

Hoping for Snow for the Holidays

Dreaming of a white Christmas? While the international community begins the long and difficult process of negotiating a global response to climate change, we can all do our part here and now. Let's help to keep Christmas white for future generations by "greening" our holidays!

Getting a tree this weekend? Don't feel guilty – actually, cutting your own tree from a local tree-farm is fairly "green." At least that tree has been storing carbon for the last number of years, and will be replaced in the field by another after it is cut. Just be sure that the tree is recycled into mulch after you're done.

LED Christmas lights let you celebrate the holidays using up to 90% less energy than the traditional strings. These bulbs are now available in various shapes, sizes and colors. A typical LED string uses only 5 watts. Turn off the outdoor porch lights while you have the holiday LED lights on for maximum efficiency. Still using traditional holiday lights? Consider turning off other lights to compensate, or limit the hours that the holiday lights are on. Consider a new tradition of adding lights gradually in the weeks leading up to Christmas, to add to the anticipation of a full display on Christmas Eve or the last weekend of Advent.

If you're like many of my friends and neighbors, you completed your holiday shopping long ago. However if, like me, you've procrastinated a tad, here are a few last-minutes suggestions for some green gifts or stocking-stuffers:

- Gardening supplies for the green thumb – how about a composting bin, or a seed-starting kit? Perhaps a cookbook of in-season recipes, or guide to local Ohio farms? How about a lower-emission mower or blower? Or perhaps muscle-powered tools?
- Dare I say it again? How about compact fluorescent light bulbs? They come in many shapes and colors, and are easily stuffed in the stocking of the person who pays the electric bill!
- How about a package or two of LED Christmas lights for next year?
- Cloth napkins can make a nice gift, and save a few trees in the process.
- Organic, free-trade, or shade-grown chocolate, coffee or tea can make a thoughtful gift. Or perhaps some locally produced treat, like Amish jam or local honey for the sweet-tooth in the family. Hand-crafted, fair-trade gifts are available at Ten Thousand Villages in Hartville; these gifts help sustain people in developing countries around the world, providing fair payment for their labor.
- How about those nifty re-useable shopping bags? You can buy them locally at Giant Eagle (a deal at 99 cents apiece) or even at Walmart! Want something more stylish? You can order colorful bags through Co-op America, or Lehman's online. Or consider buying plain bags from the local craft store, and letting the kids decorate them for the grandparents.
- Try human-powered gifts. I recently saw a video game that is powered by a stationary bicycle! This is an idea whose time has come - if we could just hook up all of our home exercise equipment to the televisions, it might actually get used! Or if you want something stocking-sized, consider a hand-

cranked LED flashlight. Check out Lehman's hardware for local human-powered and eco-friendly options. You can order on-line up to Dec. 20th.

- How about goodies for the bicycles in your life? Consider headlamps, tail lights, or reflective bands for the family cyclists, or baskets to make the bikes more useful. Does someone in the family own a business? How about a handy-dandy bike rack to install in front of their shop? Think of the positive statement it would make!
- Consider giving gifts to those who truly need them overseas. World Vision and other organizations take donations in order to provide life-sustaining farming help to families in poverty-stricken countries. Doctors without Borders provides much-needed medical care around the world, especially after disasters. With increased droughts and floods, help is needed now more than ever.

Try greening the whole process: while you're out shopping, skip the plastic bags – or just throw everything in one! Skip the holiday traffic and shop online or locally, minimizing the treks to distant malls. Get creative with your wrapping – use cloth, or reuse paper such as comics or brown paper (which can be decorated, and recycled). If you've already purchased your paper, make a game of seeing who can save the largest pieces without tearing them, and keep the paper to use again. Let the kids know that this is a way they can help to make a difference. Gift bags are another re-useable alternative.

As we make decisions about what we do this holiday, and in the coming year, let's consider LOVE for our fellow humans on the planet, the JOY that comes from doing the right thing, the PEACE that follows, and the HOPE that we can share through our actions.

Merry Christmas, and may we always have snow for the Holidays!

Check it out:

Green Holiday Tips from the Sierra Club: <http://www.sierraclub.org/holidays/>

MSNBC's Ten tips for an Earth-friendly holiday: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6707542/>

Co-op America's Green gift catalogue: <http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greengifts/index.cfm>

Ten Thousand Villages – fair trade gifts: Hartville Marketplace, 1289 Edison Street, State Route 619 Hartville, OH 446116, 330-877-2769

Lehman's Hardware: <http://www.lehmans.com/>

World Vision – “Gifts that make a difference”: <http://www.wvi.org/wvi/wviweb.nsf>

Doctors without Borders “the gift of medical care”: <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/home.cfm>