HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

HOLIDAY RECYCLING

The holiday season is a festive time with glittery lights, pretty decorations and gift giving.

Each year, tons of beautiful wrapping paper is deposited for waste pick up on Christmas morning. This year, get creative, reduce your costs for wrapping paper and integrate environmental awareness into your gifting.

Reuse newspaper from your recipients’ favorite section of the paper for that special gift. A matching bow in red, black or white is quite festive but consider making a matching bow from the newsprint or construction paper. Contact our 4-H office for easy to follow instructions for a fancy paper bow.

How about a gadget gift to help you bundle newspapers into fire logs for those with fireplaces? It saves on cutting trees for fire wood and lots of energy in toting logs into the house. Or, just make the logs yourself from all the newspaper piled in the garage and package them in a decorative fireside basket.

Reduce wrapping paper waste by using other useful items for packaging. Enclose your gift in a decorative tin. Cookies and candy are often packaged in tins, but tins are suitable for many other small gifts. Consider wrapping baby gifts in a baby blanket. Wrap large boxed items in a cuddly throw or sheet. Use discount fabric remnants for reusable giftwrap.

Reuse a 55 gallon juice barrel or buy a garbage can and build a rain barrel to help friends and family collect and reuse rainwater for irrigation. They can be painted and become yard art or blend into a landscape. Contact Jessica Sullivan, our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods coordinator for info on upcoming classes and for do-it-yourself instructions.

Encourage composting by giving a vermiculture (worm culture) bin. Worm composting is easy, does not smell if done properly and helps keep food scraps from going to waste as it converts into nutrient rich soil for landscape or container plants.

Reuse a large coffee can or plastic ice cream bucket and decorate it to disguise and hold vegetable scraps on the kitchen counter until a trip to the compost bin is convenient. Include a tub of fishing worms and you are off to a good start for a special holiday gift and a great spring garden. Be sure the worms are in a container that gets air and keep them from getting too hot before the gift is opened or everyone is in for a stinky surprise. There are many types of compost bins on the market or you can build your own.

Our Master Gardeners have information for choosing the size and type of compost bin as well as no smell instructions. They have lots of free information on plant care if you wish to give a living gift for the holidays. They sell books on butterfly gardening, landscaping, flowering shrubs, citrus and vegetable gardening that make great gifts, too.

Reduce the need for recycling by giving sets of reusable mugs, cups and storage containers for lunches. Decorative dish towels and hand towels cut down on paper towel waste.

Make holiday recycling easier. Have separate recycling bins easily accessible for party guests but move them outdoors as soon as the party is over to avoid unwanted pest guests.

Recycling at home is easier every day if there is a designated place to sort glass, plastic and cans. Purchase a bin, include information on local recycling drop-off locations and make a laminated card with handy hints for recycling. Fill the bin with a mixture of fancy foods in recyclable cans and bottles for a special gift.

Check local hardware stores or shop online for stacking recycling bins that save space. They are available in all colors and descriptions. Some collapse flat for easy storage and some come with wheels for easy movement.

If you have trouble finding rolling recycling bins, look for marine dock carts. They are commonly used by boaters
for hauling gear from the car to the dock. I use mine to collect recycling on the porch, then transport to our local recycling drop off centers.

The Florida Pest Management Association (FPMA) supports recycling and has some suggestions to keep recycling easy and pest free. Always rinse containers before putting them into the recycling bin. Hose down recycling bins on a regular basis to remove any food waste at the bottom of the bin or line with a plastic bag to catch any food or drink spills. Take recycling to drop off centers on a regular basis. Store recycling outside, in the garage or on the porch. Let your pest management company know where the recycling area is so they can help you plan on the best way to prevent pest problems.

Call our UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension office at 321-697-3000 to speak to a Master Gardener or 4-H department. Print the list of pest management tips from the FPMA website. Contact Osceola County Solid Waste at 407-962-1100 for more information on recycling.

Reduce, reuse and recycle are messages to help reduce solid waste, but they can also help you with gift ideas for friends or family members.

Eleanor Foerste  
Natural Resources Agent  
Osceola County Extension/University of Florida  
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane  
Kissimmee, FL 34744  
(321) 697-3000  
Fax (321) 697-3010  
efoe@osceola.org  
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu  
Date: December 4, 2005