

# PPI's tips for reducing waste during the holidays

The holiday season is here – it's a time for making memories, hot cocoa, and, unfortunately, a massive amount of trash. According to the U.S. EPA, 25% more trash is thrown away between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day than any other time of year. This amounts to 25 million tons of extra garbage during the holidays.

Holidays and celebrations can be just as memorable without all the trash. K-State's Pollution Prevention Institute has some tips to help you keep the season's cheer while also reducing your waste. Remember the following as you gather and celebrate throughout the year:

## When giving gifts:

- Send eCards instead of physical cards. Or, if able, call friends and family on the phone—it is always great to hear a loved one's voice.
- Give gifts of experience. Movie, concert or sports tickets are great ideas. You could also give trips to national parks and museums; memberships and subscriptions; or even IOUs for chores and tasks around the house.
- Rethink gift packaging. Rather than wrapping your gifts, hide them and turn the gift giving experience into a treasure hunt. Including packaging as part of a gift is also an excellent option—just use a reusable bag, a new dish towel or a T-shirt as wrapping. If you want to use traditional wrapping paper, choose one made from recycled materials. Even making the switch from single-use wrapping paper to reusable tissue paper and gift bags can reduce waste in a big way.
- When shopping for gifts, bring along reusable bags instead of using plastic bags provided by retailers.
- Make sure to reuse packaging and shipping materials or recycle them correctly.

## When planning holiday meals:

- Plan how much food you need in advance and buy only what you need. If you buy too much, donate any extra food.
- Keep track of leftovers. Put what needs to be eaten soonest in a designated spot in the fridge where it can be easily seen. If you can't eat all leftovers before they spoil, freeze them to eat later.
- If any food does go bad, don't put it in the trash – compost the waste instead.
- Use reusable plates and utensils instead of disposable dinnerware.
- Opt for fabric napkins and dish cloths instead of paper products. They can be easily tossed into the washer after the festivities.
- When choosing a caterer for company parties or other events, choose one that donates leftover food to local missions or food banks. Better yet, provide an accurate head count to the caterer to prevent excess food, then refrigerate or freeze any leftovers.

## When decorating your home:

- Save energy by only using LED holiday lights connected to a timer that turns them off during daylight hours.
- Reuse last year's holiday decorations rather than buying new or try to upcycle any unwanted household items into new holiday décor.
- Properly dispose of your holiday tree – you can compost live trees at community recycling centers and donate artificial trees to local thrift stores or churches.

Most importantly, always follow the three R's – reduce, reuse and recycle. Reduce waste by bringing home less stuff. Reuse what you can, such as bags and bows. For everything else? Recycle right. For additional tips, see [EPA's Tips for the Holidays](#). If you are looking for Kansas-specific resources, call PPI at 800-578-8898.

