



PRACTICAL WAYS TO CREATE MEANING

## Add Some Green to Your Winter

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Reclaim your holidays this year by giving gifts that reflect your values. If one of those values is ecological concern, give gifts of green. They do good things for the earth, send a message about your values, and may even shrink your family's and friends' carbon footprints for years to come.

Below are ideas for practical environmental gifts - from the simple to the dramatic. Enjoy!

### Electricity

One of the **easiest and smartest investments** you can make in future generations is switching your family to like [LED light bulbs](#). These are now available at most home supply centers and come in all sorts of options for all sorts of living spaces. At this web site you can shop/get information by bulb size, by application, room type, manufacturer. Finding LEDs with an Energy Star label is the way to start. Consider wrapping a gift for Mother Earth of these bulbs and let your kids open the present.

This can be an opportunity for you to help them learn about conservation and the environment. Use the opportunity to explain that LED bulbs last than incandescent light bulbs and [use at least 75% less energy, and last 25 times longer](#), than incandescent lighting. They are available in several shades of white and a multitude of sizes and shapes. And if you have difficulty remembering to turn off your lights—and we all do sometimes!—consider investing in some [motion sensor switches](#) from your local hardware store.

Another possible gift for Mother Earth, your family or friends are **power strips**. You plug in your appliances and then you can turn them fully off when they're not in use, which not only prevents wasteful energy consumption but also lowers your energy bill. In fact, new [smart power strips](#) (<http://bit.ly/ZyofQ>) costing as much as \$40 can pay for themselves in just *six weeks*, by turning off all current to devices that are plugged in, but not in use. (And if you want to take it a step further, you can rig it to a [remote control](#) that allows you to turn it off from a distance!)

Another, simpler idea is a clothes-drying rack, which can be purchased at most hardware stores. Dryers, like all appliances, require lots of energy to do their work, operating at an average annual cost of [\\$150-200](#). This [web site](#) lets you figure the cost of many appliances. See for yourself.

### Water

Many **low-flow showerheads** can reduce the amount of shower water you use by 50% to nearly 70%. *These should be available at any local hardware store.* For more reading on how low-flow

showerheads can reduce water flow without comprising the quality of your shower, we recommend [this article](http://bit.ly/bYcnjI) (<http://bit.ly/bYcnjI>) by home improvement guru Don Vandervort.

Likewise, **low-flow faucet aerators** reduce the amount of excess water you use when washing your hands or dishes. Like low-flow showerheads, they can be purchased at a local hardware store and make a great stocking stuffer.

## Food and gardening

According to the [Leopold Center at Iowa State University](#) the average piece of food travels **1,494 miles** before you eat it. Thankfully, there are lots of ways to cut that number down to a more practical size.

Many Iowa cities host [Farmer's Markets](#) (<http://bit.ly/bllpEZ>), which sell produce that travels up to 1/92 the distance of conventionally grown produce. Many, but not all, Farmer's Markets also go into the winter, making local produce a great gift possibility.

And while we're talking about delicious, Iowa-grown food, signing up your family, or gifting a membership to a CSA—or [Community Supported Agriculture](#) (<http://bit.ly/MtaxP>)—is a great way to give a personal, meaningful gift while also providing the receiver with great food, supporting a community farmer and drastically reducing the amount of miles your food travels.

If you want to reduce the miles your food travels even more, you can always grow it yourself—even during the wintertime! [EarthBox](#), a fantastic [container gardening system](#) allows you to grow food year round and makes a fantastic gift to those with green minds *or* green thumbs.

## Biking

Even though bike gifts may not strike you as a traditionally “environmental” gift, there's no doubt that doing all you can to encourage biking goes a long way to reducing carbon emissions.

There are all kinds of ways you go in this category, ranging from homemade coupons (to bike [RAGBRAI](#) (<http://ragbrai.com/>) with friends, for example) to purchasing a bicycle for a child or spouse. ([This link will](#) help you find your nearest bike shop.)

Battery-free bike lights help make your bike even more green, eliminating the need to install new batteries by using magnets to tap into the momentum of your bike and power the lights. Try [this company](#) to get started.

## Other gifts

### *For the shop and for outdoors...*

Solar-powered lanterns or tiki torches

[Arbor Day Gift Tree program](#) (<http://www.arborday.org/>)

Solar-powered shed lights

Solar-powered ovens

Water purification pumps  
Rotary charged flashlights  
Push reel mowers

***For the home...***

Clothes drying racks  
Cast-iron skillets (their durability makes them a green gift)  
Pressure cooker (they use less energy than other pots and pans)  
Mini-garden stacker kit  
Soy candles  
Stainless steel water bottles  
A water filter (get bottled water taste without bottled water waste)  
Organic cotton towels/dish rags  
Consider switching a magazine subscription to an e-zine—they're paper-free and often come with bonus features  
A non-toxic cleaning kit  
A compost bin

***For a special occasion...***

Iowa-made wine basket  
A locally woven picnic basket  
Reusable utensil sets (found with a google search)

***For the soul...***

A charitable donation on behalf of the recipient  
Plant a tree in the name of a loved one  
Adopt a pet from a local shelter at no additional cost to the environment (*Warning: This gift idea is strictly for parents. Pets take a huge time and money commitment; do not give a pet to someone unless they agree, you know they are committed, and they join you at the shelter to pick out the pet.*)

***For the teens...***

If you want your teen to have a cell phone, consider a refurbished one  
If he/she has an iPhone, [refurbished covers](#) might be a step in the right direction

***For the family...***

Fair trade coffee  
Fair trade chocolates  
Organic tea  
Basket of organic granola and other snack food  
Reusable shopping bags filled with local foods such as jellies and jams from the Farmer's Market  
Membership to a local bike library  
A plastic bag dryer (to help reuse plastic bags after they've been washed)

### **For Kids...**

[EcoArt Earth-Friendly](#) Art & Craft Experiences for 3- to 9-year-olds (lots more links to check as well)

Green toys are increasingly popular in local, independent toy stores and gift shops; look around!

Other environmentally friendly gift ideas are found throughout this website and when you google “environmental gifts.” A word of caution, however: To qualify as an environmental gift, it must be something that will be used or consumed. Buy local when possible, and try to avoid the gadget and gizmo gifts that often end up in the trash.

### **What are your ideas?**

If you think of something brilliant that we haven't included on our list, let us know!

Visit our [Facebook page](#) for more ideas and to contribute your own!  
(<https://www.facebook.com/ReclaimYourHolidays?fref=ts>)

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