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I'm Dreaming of a "Green" Christmas

by Brad Freidhof - Naturalist Johnson County Conservation Board

The Holiday Season is in full swing. For many of us that means shopping, cooking and preparing for family festivities...but should that be the focus of the holidays?

As I traverse the malls and box stores with my wife looking for those precious gifts for our children I ponder the fact that these "gifts" we are purchasing will just become more "stuff" in the months following the holidays. Many of the toys break or are simply discarded because they aren't interesting anymore. Some of the toys end up becoming trash, others are boxed away in hopes that they will somehow become interesting once again. Are gifts and shopping the focus of your holidays? Have we lost focus of our holidays? Although this thought floats around in the back of my mind, I mindlessly follow the societal norm and continue to shop.



These are examples of homemade salsa, peaches and chili canned for the gift-giving season.

Recently an e-mail came across my desktop that really grabbed my interest. It was titled: "Reclaim Your Holidays." Wow! I'm not alone in my thoughts about the commercialization of our holidays. I opened the e-mail sent by the University of Northern Iowa Center for Energy and Environmental Education and read it. The goal of "Reclaim Your Holidays" is to help Iowan's create more meaningful holidays and reduce our seasonal impact on the environment. That goal is simple in thought, but difficult for most Americans to implement.

Before you can begin reclaiming your holidays you must answer these simple questions:
What are your favorite parts of the holiday?
What traditions of this holiday are most important to you?
What parts of the holiday routine deplete rather than nourish?

By closely considering your answers, you can begin to reshape your holiday so that it creates less stress and more enjoyment.

A lot of my answers focused around my religion, decorating the tree, sharing stories about past holidays, meals and treats, and my dislike of the shopping headache.

How could I take these answers and mold them into a less stressful holiday season? I had few ideas that I had already began implementing for past holidays. One example combines two of my pastimes: gardening and cooking. These hobbies have led me to canning homemade salsa that I give away, as holiday gifts, to family and friends. This year I expanded my canning efforts and also put up peaches and homemade chili which will diversify my gift options and fill my friends' pantries. Not only are they homemade, but the products are also locally grown in my own backyard or right here in Johnson County. I also involve my kids in picking apples and

processing them to make apple pies. Many people find making homemade pies a tedious task, but it's a true joy to me and a gift that can be appreciated by anyone.

The "Reclaim Your Holidays" website (www.reclaimyourholidays.org), provides further gift giving ideas such as: giving tickets to a local concert or fine arts event, providing your services (tutoring, computer assistance) or taking someone for an outdoor adventure at your expense. I would also encourage people to revive old memories by converting VHS or older format video to DVD's or other digital formats and doing the same with family photos. Not only does this save these memories, but it also creates an opportunity for families to sit down to relive these great memories and share them with younger generations. You might even get a few laughs from the kids watching old Dad playing football or acting in a high school production of "Oklahoma."

The goal of a "green" Christmas doesn't have to end with gift ideas. Consider your wrapping paper options and what creative alternatives could be used. You could try using the comics page as wrapping paper.

I hope this article will encourage you to consider your focus this holiday season and what impact you choose to have. Please visit www.reclaimyourholidays.org for more ideas and share your ideas on their facebook page - "Reclaim Your Holidays."

I am dreaming of a "green" Christmas this year.