Giving that doesn’t cost the Earth

Giving a present is a traditional part of the holidays: a way to show your love for a family member or friend. But even during the holidays, we can practice mindful consumption by using some of these sustainable gift-giving ideas:

• **Give the gift of an experience or service, rather than a product.** The recipient will have memories of a fun, unique experience, and you will avoid holiday overconsumption. Ideas for an experiential present include tickets to a concert or sporting event, a cooking or art class, a gift card to a local restaurant, biking or canoeing tours of the DC monuments, or a massage.

• **Make your own gift.** You don’t have to be a master carpenter or expert knitter to give someone a homemade gift (although build and knit away if you’d like!). A mix CD, a plate of homemade cookies, a photo collage, turning a favorite old t-shirt into a reusable tote bag, or a hot chocolate/tea/coffee kit are all thoughtful and simple homemade gifts. If you’re feeling really crafty, search online for other DIY gift ideas or festive gift-able recipes.

• **Give the gift of a donation.** Support a cause that your loved one cares about and make a donation to a charitable organization in their name. Charity Navigator, an online tool that lets you research how organizations spend their money, can help you decide where to donate.

• **Green wrapping!** Upcycle newspapers and magazines into green gift wrap and bows. This diverts the paper from the waste stream and helps complete the cycle of reuse. You can find directions for green wrapping ideas here. Wrap gifts in kitchen towels (with ribbon) so that your wrapping becomes part of the gift. Save your paper gift bags and reuse the bag to give a present to someone new.

• **Shop sustainable.** Look to local businesses or vendors for your gifts. This supports the local economy while cutting back on your present’s transportation-related carbon footprint. Also, consider visiting second hand stores. Buying a used item helps minimize landfill waste and complete the use-reuse cycle.

• **If you want to send holiday cards, consider digital cards or making your own cards from once-used cards and paper products.** Paperless Post, and other digital card websites, offers free designs for digital cards that look just as nice as paper versions. Or, try your hand at designing your own!
Sustainable Celebrations
More than any other time of year, holidays bring us together with loved ones, near and far. Here are a few ways to make your holiday celebrations more sustainable:

• **Buy local.** The Maryland Department of Agriculture webpage lists farmers markets across the state. You can use their lists to locate a nearby market that is open year round. Purchasing some of your holiday meal ingredients at a farmers market supports local agriculture.

• **Use seasonal ingredients.** Try a new dish using winter produce, or consider swapping out an out-of-season dish that is usually on your holiday table for one with sustainable, seasonal ingredients. It might become a new family favorite! This guide can help you identify seasonal fruits and vegetables.

• **Serve food on reusable, washable plates.** It can be tempting to opt for paper or plastic cups, plates, and cutlery for a big meal, but using washable dishware will help you reduce waste. If you have to use disposables, look for items with a high post-consumer waste content or recyclable plastic items.

• **If you are hosting a holiday party,** make sure the recycling bins are visible and easy to access for your guests.

The Green Way, at home or away

• Whether you’re traveling to a holiday celebration out-of-state or just a few miles away, consider sustainable transportation options. Use public transportation when possible, and carpool with other friends and family when you need to drive.

• Before setting off on a long trip, check the air pressure in your tires to help improve your gas mileage.

• If you have holiday light displays or other decorations that use electricity, make sure to turn them off at night or set them on a timer. This will help you save energy and money!

• When putting up holiday decorations, try to reuse items from previous years or fashion decorations out of household materials you already own. This guide has many suggestions for upcycling household items into decorations.

• **Keep your thermostat set to 68°.** If it gets chilly, wear layers and show off your best (or craziest!) winter sweaters. If you are going out of town, turn off appliances, electronics, and other household devices before leaving. Be sure to turn down your thermostat.