

I'M DREAMING OF A...

Green CHRISTMAS

By KATHY BUCKWORTH PHOTO BY STEVE UHRANEY

For many years, a “Green Christmas” meant that there was no snow on the ground, which had both its good (no shovelling!) and bad (a white blanket of the fluffy stuff IS Christmas) sides. But the new Green Christmas only has an upside. Now it’s “Think Green” as in ‘environmentally friendly,’ no matter what the weather is doing outside.

Being environmentally conscious doesn’t mean trading away all the joy and indulgences of the season. You don’t have to sit in the dark, with homemade gifts made from old socks, while feasting on raw organic carrots, as one friend feared when I raised the subject. The good news is, you don’t have to take it that far to make a difference.

Leslie Garrett, award-winning journalist and author of *The Virtuous Consumer: Your Essential Shopping Guide for a Better, Kinder, Healthier World (And one your kids will thank us for!)*, discovered that she could adjust her approach to the holidays, while still keeping traditions and a festive air alive. “I’m a sucker for the holidays. I love the music, the excitement, the constant supply of home-baked cookies. But, like so many others, I’m increasingly dismayed at how our holidays have been hijacked by product marketers. It’s time to put the hope back in the holidays — hope for a better future and hope for a healthier planet,” says Garrett.

Where to start? Just about everywhere. Here are some suggestions Garrett offers:

THE TREE: If you opt for a live tree, go local and organic. LocalHarvest (www.localharvest.org) should be able to point you in a greener direction. Local farms also often offer wreaths and other decorations. Be sure to recycle your tree, or replant it.

If you choose to go with a faux fir, rest easy. Sure they’re made of a petroleum product, probably in some far-away place like China, but they’re also a symbol of reuse.

THE DECORATIONS: If you’ve got kids, you’ve got all you need for a decorated home. Homemade paper chains, play dough stars on gold string, pine cones decorated with glitter glue —they all add up to homespun charm. Light up with eco-friendly LEDs.

THE GIFTS: Build your own craft kits. You can include fabric, buttons, knitting needles, a crochet hook, whatever else is needed, along with instructions on how to proceed. Other ideas for “build your own” kits include art kits, tool kits, and gardening kits. Mix in some of your own favourites.

GIFT + STORY: Instead of new jewellery, pass along a favourite piece to your teen—along with a story of when you got it, where you wore it, even a photograph of you wearing it.

PEACE: It’s more than appropriate that you can really offer the gift of peace. Peace Bonds from Non-violent Peaceforce, an organization endorsed by no less than the Dalai Lama himself, puts volunteers on the ground in areas of conflict to act as unofficial peacekeepers.

SHOP ONLINE: Not only are you more likely to find options for eco-friendly or purpose-driven gifts online, but the practice of shopping online in itself is eco-friendly, according to the non-profit Centre for Energy and Climate Solutions. On their site (www.cool-companies.org) they point out, “Shipping 10 pounds of packages by overnight air — the most energy-intensive delivery mode

— used 40 percent less fuel than driving roundtrip to the mall. Ground shipping by truck uses just one - tenth the energy of driving yourself.”

If you do decide to go the mall route, do what King City Mom Ingrid Kasaks does, to do your part. “I use my own bag instead of all those cheap store bags or try only using one big bag and telling the cashiers I will put things in my other bag.”

THE WRAPPING: You no doubt already reuse gift bags. You may even wrap the occasional gift in the Saturday cartoons or your child’s artwork. If you have many gifts to wrap, visit the local newspaper office, which will often give away or sell the “ends” of newsprint rolls (they’re also great to have on hand for kids’ colouring projects). Kids can stamp the paper and colour it, or you can simply add a small branch of evergreen and a pinecone, tied together with a festive red ribbon. Mississauga resident Cathy Conte gets creative and uses comics from the weekend paper to wrap gifts, year round. “I think that’s a contribution and people love it at the same time,” she says.

You can find more of these easy-to-implement planet-friendly suggestions in the chapter entitled “The Virtuous Consumer Guide to a Greener Christmukkah”. Or visit Leslie Garrett’s website at www.virtuousconsumer.com

The bottom line is that we can all find ways to move towards a greener Christmas; I’m looking at turning my newly found earth friendly solutions into a stress reducer by lowering my gasoline consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by declining invitations to relatives or friends whom I really didn’t want to see...or even re-using my wine glass when I switch from red, to white. We all have to start somewhere. **GOODLIFE**