



Sustainable Holiday Guide

During the holiday season, **household waste in the U.S surges by 25% or more, resulting in 1 million tons of trash flooding landfills weekly from Thanksgiving to New Year's.** This seasonal spike in waste is largely due to **additional packaging, wrapping paper, bows and ribbons, and wasted food.**

Reducing waste during the holiday season is an opportunity to save money, resources, and invest in high-quality materials that can be used for years. What if reuse and recycling are part of your holiday traditions?

This guide will show you how to live a sustainable, environmentally friendly, and fun holiday season!

Food

In the U.S, up to 40% of food is thrown out, wasting the water and energy used to grow and transport that food. You can significantly reduce your household's food waste by planning your meals, buying the right quantity, and storing produce properly to keep it fresh!

- **Use online meal planning calculators to determine how much food** to buy for guests and holiday gatherings.
- **Prepare meals with local ingredients,** making use of what's in season in Colorado can reduce the transportation impact of your food.



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- **Buy ingredients in bulk** when possible. Don't forget to bring refillable produce bags with you to the grocery store.
- **Set the table with reusable plates, glasses, utensils and cloth napkins.** Borrow dish sets and glassware from friends or go thrift store shopping for a special holiday set!
- **Get creative with leftovers.**
 - **Food scraps:** Compost! Learn more about our local compost haulers [here](#).
 - **Extra Food:** Give to hungry neighbors through the [Hungree App](#). You can list anything from a whole box of food, a plate of leftovers, or a single apple! Anything helps our community fight food waste and food insecurity.
 - **Uncooked or dry food:** Donate to our [local food pantry at Growing Home](#).

Recycling

Recycle Your Candle Wax

More than 1 billion pounds of wax are used each year to produce candles sold in the U.S.. Approximately 35% of candle sales occur during the holiday season!

- Candle wax and used candles from your decor can be recycled at our SustainAbility [hard-to-recycle center](#).
 - **RULES:** They accept all types of wax. It must be loose (like birthday candles) or in a metal container (like tea lights). NO GLASS.
 - **TIP:** To recycle wax from glass containers, place your candle in the freezer for a couple of hours so you can easily chip out the frozen wax. Reuse the glass container and recycle the wax to be made into new candles!



Recycle your Bottles

Glass can be endlessly recycled without loss in quality or purity, and **bottles or jars, can go from recycling bin to store shelf in as little as 30 days.**

- Recycle your glass wine bottles in single stream recycling, which is offered by your trash hauler and free for residents at our [SustainAbility Recycling Center](#). The Center even accepts cork from wine bottles as hard-to-recycle items. Cork is included in the \$4 bundle of a carload of specific items, [list here](#).



Gift Giving

Holiday gifts create around 5 million tons of extra trash in the US each season. This waste is a result of overspending on gifts that are not valued by the recipient, excessive packaging, and high return rates for online purchases.

- **Buy gifts from thrift stores, [local Westminster businesses](#), or artisans.**
- **Gift “memories” instead of “stuff”.** Gift experiences like tickets to a museum, a art classes, or dinner at a local restaurant. Your loved ones may enjoy a donation to a nonprofit in their name! Something edible like a dessert or snack packaged in a reusable jar also makes a great gift! Finally, consider gifting products that will help reduce waste, such as reusable water bottles, mugs, straws, and to-go containers.
- **Share your skills.** Bake sweet treats, knit a hat, or make art.
- **Wrap gifts in reusable materials, like newspaper, fabric and gift bags. Avoid shiny, glittery and metallic papers; these are not recyclable.** If you are shipping gifts, replace foam or bubble wrap with balled-up, recyclable paper.
- **Repurpose** old holiday cards and calendars for gift tags and cards.
- **Send cards that are recyclable and contain recycled content.** Plain paper cards are recyclable, and cards made with recycled content support recycling systems! Avoid cards printed on photo paper and cards embossed with foil, glitter, plastic, or ribbons—they cannot be recycled.



ZERO WASTE GIFT WRAPPING

Traditional wrapping paper is difficult to recycle—it is more clay and ash than it is paper fiber, so please avoid it when possible. Use these “Best” and “Good” choices that are still festive yet far more sustainable.

Best

REUSE THESE MATERIALS YEAR AFTER YEAR AND SAVE RESOURCES AND MONEY!



Fabric



Reusable bags and boxes
(also recyclable; remove handles and non-paper materials before recycling)



Drawstring pouches and pillowcases

Good

RECYCLE THESE ITEMS IF THEY CANNOT BE REUSED. RECYCLING SAVES RESOURCES TOO!

Kraft wrapping paper and newsprint-based wrapping paper
(plain wrapping paper with no foil or glitter)



Recyclable papers
(for example: newspaper, magazine pages, posters, calendar pages, maps, blueprints, sheet music, etc.)

Avoid

TRASH THESE ITEMS IF THEY CANNOT BE REUSED. PLEASE AVOID WHEN POSSIBLE.

Wrapping paper
(non-kraft paper)



Mylar wrap



Ribbons, bows, and gift tissue paper



Gift bags containing foil, Mylar, or glitter
(keep for reuse; throw away when ripped)

Decorations

500 tons of Christmas lights and millions of pounds of plastic ornaments end up in landfills each year.

- **Decorate the table with natural items** such as foraged greenery, gourds and squash, bowls full of apples, or other seasonal fruits and veggies.
- **Use energy-efficient LED holiday lights** to decorate your tree and home. Remember to **unplug lights** when not in use to save energy.



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- **Trade decorations** with friends and family, make your own, or buy used décor at thrift stores and consignment shops.
- When possible, **purchase quality decorations items that are made to last.** With durable decorations, there's no need to buy new items each year, saving you money!
- Dispose of holiday decorations the right way:
 - Westminster residents can **recycle Christmas trees free of charge** by dropping them off in the lower parking lot of City Park Fitness Center at 10475 Sheridan Boulevard. [Find drop off dates here.](#) The City turns the trees into mulch for our parks and public spaces. Please remove ornaments, decorations, tree stands, and plastic bags before disposal. Dumping of any other materials is prohibited.
 - **Bring broken holiday lights** to the [SustainAbility Recycling Center.](#)
 - If you can't **reuse** them, **recycle paper shopping bags**, cardboard boxes, and other papers in your curbside bin.



If you have questions or additional creative sustainable holiday traditions, or want to share your successes stories, please reach out to the Sustainability Office at sustainability@westminsterco.gov.

Happy Holidays!

