



Let's make sustainability our holiday gift

BY DELORES SAVAS

“Sustainability is the key to our survival on this planet and will also determine success on all levels”
*Shari Arison,
 American-Israeli businesswomen
 and philanthropist*

Sustainability is one major action that we all must strive to perform, especially during the holiday season. But what does sustainability mean?

There are many renditions of the meaning of this word. However, two of the most important definitions fit the coming holiday season. Number one is, avoiding the depletion of natural resources to maintain a global ecological balance.

Number two is, shopping in a way that has less negative impact on the environment – being mindful of the way you buy items made of good material that can last longer.

The holiday season “is the most wonderful time of the year, full of decorating, giving, feasting and good cheer,” but it occurs at a high cost, not only to our bank accounts but also to our environment by depleting our natural resources and filling our landfills.

Between Thanksgiving and New Years Day, Americans increase their solid waste by an estimated 50 percent or more, according to the Environmental Protection Agency and TakeCareofTexas.org. Statistics from Stanford University show that if every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the 38,000 miles of ribbon saved could tie a ribbon around the entire planet. If every American family wrapped just three presents in reused materials, it could save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields 10 stories high. If we each sent one card less, we would save 50,000 cubic yards of paper.

And now that the holiday is in full swing with the beginning of November, stores have already emptied their aisles of Halloween items and started the frenzied activity of the Christmas season: shopping.

As usual, the Thanksgiving Day celebration has been placed on the back burner to make room for the hordes of Christmas items, although some stores do have a pit-



tance of Thanksgiving Day cards available. And sorry to say, Christmas is one of the most wasteful holidays of the year, as trash-cans full of holiday food waste, ribbons and bows, packaging, shopping bags and wrapping paper contribute an additional one million tons of trash to our landfills in one week's time.

Below are ways that can help you shop while reducing trash, toxics and waste. In other words, shopping for sustainability;

- Avoid single plastic items that cannot be recycled, and look for things like organic certified food and clothing.
- Find alternatives to wrapping paper. It is the biggest source of waste during Christmas. Kraft paper is fun to work with, and it can be recycled. Save up brown paper bags and packing materials, plus reuseable gift bags or boxes. And instead of using plastic tape, you can use washable tape – a biodegradable alternative that comes in all sorts of fun colors and patterns. Avoid buying glossy foil or metallic wrapping.

• Most Christmas cards and their envelopes can be recycled, because they are paper-based. Collect the cards you received and bring them to the nearest recycling center. Make sure the cards you buy are made from substantial material and can be recycled. Make your own homemade cards out of eco-friendly material.

- Shop locally to support stores in your area. Buy smart, think green, look for locally made gifts, and avoid traveling to save fuel and keep emissions down.
- Avoid disposable dinnerware, including disposable tablecloths and paper napkins.
- Give gifts such as homemade cookies, pies, jellies and jams. Consider subscriptions to such magazines as Smithsonian, National Geographic or Readers Digest, which can be enjoyed year around rather than tossed away.
- Use LED lights for your decorations to conserve energy, cut down on costs and reduce greenhouse emissions.
- When purchasing string lights, look for a tag that says they're ROHS-compliant.

That means they will contain the least amount of heavy metals which can become toxic over time.

- Donate money for a tree to be planted in someone's name. Our National Forests have such plans to save and grow trees that are necessary for the ecosystem.
- When purchasing a live tree, look for an organic or potted one to avoid toxic fertilizers and pesticides.
- Make sure any artificial trees are well dusted, and vacuum around them regularly so their PVC materials do not shed dust. Try to keep your tree for more than one use if you can, to avoid waste.
- Avoid children's toys that promote violence. There is too much violence in the world already, and the new wave of video games for children is disturbing. Remember that the theme for Christmas is “Peace on Earth.” There are many toys and games that are fun and nurture children's creativity and sense of active, safe play.

And lastly, there has been a great turn-about by some retail stores for this Thanksgiving Day celebration. So far, Walmart and Target have announced that they will forgo the midnight sales that have upset the timetables for special family dinners and get-togethers. They are giving all their employees the day off for Thanksgiving Day. A first! Hopefully Christmas Day will be added to this special gift to their employees. Could this be considered a sustainable present? I think so. Kudos to these companies for getting back to the basics of the true meaning of our holidays.

Please consider making this a ‘Sustainable Holiday,’ and shop wisely.

SOURCES

The Holidays – The Most Wonderful (& Wasteful) Time of the Year
 Making the holidays greener-and cheaper-by reducing trash, toxins and waste - wbur.ora.here and now/2022/

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