

The 12 Wastes of Christmas

RIRRC Shares Tips for a Greener Christmas

Sarah Kite

You shop. You mail. You cook. You wrap. You give. And in the process of giving, you generate waste. The time between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day sees the highest volume of trash sent to landfills. So instead of giving the Central Landfill your annual "gifts" of wrapping paper, Styrofoam peanuts, and poinsettias, here's some advice on reducing your trash.

12 plastic shopping bags.

Keep your baggage to a minimum. Make sure to have reusable bags in your car for those spur of the moment shopping trips. But, if you find yourself starting to accumulate plastic bags, recycle them in ReStore bins. These bins are located in supermarkets, pharmacies, and big box retail stores throughout R.I.



11 bows and ribbons.

Have you heard that thrifty is the new black? Collect ribbons or bows from gifts and reuse them next year. For your own gifts, tie environment friendly alternatives such as pine cones, candy canes, bells, or old ornaments to your gifts. This will give them a more personalized look.

10 pounds of food waste.

All food preparation yields waste. Apple cores, potato peelings, egg shells, coffee grinds and the like are organic and should be composted instead of mixed with trash. Can't make it out to the backyard right away? Fill a zippered plastic bag with food waste and freeze it. Your nutrient-rich compost will be a lasting gift to your flower beds.



9 champagne bottles.

Whatever your poison, chances are its container is recyclable. Champagne and wine bottles, as well as beer cans and bottles, eggnog cartons, milk & cream cartons, soda bottles, and cider jugs can all be recycled in blue bins.

8 miles of wrapping paper.

More than 8,800 tons of gift wrap are used each year by consumers during the holiday season. Sadly, the life cycle of wrapping paper is only a few days. When opening gifts, collect the torn gift-wrap in brown-paper-bags from the package store or leaf-and-yard waste bags (no bows or ribbons, please). Leave the bag at the curb beside your green bin and all that paper will be recycled (check with your local Department of Public Works first to make sure they'll take the bag). For your own gift-giving try making your own cloth gift bags instead. See our article on [Holiday Gift Bags](#) for directions!



7 gift and cardboard boxes.



Online shopping is convenient, but it often results in an abundance of corrugated cardboard boxes. Give them extra life by reusing them as gift boxes. If you have no secondary use for them, flatten them out and recycle. If they are longer than six feet, cut them down and tie them up with string; otherwise they won't fit in the recycling truck. You can also try unloading the boxes on a materials exchange website like [freecycle.org](#) or [freexchangeri.org](#) under the heading "moving boxes". Moving boxes never go out of style.

6 bundles of greeting cards.

Isn't it nice to get something in the mail other than a bill? Continue the good feelings of your friends and family by recycling the envelopes and cards in your green bins. Or, for those crafty people out there, cut off the front of the card and re-use it as a gift tag. There are charities that accept greeting cards for recycling into new cards. St. Jude's Ranch for Children is one, but they're certainly not alone. Type "recycle greeting cards for charity" into a search engine and take your pick!



5 lumps of coal.

If Santa gave you coal, it might be a hint from him to reform your naughty anti-environment practices. Use that coal to add a smile to your snowman, and promise to adopt one new earth-friendly practice in 2012. For suggestions, go to thedailygreen.com or practicallygreen.com



4 dried-up decorations.

Once your holiday greenery (wreaths, boughs, poinsettias, and boxwoods) dries up and turns brown, remove the wiring, bows, foil wrap and decorations and add them to your compost bin.



3 holiday catalogs.

More than two million tons of direct mail winds up in the trash each year. You can recycle all of those catalogs, flyers, coupons and special mailers by putting them in your green bin. Even better, cut down on unwanted mail by delisting yourself at dmaconsumers.org

or at catalogchoice.org. If concerns about identity theft keep you awake at night, rip off the address page and shred it before recycling the rest of the catalog.

2 mountains of bubble wrap.

Save packing materials for future mailings. Or, you can donate the Styrofoam peanuts and bubble wrap to a local pack-and-ship businesses. Call 800-828-2214 for the nearest location.



1 brown Christmas tree.

Cut Christmas trees are accepted free of charge at RIRRC. Most RI municipalities designate a certain week for tree pickups after the holidays. Contact your local department of public works for more information. Resource Recovery chips the trees so they can live again as mulch and compost.

This holiday season, be sure to add one more person to your gift list: Mother Nature.

~Sarah Kite is the director of Recycling Services at the R.I. Resource Recovery Corporation.

