

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Greening Your Gifting

Dear EcoGirl: How can I be more ecological in my gift-giving this year? *Signed, Curious in Cotati*

Dear Curious: Greening your gifts is a wonderful way to thank Mother Earth for making all life possible on this beautiful orb! Here are some ideas for including the planet in your holiday lovin'.

(1) Choose earth-friendly gifts and cards. Reduce your eco-impact with items that are organic, less-toxic, natural, sustainably-harvested, energy-efficient, locally-made, durable, minimally-packaged, "previously-owned," recycled, and recyclable. There are many wonderfully unique and useful options with these qualities. For example,

* A wind-up or wooden toy can feel innovative in a world with so much electronic hum.

* Local organic food and wine connects folks with our home-grown treasures and supports healthier local agriculture.

* Nature calendars on recycled non-chlorine paper can inspire people to protect the earth.

* A "previously-owned" item that you refurbish brings fun and personalization back into gift-giving.

* Anything homemade allows you to make it organic, local, and green. Food is always appreciated, but consider sharing your other passions. For instance, one year my love of herbs became gifts of custom herbal scrubs and sachets.

(2) Trim your giftee's everyday eco-footprint. Look at their daily activities to discover useful gifts, such as: A refillable Thermos for coffee or tea (to replace Styrofoam cups); a battery charger and rechargeable batteries (to avoid toxic waste and save them money); cloth napkins (instead of paper ones); a solar-powered calculator; educational eco-toys; and a pretty cloth grocery bag (the best answer to the paper-or-plastic debate!).

(3) Green their minds. A wide variety of eco-books can help both beginners and those with specialty interests such as green gardening, cooking, building, and more. Or order an ecological or nature magazine subscription, to keep them connected to the earth all year 'round.

(4) Avoid cheap throwaway items. Even if these are inexpensive to buy (because of our short-sighted economic system), they're costly to the earth in resources extracted, energy used, and landfill space.

(5) Shop at local venues, including locally-owned eco-stores, crafts fairs, and direct-from-the-source. This reduces transport impacts and supports your earth-nurturing neighbors. A gift certificate to such spots is also an easy green gift. (Many places offer shipping services and website ordering too.)

For instance, in Sebastopol, check out Earth Child's natural toys (824-0940), Hot Peppers' natural arts (829-3082), and Just Living's newly-reopened natural bedding and clothing store (823-4499). Also explore Harmony's eco-gardening supplies (near Graton, 823-9125), Renga Arts' recycled art (Occidental, 874-9407), and Community Market's cooperative natural foods store (Santa Rosa, 546-1806). A little farther afield you'll find Real Goods, Hopland's green general store <www.realgoods.com>.

But perhaps you want both goodies and adventure? Then join others wandering the many local crafts fairs. A favorite of mine is the Goddess Crafts Faire, Dec. 1-2 at Sebastopol's Community Center <www.goddesscraftsfaire.com>.

You can also have fun exploring local organic wineries and farms. For an organic wineries list, see <www.townhallcoalition.org/resources>. Organic farms are shown at <www.farmtrails.org>. (Click on "Our Farms." Under Services, choose "Certified organic.") Review the specifics to see which of-

ferings are organic and if they're indeed certified (with a third party verifying practices).

(6) Improve your wrap. Buy recycled chlorine-free wrapping paper. Avoid unrecyclable metallic wraps. Reusable gift bags are also quick and fun. Or wrap creatively with magazine pictures, comics, sports pages, old maps, and fabrics. You can stamp kraft paper, tie with raffia, and add a fallen twig for an artistic twist. Or gather thematic goodies in a reusable basket or other container that becomes part of the gift.

(7) Create valuable experiences. Easy low-impact gifts that mean a lot and help build relationships include: a coupon for babysitting, a day helping clean out the garage, cookie-making lessons, a pre-paid class registration, a gift certificate for a massage or astrology reading, theater tickets, and a night out on the town! For extra points, choose a green activity, such as a gift certificate for a Daily Acts Sustainability Tour (<www.dailyacts.org>, 789-9664).

For more eco-holiday ideas, see <www.healthyworld.org/ecoholidays.html>. I'd also love to hear your ideas for making the holidays even more green.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guide to Sonoma, Napa, & Mendocino Counties, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter.

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