



# SustainVU

*Growing Responsibly*

## Sustainable Holiday Greening Guide

Tips for reducing your environmental impact during the holiday season



VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY



This guide was prepared by the Sustainability and Environmental Management Office at Vanderbilt University. For more information on greening your holidays or Vanderbilt's sustainability programs, please contact us at 615.322.4551 or [sustainvu@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:sustainvu@vanderbilt.edu).

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**Sustainability** is achieved when the needs of the present population are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To achieve sustainability, we should examine the impact that our activities have on the environment and implement ways to reduce our consumption of resources and our generation of waste. In keeping with the efforts of Vanderbilt to become part of a more sustainable community, the Sustainability and Environmental Management Office has developed this **Sustainable Holiday Greening Guide** in order to provide the Vanderbilt community with tips to lessen their environmental impact during the holidays.

The holiday season brings good cheer to many people and is a wonderful time to celebrate with colleagues, friends, and family. An unintended side effect is that the holidays are also a time of excessive generation of solid waste and consumption of natural resources.



Did you know...?

- Americans throw away about **25%** more trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve<sup>1</sup>.
- If every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the **38,000 miles** of ribbon saved could tie a bow around the entire planet<sup>2</sup>.
- **Half** of the paper America consumes is used to wrap and decorate consumer products<sup>3</sup>.
- The average Christmas/New Year's long-distance trip is **275 miles** long<sup>4</sup>.

These guidelines were developed to help you think about the environmental impact of the holidays and provide some tips on how to minimize your impact as much as possible.

## Green Giving and Shopping

The exchange of gifts and cards during the holidays has become an American tradition. About **6.5 billion cards** are sold in the United States each year<sup>5</sup>—that's enough to fill a football stadium almost 25 stories high<sup>2</sup>. Excessive gift-giving not only takes its toll on our wallets, it also harms the environment. Millions of tons of paper products and packaging are taken to the landfill during the holiday season. These tips will help you to reduce the environmental impact of your shopping and giving this year.

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<sup>1</sup> "Greening the Season." EPA Pacific Southwest, Region 9. <https://www3.epa.gov/region9/waste/recycling/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> "42 Ways to Trim Your Holiday Wasteline." Use Less Stuff. <http://www.use-less-stuff.com/ULSDAY/42ways.html>

<sup>3</sup> "Facts on Holiday Waste." RecycleWorks. [http://www.recycleworks.org/resident/holiday\\_facts.html](http://www.recycleworks.org/resident/holiday_facts.html)

<sup>4</sup> "U.S. Holiday Travel." Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

[http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/america\\_on\\_the\\_go/us\\_holiday\\_travel/html/entire.html](http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/america_on_the_go/us_holiday_travel/html/entire.html)

<sup>5</sup> "Hallmark Card Statistics." Statistics Brain. <http://www.greetingcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/About-Greeting-Cards-General-Facts.pdf>

## Holiday Cards

- Instead of sending holiday cards via postal or campus mail to your colleagues, clients, friends, and family, consider sending **e-cards**. A few good sites to consider are [care2](#), [123Greetings](#), and [BlueMountain](#). You will save trees, save greenhouse gas emissions created during the transportation of the cards, save pollution from the printing process, and even save some money!
- Make a **phone call** to wish someone a happy holiday instead of sending them a card. This is a better way to really connect with people!
- If you send cards, choose cards that are printed with **vegetable-based inks** on paper with **recycled content**. For example, [Seltzer](#) makes all of their products, including gift cards, envelopes, and gift wrap, from 100% post-consumer content paper and [Fishlips](#) makes gift wrap and paper products with recycled paper and soy ink.
- If you choose to send cards, consider buying those that provide a **donation** to a favorite charity. One good option is the [Vanderbilt Children's Hospital Holiday Project](#).
- Reuse the front of greeting cards as colorful postcards or gift tags.

## Gifts

- You might find the perfect **pre-loved gift**, such as a book, picture frame, or sweater while keeping usable goods out of the landfill by using the **Vandy FreeSwap** section of the [Vanderbilt Classifieds](#), where Vanderbilt students, faculty and staff are giving away (and getting) free, usable, unwanted items.
- Consider gifts that support your local community and generate **minimal waste**. This includes things like sports tickets such as [Vandy football or baseball](#), theater or performance tickets, charitable donations, or gift certificates.
- Give a gift that helps someone **go green**. Items such as energy-saving power strips, motion sensor lights, reusable stainless steel water bottles, and reusable cloth shopping bags are great sustainable gifts.
- Give the **gift of your time**. Volunteer for a charitable organization in lieu of a gift. Offer your friends and family an evening of babysitting or a home-cooked meal.
- **Re-gift!** Give a past present you didn't need or want to someone you think might appreciate it.
- Try to **purchase items locally** to help small merchants, drive less, and support the local economy. Antique and thrift stores are also great places to find unique gifts.
- Give a colleague an **electronic magazine subscription**.
- Give the gift of a membership to a local organization in which the recipient is interested. Plant a tree or donate a book to a local or school library in someone's honor.
  - Read about Vanderbilt University's [library gift policy](#).
  - Read about ways to support the [Nashville Public Library](#).
  - Read about giving trees through the [Arbor Day Foundation](#).



