

Sustainability this Season

For many, the holidays are one of the most anticipated times of the year. The season is a time to festively decorate, gather with our loved ones over delicious meals, and express feelings of gratitude and appreciation. However, while the holiday months can be a great source of joy, they can also be a major source of waste!

Did you know that the most waste is created between Thanksgiving and New Year's each year? This waste includes food, paper and plastic products, and various non-reusable sources of energy. Such wasteful practices contribute to the degradation of our environment, leaving our planet a little less cheerful during the seasonal months. How can you help? Challenge yourself this season to learn about and practice sustainability. This will allow you to celebrate the best time of the year to the fullest, while knowing that you've done it in the most environmentally responsible way.

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is the responsible use of environmental resources in the present, allowing for future generations to be able to meet their needs. At large this can seem like a hefty goal. One might ask themselves, "How can any one person make a difference?" However, it is important to recognize that the more people who participate in sustainable efforts, the greater the benefit for our planet.



Food for Thought

- ◆ In the past 5 years, humans have consumed more resources than in all previous history
- ◆ Americans produce 25% more yearly trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's
- ◆ Added food waste, shopping bags & packaging add an additional 1 million tons a week to our landfills
- ◆ If each American family switched to wrapping presents in reusable material, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields
- ◆ About 2.8 million plastic spoons and forks are thrown away each Thanksgiving
- ◆ Approximately 35% of Americans have an unused Christmas present located in their closet

Your Plate, Our Planet

America wastes approximately 40% of its food. That means an estimated 125-160 billion pounds of food goes to waste every year! Unfortunately, much of the food that is wasted in our country is both edible and nutritious.

According to the USDA, households contribute the largest percentage of food waste each year – especially around the holiday season. Interestingly, only 5% of food is composted in the United States. As a result, food is the largest contributor of solid waste. When this waste sits in landfills, and unused food begins to break down, the resulting environmental effect is undesirable to the health of our planet.

In addition to the environmental impact, food waste also contributes to the loss of energy and economic resources. When food is wasted, so is the time, effort and money of producers and consumers. Given the high demand of resources that is need for food production, it is worth it for everyone to learn what they can do to live more sustainably.

Six Seasonal Tips for Sustainability

Tip #1: Shop locally! Sustainable eating means choosing foods that are grown with respect for our environment. Choosing locally grown items minimizes the use of resources for food transportation and reduces the total amount of shopping miles you must travel. Furthermore, this is a great way to support your local community. Check out your local farmer's market for nutritious, in season items such as carrots, potatoes, pumpkins, chestnuts, figs, prickly pears, and garlic. In season items tend to taste better and retain more nutrients!



Tip #2: Ditch the paper products and plasticware during your festive meals. Avoid serving food and drinks using disposable tableware. This practice will help you to save money and reduce this season's environmental impact.

Tip #3: Avoid purchasing and/or preparing excessive amount of food. Do you typically have a surplus of leftovers at the end of holiday meals? If the answer is yes, consider cutting back on the amount of food that is made this year. Make a list of what you and each guest plans to bring to the table. This will help to avoid excessive portions being made and the inevitable waste that comes with dinner parties. Alternatively, seek out local donations centers as a sustainable way to contribute your excess food to the less fortunate.

Tip #4: When grocery or gift shopping, bring along your own reusable bags. On average, American families take home about 1,500 plastic shopping bags each year! By following this tip, you will ultimately help to reduce the amount of waste produced by single use bags. To help you follow out this practice, keep your reusable bags in the car.

Tip #5: Think green when selecting gifts! Environmentally friendly presents include...

- ◆ Reusable water bottles and/or straws
- ◆ Garden seeds for the following summer
- ◆ Gift certificates for local diners, theaters, and farmers' markets
- ◆ A set of wooden cooking utensils instead of plastic ones
- ◆ Reusable mason jars or a lunch box to carry one's favorite snacks in

Tip #6: Use creative materials to wrap presents in this year! Old fabric, maps, newspapers, sheet music, reusable tins and/or baskets would all add a creative element to the gifts you plan to give. Also available in many local stores are reusable Christmas bags.



In a Holiday Nut Shell...

Let your mantra of the season be, "Less waste, same holiday cheer!" Practicing sustainability has endless benefits for both the environment and you as a consumer. By following a few of the suggested tips this year, you will actively be contributing to the health of our planet. Furthermore, these tips can help you to simplify your life during the busy holiday season. So, challenge yourself – don't let the most wonderful time of year be the most wasteful.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/features/greenholidays/index.html>

United States Environmental Protection Agency
<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics>

Sustainable Holiday Greening Guide
<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/sustainvu/wp-content/uploads/sites/69/Sustainable-Holiday-Greening-Guide-2016.pdf>

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions.
To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).