

## Give Well

By Kristan Cockerill

It is that time of year when thoughts turn to family, friends, social gatherings, and gift giving. We all love the spirit of the holiday season, but perhaps we might think a bit more about how we express that spirit.

Do we give a gift just because it is expected? Or do we give gifts that truly express our appreciation for one another? This season, let's expand our thinking about the gifts we purchase so that they reflect our values. Let's choose gifts that not only please the recipients but also help to sustain our community and our Earth. Let's think "sustainable" when we do our holiday shopping this year.

There are many gift options that are fun, creative, and sustainable. Look for innovative objects made from recycled materials, such as a colorful "news" bracelet made from recycled magazines or a beautiful chess set crafted from car parts. There are local artisans who produce wonderful items. Support them.

Make those traditional fruit and nut baskets or bottles of wine organic, and if possible make them local. Spoil someone special with chemical-free spa products like bubble bath and moisturizer. Give those practical folks on your list compact fluorescent light bulbs, and let them garner the energy savings.

If you want to be even more sustainable, don't think "stuff" when shopping. Instead, give an alternative gift. For the animal lover on your list, donate in their name to Save a Lemur, Protect a Tiger, or any of dozens of other wildlife conservation funds. Pay for a gym membership, lift tickets, or climbing-wall access for your favorite athlete. You might give the gift of food to needy preschool classes in a friend's name. Give a membership to a Community Supported Agriculture program, and your loved one will be reminded of your generosity with each food box.

When you give your gift, think about packaging as well. Use recycled newspaper or brown grocery bags instead of brand-new glossy wrapping paper. Help the kids decorate with crayons, and it will mean even more to the recipient that you spent time, not just money.

Instead of increasing our stress levels with a dread sense of obligation in our gift giving, let's find the joy again and select our gifts with care and intention, both for the person we care about and for our community.

For more ideas go to:

Shop Green at MSN <http://shopping.msn.com/content/shp/?ctId=8371>

The Green Gift Guide <<http://www.greengiftguide.com>>

EcoBusiness Links <<http://ecobusinesslinks.com>>