- [Support the military](#) through monetary donations, Operation Phone Home, or Operation Care Package.
- Instead of buying gifts for your colleagues, consider organizing a group to support a needy Vanderbilt family with gift cards through the Employee Assistance Program (615.936.1327) or adopt an Angel through the Susan Gray School (615.322.8200).
- Purchase gifts that are **fair-trade, locally made or grown, or organically grown**, such as coffee or chocolate. Several great local places to shop for these items include:
  - [Ten Thousand Villages](#)
  - [Scarlett Begonia](#)
  - [Whole Foods](#)
  - [Olive and Sinclair chocolates](#)
- If you plan to purchase electronics this holiday season, try looking for the most **energy efficient** models, which are generally designated with Energy Star labels from the U.S. EPA.
- Great ideas for green gifts can also be found through [Treehugger](#).
- **Unsubscribe!** Call or email catalog companies that send holiday catalogs to your office and home and ask to be removed from their mailing lists. To make it easy, [Catalog Choice](#) will allow you to cancel nearly all catalogs in one location.

## Packaging

- Put gifts in **reusable packaging**, such as baskets, bags, or fabric wrappers.
- Try packaging this year's gifts in **comics, newspaper, old maps, or brown paper** decorated with sponge art or drawings instead of wrapping paper so your presents' packaging can be recycled after the holidays. **Recycled aluminum foil** can also make for a fun and different approach to wrapping.
- **Natural fiber raffia** works well as a substitute for ribbon and is recyclable too! Also look into **twine or yarn made with recycled material**.
- If purchasing wrapping paper, find responsible gift wrap that is made with **post-consumer recycled content**. Visit [Nashville Wraps](#), [Seltzer](#), or [Fish Lips Paper Designs](#) for more information on eco-friendly wrapping paper. Look for paper printed with plant-based inks instead of harmful petroleum based products.
- **Reuse old boxes and packaging materials** such as Styrofoam peanuts, or donate them to mail centers. Any **UPS store** will accept peanuts for reuse in any quantity and in any container.
- **Bring your own tote bags** in which to carry your purchases when you go shopping.
- Online shopping keeps you out of your car and off the roads, and may curb impulse buying. However, consider how far your purchases have to travel to reach you.
- Plan ahead and **consolidate** your shopping trips to save time, gas, and hassle. Try to get all of your shopping done at several stores that are near each other.

## Holiday Decorating

### Christmas Trees

Choosing between an artificial tree and a real tree can be a difficult decision. Here are some things to consider while decorating for the holidays:

- Consider buying a [live tree with a rootball](#) that is native to the area. After the holidays, plant it in your yard.
- [Recycle your real tree](#) following the holidays—they make great mulch!
- Decorate an [indoor plant](#) instead of a tree this year.
- If you do purchase an artificial tree, be sure to use it for many years. Artificial trees consume energy and petroleum-based materials during their manufacture. If pre-lit, be sure to buy one with [LED](#) (light-emitting diode) lights.



### Other Tips for Decorating

- Invest in [LED](#) (light-emitting diode) holiday lights, which use 90% less energy than traditional incandescent lights and can last up to 100,000 hours!
- Host an old [ornament swap](#) with friends instead of purchasing new ones. Or, take a trip to your local antique shop or thrift store to find great vintage decorations.
- Check out the [Vanderbilt Classifieds](#)! You might find [reusable, pre-loved decorations](#) such as wreaths, ornaments, lights, tablecloths, and more.
- As an alternative to decorative string lights, use popcorn and cranberries, or colored raffia made with post-consumer recycled content.
- [Make your own](#) wreaths and table centerpieces using materials from your yard or around your home.
- Conserve energy by only leaving holiday lights turned on for a small period of time each night. You may want to place your lights on [self-timers](#) that turn your lights on and off at pre-programmed hours so you don't forget or leave them on all night.
- Instead of traditional paraffin wax candles, use [soy or beeswax candles](#). Made from renewable soybean oil or beeswax, these candles do not emit unsafe aromatic hydrocarbons and produce less soot than paraffin candles. Soy and beeswax candles are available at various local stores, including Target, Walmart, and Walgreens, and also make great gifts.



