

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info



Nurturing Authentic Holiday Green

Dear EcoGirl: I want to be eco-respectful this holiday season, but with so many companies claiming to be green, how do I choose products that are truly better for the earth? *Signed, Confused*

Dear Confused: Thank you for your great question. Yes, it's been fascinating for me to watch over the years as green has been moved from the "wacky" fringes to the everyday mainstream.

On the one hand, it's wonderful to see the increased participation that's so essential to steer us away from destruction. However, this popularity has also attracted folks who slap on fake green façades and make it confusing for us to know how to really make a difference.

So here are some suggested ways you can take actions that really do serve our beautiful and precious earth, this holiday season and all year 'round.

How to Choose Truly Earth-Friendly Products

1) Look for products and services that indicate the specific green criteria they meet, with evidence. Look under the surface. Don't just accept unsupported vagaries such as a nature scene on a label or the word "earth" in a brand name.

2) Learn the definitions of common eco-words, to know what they mean and don't mean. Some words have strong legal definitions, such as "organic," while others have no definition in law, such as "green" and "sustainable," and thus mean different things to different people. Identify the criteria that are most important to you. You can learn more at www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels.

3) Recognize that no company or product in our modern world is completely ecological, because our culture is so complex and interwoven. Instead, items can be just more or less green, based on specific measures.

4) Go beyond buying replacement green products to greening your activities. For example, you might start by buying recycled paper towels, then later swap to reusable dish towels that avoid the waste of disposables.

Ideas for Greening Your Holidays

- **Look for authentically eco-gifts,** including those that are energy-efficient, minimally-packaged, locally-made, sustainably-harvested, less-toxic, natural, organic, fair-trade, "previously-owned," recycled, and recyclable.

- **Trim your giftee's everyday eco-footprint and expenses.** For instance, they might appreciate a refillable Thermos for coffee or tea (to replace Styrofoam cups); a battery charger and rechargeable batteries (to save the cost of new batteries and reduce toxic waste); cloth napkins (instead of paper ones); or a pretty cloth grocery bag (the best answer to the paper-or-plastic debate!).

- **Support local organic food and wine,** as gifts and at your events. This nurtures both our local eco-allies and healthier local ecosystems. Find leads at www.farmtrails.org.

- **Buy less-toxic toys.** See PIRG's "Trouble In Toyland" toy safety survey, plus easy ways you can help keep toxics out of toys, at www.uspirg.org/issues/toy-safety. Also, speak up for the long-needed action finally being taken to reform our key federal toxics law, TSCA, at www.saferchemicals.org.

- **Avoid cheap throwaway items.** They're inexpensive to buy because of our short-sighted economic system, but costly to the earth in resources extracted, energy used, and landfill space.

- **Discard responsibly.** Setup an easy system for guests to help recycle holiday trash. Also, recycle your old techno-toys, to keep toxics out of landfills and ecosystems. More recycling information is at www.recyclenow.org.

- **Share your love of nature with others.** Take nature walks and watch nature videos to learn about and be inspired by the beauty and vitality that are the foundation supporting all life on earth.

Finding Out More

You can explore more ideas for showing your affection for Mother Earth on my website, including past columns that can help you buy green on a budget, choose truly eco-gifts, reduce holiday waste, and savor eco-wine and bubbly.

I also invite you to give folks my "insanely useful" Ask EcoGirl booklets, titled *Healthier Housekeeping* and *Detoxing Your Life*. They're an easy, affordable way to inform and nurture your loved ones. Quantity discounts are available, and all proceeds support my eco-work.

So I hope you find this information helpful, and that everyone has the very happiest of holiday seasons!

You can become an Ask EcoGirl Facebook fan to show your support and receive my ongoing eco-information. See www.facebook.com/AskEcoGirl.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of [The Organic Guides](#), and Editor and Lead Writer for [The Next STEP](#) newsletter. Email your questions about going green to EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

"EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone."

© Copyright Patricia Dines, 2010. All rights reserved.

Published in the Sonoma County Gazette, December 2010.

For more Ask EcoGirl columns, see www.askeco.org