



Extension News Column

University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service, www.uaf.edu/ces/fycit@uaf.edu, 907-474-5211, FAX 907-474-6885

Date: Nov. 9, 2011
To: Mary Beth Smetzer, community news editor, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), msmetzer@newsminer.com, and people@newsminer.com
From: Roxie Dinstel
Re: Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3
Additional Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

The holidays are known for their excess. Ribbon, paper, ornaments and too much food all add up to lots of consumption. If you are trying to be a bit “greener” this year, you may be looking for ways to make sustainable choices. Our friends at the American Cleaning Institute offer a list of ways to have a greener Christmas. Just a little thoughtful effort and imagination can keep the celebration high and the environmental impact low.

A real tree can be a more sustainable option than an artificial tree. Because the latter is often made from petroleum products (PVC), when discarded, an artificial tree ends up in a landfill, where the plastic content makes it last forever. A real tree, on the other hand, can be turned into mulch, which protects plantings and returns the tree to Mother Earth.

Instead of a large cut tree, consider a smaller, live potted tree. Depending on your circumstances, you may be able to reuse the tree for two or three years without having to plant it or repot it. Once it gets too tall or too heavy for indoor use, plant it outside.

In a household where someone suffers from allergies or asthma, an artificial tree may be a better choice because it doesn't have the allergens of a real tree. To ensure a longer life for this type of tree, follow the tree manufacturer's instructions for removing dirt and dust. Invest in a storage bag or bin so that when the season is over, the tree can be stored in a dust-free environment.

Switch from standard holiday lights to the new, longer-lasting, lower-energy-use LED lights. Visit www.earth911.com to find out how to recycle your old strings of holiday lights. There are programs that remove and recycle the copper, glass and plastic these lights contain. Or, several of our local stores offer reduced prices for new lights if you turn in your old strings.

When doing your holiday shopping, take along some canvas tote bags so you can leave the paper and plastic shopping bags in the store.

Wrap green. Avoid foil or metallic wrapping papers, as they are difficult to recycle. Instead, look for eco-friendly gift wrap made from recycled paper. When unwrapping large gifts, save the paper for reuse; it can often be cut down for smaller presents. Creased wrapping paper can be ironed flat. And if you keep the use of adhesive tape to a minimum, more of the wrapping paper will be reusable.

Ribbons and bows are ultimately destined for the garbage bin. So, give them as many lives as you can before they are trash-bound. Fabric ribbon, in particular, can be ironed and reused many times.

Stock up on cleaning supplies so that you don't run out during the busy holiday season. Take advantage of the concentrated products that are on the market. It's the greener alternative, because a little bit of product goes a long way and you're using less packaging while getting more cleaning power.

When the festivities are over, make sure all glass, plastic and aluminum containers from your holiday cheer go into the recycling bin. Remember that all these items can be placed in the recycling bins in the parking lot next to Patty Center, located on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. Paper and some plastics can be recycled at the Fairbanks Rescue Mission.

If your entertaining calls for plastic utensils, buy the thicker, more expensive versions. They are actually dishwasher safe, so you can reuse them many times before disposing them in the recycle bin. In the long run, this makes them a more economical choice and better for the environment than the cheaper versions.

Hold off on running the dishwasher or washing machine until it is full. Frequent, small loads waste detergent, water and energy.

Keep stain sticks and stain wipes in convenient locations around the house, so that even if the laundry has to pile up, stains can be treated promptly. This will help preserve those special holiday items so you can enjoy them again next year.

Have a green holiday!

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.