## Holiday Entertaining

### Food

Whether you are preparing a home-cooked holiday meal or hosting a holiday party, these tips will help to make your meals more environmentally friendly. For sustainable food practices, consider the food itself, the transportation of the food, and the waste produced by food packaging. Sustainable food practices include:

- Grocery shopping at stores or hiring caterers who commit to using locally grown and organic food. This greatly reduces the distance the food had to travel to your home or event, making it fresher, and reducing the environmental impact of that transportation process.
- Using reusable china plates and utensils whenever possible, especially when hosting a large event, to reduce the waste of disposables.

Several local companies who offer these products for rental include:

- [Art Pancake](#) at 615.834.1234
  - [Classic Party Rentals](#) at 615.641.1111
  - [Grand Central Party Rentals](#) at 615.868.3747
  - [Liberty Party Rental](#) at 615.822.4392
- If disposables must be used, here are some choices, recommended in order of least environmental impact: 1) paper products with a high recycled content (i.e. paper cups or napkins made with recycled paper), 2) bioware that is made of corn, potatoes, etc. that is biodegradable or compostable, or 3) recyclable plastic ware.
  - Eliminate excess packaging by serving food in large containers instead of single-servings. Provide bulk water, coffee and drink dispensers instead of individually packaged products.
  - Serve bite-sized or finger foods to minimize plate and utensil use.
  - Get an accurate count of attendance before the event to eliminate excess food waste.
  - Donate excess food to food banks, if possible. Make sure you call ahead to learn holiday hours of operation:
    - [Second Harvest Food Bank](#) at 615.329.3491
    - [Nashville Rescue Mission](#) at 615.255.2475



### Alternative Food Options

Did you know that the **meat production industry is resource intensive**, consuming fossil fuels, water, and land; and creating pollution and greenhouse gas emissions? The production of chicken and turkey has considerably less impact on the environment than other meats, such as beef and lamb.



- Seek free-range and/or locally raised meat for your holiday celebrations.
- Consider serving or eating less meat this year and serving vegetarian- and/or vegan-friendly alternatives to turkey or ham at your holiday celebrations. Several options include:
  - Field Roast’s Celebration Roast and Gardein Stuffed Turk’y Roast are great vegetarian-friendly options that are stuffed with fruits and vegetables and seasoned with savory spices.
  - Tofurky Roasts are available in many grocery stores and at VU’s Holiday Gift Giveaway.
  - Lentil loafs are another great option to traditional meat dishes.
- Consider serving hearty vegetable dishes, such as stuffed winter squashes, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, brussel sprouts, carrots, broccoli, swiss chard, mushrooms, and more! The recipes are endless!
- [AllRecipes.com](http://AllRecipes.com), [FoodNetwork.com](http://FoodNetwork.com), and [WholeFoodsMarket.com](http://WholeFoodsMarket.com) all publish numerous ideas and recipes for celebrating the holidays with vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free menu options.

## Party Planning

- [Publicize your event](#) via email and the internet by sending online invitations. You will save trees, save greenhouse gas emissions created during the transportation of the invitations, save pollution from the printing process, and even save some money!
- If you do use printed materials, make sure invitations are printed on paper with post-consumer recycled content with vegetable-based inks.
- Decorate using items you already have or ones that you can borrow from friends. Also consider decorations that can be reused and enjoyed after your event, such as whole fruit, small plants, or herbs.

## Other Entertaining Tips

- Request recycling bins for your holiday event here at Vanderbilt:
  - For events held on Vanderbilt’s campus, include a request for recycling on your work order to Plant Operations. If you don’t have a work order for your party, you can contact Vanderbilt’s recycling coordinator at 615.34.EARTH (343.2784) or [recycle@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:recycle@vanderbilt.edu).
  - If you are not serviced by Plant Operations, you can specify within your catering contract that the caterer provide recycling containers and remove the recycling when they leave.
- Place recycling containers next to trash bins for easy access.
- Announce to guests what and where to recycle.
- Kids love to recycle so put them in charge of collecting recyclables at family events.



- [Click here](#) or visit your local community's website to find locations where you can take recyclables.
- When hosting a party, **lower the thermostat**. More people in an area means more body warmth.

## Travel

- Encourage and participate in **carpooling** to and from holiday celebrations.
- If driving long distances, be sure to **check the air in your tires** to achieve optimal gas mileage while traveling.
- If flying, consider **offsetting the carbon emissions** of your flight. Helpful information can be found through [Terrapass.com](http://Terrapass.com), [carbonfund.org](http://carbonfund.org), [myclimate.org](http://myclimate.org), and [nativeenergy.com](http://nativeenergy.com).
- If you will be away from home or the office for long periods of time, **remember to set your thermostat to a lower temperature or program the vacation setting** on your programmable thermostat.
- While you are on vacation **turn down your electric and gas water heaters** to conserve energy and gas.





Thank you for your interest in creating a “greener” Vanderbilt and Middle Tennessee.

Check out SustainVU’s other [Sustainability Guides](#).

For more information on any of the greening suggestions above or general sustainability information, please visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/SustainVU](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/SustainVU).

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