

# The Green Zone

By Patricia Dines



## Waste Not, Want Not

### Disposing of holiday detritus responsibly

As the parties and gift-giving wind down, we can find ourselves surrounded by piles of holiday debris. Not surprisingly, Americans generate an additional 25 million tons of waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's. But that volume means that it's also a great time to make a difference by disposing of our waste wisely.

The first step in a post-holiday sort is to look for what can be reused. For instance, we can save ribbons, bows, and wrapping paper for future years. I've read that if we all reused just two feet of ribbon, we could tie a bow around the planet. Yeah, it's corny, but it demonstrates how small actions do add up. Artistic folks can also save pretty pictures from holiday cards to paste onto blank cards next year, perhaps with creative embellishments.

Along with the season's gifts of new clothes, toys, and more comes the inevitable disposal of the old ones. By donating these unwanted items, we can brighten someone's day while making better use of the resources they represent. Higher quality discards can go to a consignment store, perhaps even netting a little cash. Unneeded paper and plastic bags can also be dropped at a thrift store for reuse, and shipping "peanuts" and foam packaging at a private mail center.

To explore more ideas and resources for repairing and reusing unwanted items, check out *Choose to Reuse* by Nikki and David Goldbeck.

Next is the question of what can be recycled. Garbage services have different rules, often posted on their websites. (Many Sonoma and Marin County folks are served by North Bay Corporation, which is at [www.unicycler.com](http://www.unicycler.com); Napa is served by Napa Recycling and Waste Services, [www.naparecycling.com](http://www.naparecycling.com).) Generally, we can put glass, cans, cardboard,

paper, and plastic in the blue single-stream can; this includes holiday cards and wrapping paper, except those with metallics.

Much of our holiday waste is food. After we offer appropriate leftovers to a friend or food bank, what remains can often go in the green yard waste container for composting. By this simple act, landfill waste is magically transformed into a useful resource. My service accepts vegetables and dry foods like bread and pasta; meat, bones, cheese, and oil are not allowed. Christmas trees can also go in the green can, if cut to fully fit within.

With many folks getting new techno-toys (including phones, computers, TVs, and other gadgets), it's important to keep old electronic items out of the trash. That's because this high-tech e-waste contains toxics such as lead, cadmium, copper, and mercury, which can leach from landfills to poison humans, wildlife, and ecosystems. For example, a TV or computer monitor contains up to eight pounds of lead, which can cause brain damage and hyperactivity, especially in children. Of the lead in U.S. landfills, 40 percent is from electronics.

Nonprofits such as the Computer Recycling Center ([www.crc.org](http://www.crc.org); 707.570.1600) accept donated e-waste, which they refurbish, resell, and responsibly recycle. Donators even get a tax write-off. Some curbside services and household toxics centers also take small electronic devices.

Which brings me to household toxics. Since these also don't go in the trash, I gather mine in a designated spot in my house, then periodically drop them at the Sonoma County Household Toxics Facility, Community Toxics Collections Days, or appropriate stores. Household toxics include batteries, fluorescent bulbs, glues, paints, solvents, treated

wood, car fluids and fuel, household cleaners, pesticides, medications, even nail polish and remover.

To discover all the nitty-gritty of local recycling and disposal options, I love the Sonoma County Eco-Desk ([www.recyclenow.org](http://www.recyclenow.org); 707.565.3375). Both their website and handy recycling section (under "R" in the AT&T Yellow Pages) list places to drop unwanted appliances, bikes, books, building materials, cars, eyeglasses, hangers, medical supplies, scrap metal, gardening supplies, cooking oil, car tires, video tapes, and more. Their website's "Recycling" page also lists free Christmas tree drop-off spots.

Another vital way for us to help this process is by purchasing recycled products, making use of these rescued resources and encouraging the market. The economy's slump makes this even more important, as drastically lower materials prices have created an excess of recyclables and discouraged some recycling.

We can each also look at our current waste patterns for ideas to reduce future flow, an essential part of lowering our planetary impact. Thus, we might decide to buy a battery charger, keep electronics longer, or even start our very own compost pile that allows us to turn everyday food scraps into gardening gold.

*The Computer Recycling Center accepts drop-offs Monday–Friday, 9am to 5pm, and Saturday, 9am to 2pm. 3227 Santa Rosa Ave., Santa Rosa. If you have more than 15 large computer items, please contact them in advance. 707.570.1600.*

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Published in the North Bay Bohemian, Dec. 24, 2008.