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# Natural Resources Newsletter

## Holiday Edition!

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December 2020

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### Incorporating Sustainability Into your Holidays

Happy holidays! 2020 has been an intense year, and we've had to learn to adjust to so many new things. Since the holiday season is going to look different this year, it may be a good time to reflect on holiday traditions. What is working for you? What can you let go of? This time of year especially, it's easy to be swept up in the rush of the season. We are sharing some simple, easy ways to include conservation in your holiday plans. Even small changes can collectively make a huge difference in lessening our environmental footprint. We encourage you to consider adding a few things on this list to your holiday traditions.

Take a look to see what inspires you, and we'd love to hear if you tried any of these! [Email photos](#) of how you are making your holidays more sustainable, and you may be featured in a future newsletter or Facebook post!



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## Food

- Consider having a vegetarian or vegan meal, or introducing those elements to your usual holiday food. Challenge yourself! You can learn to make some amazing new dishes.
- Find locally sourced foods. Check out these guides ([here](#) and [here](#)) for local food options in Island and Skagit Counties.
- Find your own food: with permission, wild harvest edible plants from the woods (there are a lot of great books on the subject), or harvest shellfish (make sure to get a permit and always check the [Shellfish Safety Map](#) first). You will definitely appreciate every bite!
- Plant an [indoor veggie garden](#), or grow some herbs in a windowsill or window box.
- Reuse food. Save your veggie scraps and make vegetable stock. Broth from turkey, chicken, beef, and ham bones can make an excellent soup base.
- Look into donating leftover food to food banks; just be sure to check with the individual food bank first. [Click here](#) for information on food banks serving Island County.
- [Compost](#) leftovers.
- Use recyclable aluminum foil, beeswax wraps, or reusable food storage containers for leftovers rather than plastic wrap.
- Use reusable plates/cups/cutlery/napkins.

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## Decorations

During the darkest days of the year, nothing is more magical than seeing all off the holiday lights and decorations.

## Trees

- Decorate an indoor potted tree (or any potted plant) instead of a plastic or cut tree.
- Decorate a living tree outside instead of having one inside.
- Get a living native tree, decorate it, and plant it outside the following spring.
- Rent a tree! Some places will deliver a living, potted tree. After the holidays, they will pick it up and bring it back to the nursery. In some cases, you can rent the same tree year after year and watch it grow.
- If you get a cut tree, recycle it in January. [Be creative!](#) You can make a [hugelkultur mound](#), line a trail, feed birds, prevent erosion, and make mulch.
- Real cut trees are more sustainable than plastic ones – learn why [here](#).
- If you do prefer an artificial tree, consider purchasing a used one from a local thrift store or getting a hand-me-down from a friend, rather than buying new.
- Get creative with the materials in your home, and craft your own tree. Check out [this article](#) for some ideas, including using ladders, books, wall art, and driftwood.

## Decorating

- Switch to LED or solar lights for decorations. They are much more energy efficient. LED lights last longer and don't heat up like other types of light bulbs.
- Set an automatic timer for your decorations.
- Make or purchase [compostable or edible decorations](#). You can make new decorations every year, and some can be saved and used year after year.
- Make edible decorations for wildlife, and hang them around your yard, porch, or next to a window. Spread peanut butter on a pine cone, roll it in bird seed, and hang it with a festive ribbon. See how many feathery visitors you get! This is especially fun for kiddos.
- Do you like to throw confetti at midnight on New Year's? Make compostable confetti for New Year's Eve by hole-punching or ripping fallen leaves.
- Make wreaths and garlands out of native plants - explore the woods and find cedar boughs (which twist really well and make a great wreath base), snowberries, salal, lichens, and rose hips. Always make sure you have permission to harvest, and don't take more than 1/10th of a plant's resources.



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*Pinecone bird feeder.*

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## Gifts & Cards

### Buying Gifts

- Make a homemade gift (something like jam, bread, soap, crafts, etc.) - you can learn a new skill and give someone an unforgettable, personalized gift. Here's a list of [mason jar gift ideas](#).
- Donate to a good cause that the other person believes in (this is great for people who are difficult to shop for).

- Consider doing an act of service for someone instead of purchasing a gift.
- Gift an experience instead of material good.
- Give gifts that help enable someone to live more sustainably (bird houses/feeders, bat houses, non-plastic household products, compostable garbage and dog poop bags, bidet, mason bee house, native pollinator-friendly seed mix or plants, reusable bamboo silverware, etc.)
- If you can, try to give gifts that are made of compostable or recycled material, locally produced, fair-trade certified, second hand, have plastic-free packaging, etc.
- Do a re-gift swap if friends and family are also into it. Re-gifting something meaningful, like an old book or piece of art, can be a very special gift.
- Consider setting up a gift exchange with a group of friends or family - instead of buying for everyone, have a drawing so each person only needs to buy for one other person.
- Shop locally if possible. Also, buying a gift certificate for a local business could be a great option.
- When buying online, consider how far the item needs to travel to get to you. Ask companies if they'll ship to you in more sustainable packaging.

## Wrapping Gifts

- Use a reusable shopping bag instead of gift wrap.
- Wrap gifts in materials you would throw away. [Potato chip bags](#) make a beautiful metallic wrapping paper!
- Put a present in a gift-bag, which can be used over and over.
- Wrap gifts in compostable or recyclable materials. You can incorporate herbs or other pretty things from nature to accent minimalist wrapping.
- Play hide and seek with gifts. Don't wrap them, but hide them around the house and leave clues. This is just as much fun as finding a gift under the tree or in a stocking.



*Minimal wrapping can look very festive! Click image for photo source.*

## Cards

- Send an e-card instead of a physical card. Hallmark, Blue Mountain, Punchbowl, Paperless Post, Greenenvelope, Open Me, and Smilebox are some of the many platforms you can use. You can customize them and send videos. Some are even free of charge!
- Mail a post card instead of a card with an envelope.
- Use recyclable or compostable paper (or paper made from recycled material).
- If you're crafty, try making your own paper out of [dryer lint](#), [old newspapers](#), [shreddings](#), and many other materials. You can imbed wildflowers, seeds, and leaves. There are tutorials online, and it makes for a very memorable, special holiday card.
- Make or purchase cards or paper embedded with native, pollinator-friendly wildflower seeds. In the spring, your card can become someone's mini wildflower garden.
- Save envelopes from cards to use as scrap paper, reminders, grocery lists, etc. It gives them a second life before they go to the recycling bin.
- Instead of throwing cards away, use them as decorations! Staple them to a festive ribbon, twine, or garland, and make one a year. After the holidays are over, store them with the rest of your decorations. It's a great way to display cards, and it's fun to watch your friends and families evolve over the years.

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## New Traditions!

- Because things are so different this year, it's an opportunity to begin new traditions, with sustainability in mind.

- Volunteer! There are a lot of organizations that need individuals and families to donate their time. Maybe think about adopting a [road](#) or your favorite [park/trail](#).
- Since hosting and traveling is not an option right now, consider using the extra time as an opportunity for reflection and self-care. Maybe check out a new park, beach, or natural area.
- Participate in the [Christmas Day Bird Count](#)! It is still happening this year, but with special COVID-19 precautions. Join the thousands of volunteers who participate, and be part of a massive citizen science effort.
- Consider making a New Year's resolution to visit more natural areas, or to get involved with a local conservation organization.
- In future years (when traveling is safer), offset your holiday travel. [Learn more here](#).
- Visit friends and family virtually instead of flying or driving. Include people remotely who you might not see otherwise - it can be a good opportunity to reconnect.

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**Be Well!**

**We hope you have a wonderful holiday season!**



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