

# 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 Cambria*

**Dear Curious:** Greening your gifts is a wonderful way to thank Mother Earth for making all life possible on this beautiful orb! The money you're already spending on loved ones can also nurture an earth-smart economy for all.

Here are some ideas for including the planet in your holiday lovin'.

**1) Choose earth-friendly gifts.** Reduce your eco-impact by looking for items that are energy-efficient, locally-made, fair-trade, organic, less-toxic, natural, sustainably-harvested, durable, minimally-packaged, "previously-owned," recycled, and recyclable. (Read labels to understand and confirm green claims.)

Many wonderfully unique and useful options have 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.
- An organic fruit tree brings delicious dividends through the years.
- A "previously-owned" item that you refurbish re-personalizes your gift-giving.
- Homemade almost-anything let's you make it organic, local, and green. Food is always appreciated, but consider sharing your other passions too. For instance, one year my love of herbs became gifts of custom herbal scrubs and sachets.

**2) 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.

**3) 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!).

**4) 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. Start with Chelsea Green at <[www.chelseagreen.com](http://www.chelseagreen.com)>. Or order an ecological or nature magazine subscription, to keep them connected to the earth all year 'round. Excellent options include *E-The Environmental Magazine* <[www.emagazine.com](http://www.emagazine.com)> and *Yes! Magazine* <[www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org)>.

**5) Give the gift of meaningful experiences.** Easy low-impact presents that 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! (Hmmm, perhaps an organic facial at Ventura's One Skin& Body...)

**6) Buy locally.** When you purchase locally-made products at locally-owned eco-stores, crafts fairs, or direct-from-the-source, you reduce your net transportation impacts. Plus you support your earth-honoring neighbors! A gift certificate to such spots is also an easy option. (Many places also offer shipping and website ordering.)

You can also have fun while looking for gifts at area organic wineries and farms. Find options at <[www.caff.org/buylocal](http://www.caff.org/buylocal)> and <[www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)>. The latter site also has a free downloadable Central Coast Food Guide, which includes Santa Cruz County.

**7) Shop ecologically.** Go with a friend to save gas and money and increase camaraderie. Bring a cloth bag or consolidate purchases into one bag.

**8) Improve your wrap.** Buy recycled chlorine-free wrapping paper, and 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. Consider gathering related goodies (perhaps around a theme like kitchen or sewing) in a pretty basket or other container that becomes part of the gift.

**9) Discard waste responsibly at holidays' end,** including those outdated techno-toys. Recycle foam shipping "peanuts" at most private mail centers; and save wrapping paper and ribbons for next year's reuse. Don't burn wrapping paper; it can contain toxic metals. It's OK to recycle non-metallic ones.

**For more recycling information,** contact your local waste management folks: San Luis Obispo County (<[www.iwma.com](http://www.iwma.com)> 782-8530), Ventura County (<[www.wasteless.org](http://www.wasteless.org)> 658-4321), and Santa Barbara County (<[www.lessismore.org](http://www.lessismore.org)> 882-3600).

**For more eco-holiday ideas,** see <[www.healthyworld.org/ecoholidays.html](http://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.*

*Email your questions about going green to <[EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info](mailto:EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info)> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <[www.AskEcoGirl.info](http://www.AskEcoGirl.info)>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. "EcoGirl believes that everyone can be a superhero for the planet. Then she shows you how!"*

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