

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Community Knowledge: The collective knowledge and energy of the community is an incredible resource that must be channeled to where it is needed.

Check out green ways to give this holiday season

By Isabel Stein
City of Holland

The first snowfall has melted. The Halloween candy has been eaten. Thanksgiving plans are being stressed over. Now it's time to start thinking about everyone's favorite season: Gift-giving season!

How to be more sustainable isn't usually the first thought that comes to mind about gifting season, especially because it's not always easy to do around the holidays. Extra emissions are created from last-minute gift deliveries, and excess waste is produced from wrapping paper, bows, and ribbons being incorrectly disposed of.

Still, there are ways to offset that additional waste while still bringing holiday cheer. Here are a few ideas.

Sometimes, having to expedite shipping last-minute gifts is unavoidable, but try to shop locally first.

Also, the Holland area has several boutiques and thrift stores that will supply you with unique gifts for everyone in the family. Buying something second-hand keeps it out of the landfill longer, and someone new gets to enjoy it.

Gift cards are also great for last-minute gifts, especially e-gift cards. Physical gift cards are hard to recycle because they are typically made from PVC, but e-gift cards work just as well.

Gifting experiences is a fun way to be sustainable around the holidays. Consider giving tickets to museums, concerts, or sporting events, or paying for a monthly subscription or a class for their favorite hobby. If they like to be outdoors, seasonal ski passes or national or state park passes are always a hit.

When it comes to wrapping a gift, regular wrapping paper is festive and fun, but it's rarely disposed of properly. Almost all wrapping paper cannot be recycled. Unless it specifies that it is 100 percent paper, throw it in the trash after it's served its purpose. The same goes for ribbons and bows; they are not recyclable and need to be thrown away if you're not going to reuse them.

Think about alternatives to non-recyclable wrapping paper. Gift bags are a widely-known alternative. They're easier to use than trying to wrap an oddly shaped gift, can be reused for several years, and tissue paper is 100 percent recyclable.

Though using bags from all occasions doesn't create the most cohesive holiday look, there's luckily another alternative right under the kitchen sink: paper grocery bags. There are quick tutorials that show how to turn paper bags into wrapping paper. Letting kids decorate the bags is a fun activity for them and becomes more personal for the receiver.

Brown craft paper offers the same aesthetic and can be recycled after use.

There are several alternatives to wrapping paper, but before going out and buying a more earth-friendly option, using up any that you already have is the easiest and most effective way to be sustainable.

Hopefully, these ideas give you a new perspective and inspire you to be more creative when giving gifts.

■ *Isabel Stein is sustainability coordinator for the City of Holland.*

