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Earth friendly Christmas gift wrapping

With just over two weeks until Christmas, the season for gift wrapping is upon us. Gift wrapping really is the arch nemesis of a green Christmas! We wrap gifts to make them look beautiful and festive, and then immediately discard the wrapping. We are essentially buying a product for the purpose of throwing it out! Some wrapping papers can be recycled but many of the specialty papers cannot due to metallic dyes added to the paper. So imagine how much the landfill expands after Christmas. It is time for a 'green wrapping' revolution! So let's consider some gift-wrapping ideas to help lesson our environmental footprint this Christmas.

Reusable decorative boxes are a great idea for most any gift – they are available anywhere, are inexpensive, and come in all sizes. Best of all, the decorative boxes don't have to be wrapped and the person you give it to can pass it along or keep it to store recipes, Christmas ornaments, or any number of treasures! The same is true of paper or cloth gift bags that can be reused many times over for various purposes.

Wine is a very popular gift to give over the Christmas season. But if you don't want to go out and buy wine gift bags for all of your holiday parties, why not use newspaper? Wrap the wine bottle in the newspaper, leaving about 5 inches of excess newspaper at the top. Tape the newspaper to keep it snug around the bottle. Cut strips from the top of the newspaper to the top of the bottle, and just like ribbon, it curls by running the strips along the sharp edge of your scissors! Finish by tying a ribbon or piece of twine or string around the neck of the bottle. This method can be used for any cylinder shaped gifts which are always a challenge to wrap.

Getting the kids involved in our green wrapping projects is a wonderful way to teach them environmental practices and it also lets them put their creativity to work! Gather the family around the kitchen table and decorate some saved brown paper bags or brown Kraft paper (unbleached paper made from wood pulp – often 100% recycled content and recyclable). The kids can color and draw on the paper and personalize each gift - which makes it really "from the heart". And you don't have to use a gift tag because you can write the recipient's name directly on the brown paper as part decorating project. To finish off, tie a cloth ribbon or twine around the gift, and you can even attach a Christmas ornament for an extra personal touch.

One thing that never ceases to aggravate me as I do my Christmas wrapping each year is the spool of ribbon running out and being too short for my gift. Well, I found a solution – create a patchwork of ribbons! All you need is some seam-binding tape and an iron. Gather all the too-short ribbons together and sort by width of ribbon. Place a piece of seam-binding tape at the end of one piece of ribbon and place another piece of ribbon on top. On low heat, slowly iron for a few seconds until the tape melts and binds the two materials together. This ensures that none of your ribbon scraps go to waste, and trust me - it looks beautiful and eclectic under the tree!

These are just a few ideas to help your household have less wasteful and more environmentally friendly Christmas. So cozy up with your family this holiday season and put your creative juices to work!

Brown paper packages tied up with string, these are a few of my favorite things...

Jessica Scott formerly worked for the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, and is now studying for her Masters in Environmental Management at UNB in Fredericton. For more 'green' Christmas tips check out www.greenmattersfredericton.com