

Annually Americans throw out 25% more waste from Thanksgiving to January 1st. During this time I hope that Belmont residents will be mindful of this fact and make an effort to reduce their trash by using some of the suggestions listed below.

Wrapping paper and gift bags can be reused and recycled. Gift wrap, boxes, bags, and other paper products can be reduced by placing gifts in useful containers, such as decorative plates, tins or baskets. Holiday gift bags can be used the following year if nametags or names are not placed or written on the bag, but tied from the handle with ribbon or string. If the bag becomes too worn it can be recycled as long as it is not made from foil. Wrapping paper except foil can also be recycled and by folding it into the bag instead of balling it up makes it easier. Ribbon and bows can be reused again if in good condition.

Holiday cards can be reused and recycled. Holiday cards as well as all occasion cards can be sent to St. Jude's Ranch for Children Recycled Card Program to be refurbished into new cards. Otherwise cards can be saved for making next year's gift tags for a fun craft, or recycled. Holiday cards can also be sent electronically as a paperless option.

Be conscious of the packaging that gifts come in. If your purchase comes in excessive packaging look for a different brand or send an email to the company expressing your disappointment with the amount of natural resources, energy and money wasted on ineffective packaging. Large companies do listen to consumers. Take notice of how Styrofoam, a difficult item to recycle, has been replaced by air pillows that can be deflated and recycled with your plastic grocery bags and other plastic film (dry cleaners bags, newspaper sleeves, overlay wrap on single use water bottles and any film with a 2 or 4 printed on it) at local supermarkets.

Cardboard and catalogues can be recycled. With online shopping gaining in popularity more households are being inundated with cardboard boxes. According to Earth911.com 90 % of all products are shipped in cardboard. Please remember to recycle by breaking down boxes into approximately 3' x 3' sections and placing under the bin or bundling together. When in doubt about placing it curbside, consider if the recycling crew can easily grip and fit it in the side pocket of the truck. All catalogues and junk mail can be recycled and if you want to reduce the amount arriving to your home go to the websites catalogchoice.org or dmachoice.org for instructions.

Lastly, think about buying a gift that will help with recycling. A reusable coffee mug or water bottle will help cut down on plastic water bottles and disposable coffee cups for commuters. Some coffee shops are offering a 'bottomless mug' program that can be purchased as a gift. Reusable lunch bags and sandwich bags are great gifts for school age children that will save on money and natural resources. Decorative reusable grocery bags can be used as a gift bag and then later to hold groceries. Other gift ideas that require little packaging include tickets to the movies, theater, passes to a museum or gift cards.

Happy Holidays and please remember to reduce, reuse and then recycle during this time as well as throughout the year. Thanks for recycling, improving the environment and quality of life for all!

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