

Framework topic:

Environmental Awareness - Environmental education and integrating environmental practices into our planning will change negative outcomes of the past and improve our future.

Eco-Friendly Festivities: Tips for a Sustainable Season

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The twinkling lights! The classic colors! The fresh evergreen wreaths! The sparkling baubles! It's a beautiful and festive time of year. There are many ways to enjoy a fully decorated space and a plentiful holiday without purchasing unnecessary things, overspending, or creating excessive waste.

As you decorate, there are two main ways to make things more sustainable: buy local or make things by hand (or combine the two by purchasing supplies at a local store and then making your own creations!). Local shops and craft markets offer beautiful items that often last longer than mass-produced decor from online retailers or big-box stores. Purchasing from thrift stores or Facebook Marketplace is another great way to find ready-to-go decor at a bargain.

Handmade decorations will enhance the cozy atmosphere this time of year. If you're unsure where to start, check out the options at [Herrick District Library](#)! They offer a variety of arts and crafts experiences for all ages. [The Holland Area Arts Council](#) is another great place to tap into your creative side, offering classes for both youth and adults.

When it comes to twinkling lights, choose LED string lights for decorating inside and outside your home. These lights consume significantly less energy, emit little to no heat, and are more durable!

Gifts are another major aspect of the holidays. When giving gifts, remember the saying "Quality over Quantity." Consider giving admission passes to museums, waterparks, and zoos. You could also gift classes to help someone pursue their passions, or concert and sports tickets. When thinking about what makes a meaningful gift, don't underestimate the personal touch that comes with giving someone a handmade gift, especially if it has a reference to something they love—like their pet or favorite music artist.

When wrapping gifts, try using plain paper, bandanas, tea towels, or pillowcases! You can also purchase reusable decorative boxes or bags. If you already have reusable items for gifts being given in your home, keep track of them and pack them away with the rest of your holiday decor to store for next year. Avoid wax-coated paper, glitter, and excessive adhesive.

When gathering with family and friends, try to carpool or take public transportation as much as possible! For group meals, avoid using single-use utensils, plates, and cups. Consider making large batches of drinks to avoid single-use plastic bottles. Remind guests to bring Tupperware so leftovers can be split up, helping to avoid a mountain of mashed potatoes going to waste.

If you're traveling instead of hosting, make sure to reduce energy use in your home while you're gone! Unplug non-essential items like TVs, toasters, gaming consoles, lamps, and electric tools. Leave your router/modem, refrigerator, and anything related to your security system plugged in. Turn the heat down to around 60°F—low enough to save energy, but not so low that your pipes could freeze.

Reduce waste by composting, but make sure not to put meat or dairy products in the compost pile! You can recycle plain paper, clean aluminum cans, glass jars, and cardboard boxes. Check out the [Holland BPW's guide to recycling](#) to learn more! If you have a real tree, you can safely burn it and add the ashes to your garden beds or to a compost pile. Wood ash contains great nutrients for plants! You could also cut the stump into little “tree cookies” to create ornaments or coasters. If you're not interested in repurposing your tree and it's just gotta go, many cities have curbside tree pickup. Check the dates to make sure you don't miss your pickup window! Many times these trees are mulched and repurposed. You can also reach out to zoos and farms to see if they are collecting trees for use in their operations.

Whether it's the memories made from creating decorations, the satisfaction from sending your guests home with delicious leftovers, or the sincere connection from giving a purposeful gift, these changes will make your season merry and bright!

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