, because they will look and smell good enough to eat.

#### *Ingredients:*

4 cups all-purpose flour  
1 cup salt  
1 ½ cups water  
Dash of cinnamon

#### *Directions:*

Preheat the oven to 250°.  
Mix the ingredients and knead the dough until it is smooth.  
Roll the dough out flat on wax paper.  
Use your favorite cookie cutters to make shapes from the dough. If you are hanging your ornaments, cut a hole at the top with a drinking straw.  
Bake the shapes on a cookie sheet for 20-25 minutes, and then let them cool until they have hardened completely.

Use craft paint to decorate your ornaments, and then string your ribbon through the opening. Enjoy your fun new ornaments!

### Go Natural

Sometimes the best decorations can be found on a walk through your backyard. Pine cones and acorns can easily be turned into ornaments with a piece of ribbon and a little hot glue. Small, sturdy twigs could even be fashioned into a Star of David ornament with a glue or twine. If you're feeling crafty, try incorporating them in a homemade wreath or centerpiece, too. Little things like this can look professional and heartfelt and cost you next to nothing.

Another great natural decoration is a living Christmas tree. About 30 million live trees end up in landfills after the holidays each year, but many people are just not willing to give up this time-honored tradition. Don't worry; you don't have to, either. A living tree is a tree that sits in a pot rather than a tree base, and is returned outside after the holidays. Many people choose to plant it in their yard and add a new one each year, but you can also nurture it in the pot and reuse it as your Christmas tree for a few more years. Nurseries in some areas even offer a service where they pick your tree up in January, and then return the same healthy tree to you the next December.

### The Odds and Ends Drawer



Homemade decorations can be a triple blessing: they save you money, they're usually environmentally-friendly, and they can occupy the time of your adventurous children. When the kids are feeling crafty, sometimes the best supplies are just what you have sitting around the house. Old Popsicle sticks can become snowmen, wreaths, or a Star of David, leftover candy canes could be a sled or a reindeer, and tiny handprints with a little leftover non-toxic paint can be anything from a turkey to an angel.

This clothespin wreath is one of the many cute crafts on [holiday-kids-crafts.com](http://holiday-kids-crafts.com), so be sure to check them out for more fun ideas to use around your home.

### Gifts and Shopping:

The origins of the holidays celebrated have very little, if anything, to do with gift-giving, but we definitely associate big, elaborately-wrapped presents with the season today. The best gifts are sincere

and useful, but that doesn't mean they have to be expensive and materialistic. Learning the difference is a great way to make your holidays a little greener.

### Edible Gifts

It's not a secret: Americans like food. Maybe now more than ever, because of predominantly busy lifestyles and a lack of free time, we also appreciate home-cooked meals. Giving baked goods as gifts may seem like a lazy way out, but think about it: Would you rather receive a cute, reusable container filled with your favorite desserts, or another re-gifted lotion set that may or may not smell funny and make your skin itch? Baking for your friends and family is much cheaper than traditional shopping, and it also uses fewer non-recyclable resources. It also helps to know that your taste testers will appreciate the time and effort that went into a gift that is so practical and personal.

### The Gift of Experience

Everyone strives to give gifts that the receiver will actually use, but that doesn't necessarily mean something they will physically pick up every day. Many people are beginning to lean toward giving and receiving experiences as gifts. This could mean concert tickets, guitar lessons, a year of gymnastics classes for the grandkids, or anything in general that your loved ones have on their bucket list that they haven't gotten to on their own. Even if something like this might only be used once, the memories or skills will be cherished and appreciated for years to come.

### Save Yourself the Trip

Americans could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one million tons each year if every family used just one fewer gallon of gasoline during the holidays. This equals about twenty miles, so for many people this could mean cutting out just one trip to the mall. Your family could do this by making a shopping list before your trips or by shopping online. Shopping online also saves shopping bags, and you can usually find some pretty sweet deals if you hunt around.

Following these tips shouldn't change up your holiday routine too much, but even using just a few of them will cut down your family's holiday waste. The holidays should be about appreciating your family and friends, not the imminent environmental doom caused by your trendy Christmas tree, so go green for the holidays and check one small thing off of your miles-long to-do list.

The cool tips and fun facts in this article came from [recycleworks.org](http://recycleworks.org), [holiday-kids-crafts.com](http://holiday-kids-crafts.com), and Yahoo.com contributor Danielle Crofford Fetters, so be sure to check out their advice year-round to make your life a little greener.

