



# The Daily Gleaner

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## Think Outside the Gift Box

The unmistakable signs of Christmas can already be seen throughout the city. Trees, decorations and wreaths all lit up with multicoloured lights, and the stores are getting busier and busier by the day.

Christmas is always an exciting time of year, yet at the same time it does bear a heavy environmental footprint. There are many things we can do to reduce our impact during the holiday season, such as: use LED lights; put lights on timers; buy local gifts and food (with minimal packaging); and use reusable gift bags (rather than paper).

Another option, that might not be quite as obvious, is to rethink your gift giving ideas. Every year there are people on our list who seem impossible to buy for. Most likely because they already have everything they need or maybe even everything they want. It seems wasteful to buy stuff that later may only get re-gifted or put in a yard sale. Almost everything we buy has a carbon footprint, from the manufacturing to the packaging, and then often inter-continental delivery on top of that. So why not think outside the box?

I do love shopping, but in recent years this love has been eclipsed by the call and desire to reuse and recycle. I buy almost all of my clothing second-hand and have a lot of fun doing it. Last year for Christmas I gave my girlfriends gift certificates for my favourite second-hand shop. That way, we could enjoy shopping together, searching for that special “find”, getting a bargain, and recycling, all at the same time.

Another way to reuse and recycle is to make gifts, gift cards and/or wrapping paper from items you already have around the house. And if not homemade, then handmade also makes a wonderful gift. In Fredericton, we have many artisans and craftspeople with a variety of wares to choose from. Many artists prefer to use locally produced materials in their products, which also lowers the product's environmental footprint.

This year my brother, who is hosting Christmas at his house, decided that since we are all adults now we don't really need to buy things for each other. Instead we are having a Yankee Swap. So we each only buy one present (instead of eight) and on Christmas morning we'll have fun swapping for the “best” gift.

And remember, a gift doesn't have to be something physical. I once gave a gift that consisted of an evening out and babysitting services to give a couple some precious time alone together. For the busy beaver in your life, you can give them a coupon for housecleaning. And for the person on your list who you need to spend more time with, just give them your time – the promise of a special day just for them.

Something else I began doing the past few years is making a gift donation. For example, the Fredericton Homeless Shelter has a “Buy a Night” campaign where you can make a donation in someone else's name. You can give to your favourite charity or to an organization that has special meaning to the recipient. Last

year my friend gave me a beautiful pewter ornament for which the proceeds of the sale went to forest conservation efforts, and the ornament is something I can keep forever.

Finally, there is the true gift of giving which is giving back. Please do not forget that many community organizations need extra help at this time of year. Give back by volunteering at a local charity – there are lots of options – and giving your time has no environmental footprint! Happy Holidays!

*Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who takes on everyday challenges to lower her environmental footprint. Find out how to lower yours at [www.greenmattersfredericton.ca](http://www.greenmattersfredericton.ca)*