



# The Daily Gleaner

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## **In Search of a Simple Christmas**

There are many words for simple: easy, uncomplicated, trouble-free, and undemanding. Most would agree that none of these are synonymous with Christmas. Was Christmas ever simple? Should it be? What I do know is that in an informal survey (mostly mothers, and husbands of these mothers), I found that I am not the only one searching for something different, more peaceful, and less demanding than what is typically experienced. National surveys consistently show that people feel burdened by the commercialization of the season and want more of what really matters . . . not just more stuff.

To put an environmental face on the desire for holiday simplicity, one only has to look at the outcomes of simplifying our Christmas experiences. This includes everything from gifts and wrapping, to decorating and entertaining. Dare I propose the clichéd phrase ‘less is more’ this Christmas?

This week many people will begin to decorate their homes for the season and ‘less is more’ can be perfectly applied. Just because you have copious strings of Christmas lights doesn’t mean you have to use them, particularly if they are not LED. Take the low-energy route and choose one tree in your yard that makes a statement when lighted. If you want to forgo traditional lights altogether, go to the Market and buy a decorated wreath for your front door or a planter for your front step, and use an energy efficient spotlight to show it off.

One of the biggest reasons people yearn to simplify the holiday season is to reduce consumption and waste. The Christmas season generates an exceptional amount of waste, and often adds clutter to our homes that ends up stressing us out. As such, I challenge you to buy gifts that are useful and of high quality so they last and are used for many years to come. And there is still time to exchange names in your family or group of friends – this will reduce the number of gifts you have to buy, wrap and ship. Or over Christmas, when family members are all home, exchange names for next year!

Do you have family members who want for nothing, or if they need something through the year they just buy it themselves? If so, why not start something new and meaningful with them and donate money in their name to a local charity, or through Plan Canada ([www.plancanada.ca](http://www.plancanada.ca)) purchase a gift for a family in a less developed nation. For example: a mango tree, a mosquito net, a goat, or a home birthing kit, to name a few. I assure you, when you give a gift such as this (or one is given in your name) you will get a glimpse inside yourself of something sacred and true. Neither you nor the recipient will feel disappointed or deprived, in fact, you will both feel that something significant has happened in this exchange.

How can we return to the sacred, reduce family expectations, feel healthy and fulfilled at the same time? Well, maybe we can start by cutting ourselves some slack and taking 15 minutes now, at the end of November, to really figure out which Christmas traditions ‘make’ our family’s experience. Ask your

children what their favourite part of the Christmas season is. You may be surprised to learn it is not parties and gifts, but instead simple things like helping with Christmas baking and decorating the tree.

Like many, I'm searching for something more – or maybe it is really something less? I believe that this search will yield a more beneficial environmental outcome as well. There is still time to change your practices this Christmas – just pick one or two things to do differently - more simply. You will likely find that as you simplify, you are treading lighter on the earth as well.

In 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' Charlie Brown yells the question loud with his hands in the air: "ISN'T THERE ANYONE WHO KNOWS WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT?!". Linus replies, "Sure Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about." If you need reminding, go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search 'Linus Christmas Monologue'.

May you enjoy the many simple blessings of the season.

*Sonya Hull is a consultant working on the City of Fredericton's environmental portfolio. For more ways to celebrate Christmas with the earth in mind check out [www.eartheasy.com/give\\_sustainchristmas.htm](http://www.eartheasy.com/give_sustainchristmas.htm) or [www.greenyour.com](http://www.greenyour.com) and search 'Christmas'. The Green Matters team can be reached at [greenmatters@fredericton.ca](mailto:greenmatters@fredericton.ca).*