

When a

Green

Christmas

is a good thing

By N. Glenn Perrett • Photos by Lynn and Glenn Perrett

With the health of the planet in decline, not to mention our species' population approaching 7 billion, it is becoming increasingly important for everyone to significantly decrease their ecological footprints. While we may dream of a white Christmas, a green Christmas is what we all must strive for. The gifts we choose, the wrapping paper that we use, the cards that we send and our Christmas trees need to reflect our concern for the environment.

That's a Wrap!

According to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, in December Ontarians throw out "23 square kilometres of wrapping – enough to cover more than three thousand football fields." Much of this paper isn't very environmentally friendly. According to the California Integrated Waste Management Board, in the United States an astounding "38,000 miles of ribbon alone is thrown out each year – enough to tie a bow around the Earth!"

Fortunately, there are plenty of green alternatives to the environmentally unfriendly ways that many people present gifts. If you have young children you can have them create wrapping paper. We save the manila sheets of paper often used to pack items sent in the mail. After flattening out the paper we have Gleannan and Liam make festive wrapping paper. Not only does this incorporate one of the 3Rs and allow our children to display their creative talents, but the recipients of the gifts enjoy the one-of-a-kind wrapping paper.

Other ways to minimize the environmental impacts caused by wrapping paper include:

- removing wrapping paper carefully and reusing it again
- wrapping gifts using the colour comics or the photo spreads in the newspaper
- using reusable gift bags for presents
- decorating plain paper bags and cardboard boxes to put gifts in
- hiding unwrapped gifts and giving the recipient clues (written or verbal) of where to look
- giving presents in reusable baskets, glass jars or towels
- wrapping gifts in old road maps

Gleannan and Liam used the book "Draw Christmas Thumbprints" to create this festive bag.



Eco-Cards & Tags

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment also estimates that Ontarians discard approximately "288 million Christmas cards". That's a lot of trees. You can reduce your impact on the environment while sending your holiday greetings in a variety of ways. Send Christmas greetings by email or phone those on your Christmas list. If you buy cards, purchase ones made from recycled paper. Obtaining cards from environmental groups helps these organizations protect the planet. You can also make your own cards by reusing scrap paper around the house. Gleannan and Liam use old computer paper to create beautiful Christmas cards. There are several books that provide lots of information pertaining to creating your own cards. And there is no need to buy gift tags as creating tags from last year's Christmas cards is both an economical and environmentally responsible thing to do.

The Greening of Our "Tree"

For two decades, Lynn and I have avoided the traditional choices for a Christmas tree. Both real and artificial trees have serious impacts on the environment. Artificial trees are made of metal and plastic. When they are discarded they take up space in a landfill where they don't readily biodegrade.

Real trees aren't very eco-friendly either. Pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers are commonly used on Christmas tree farms. Cutting down the trees and transporting them, often great distances, to market causes considerable pollution and uses lots of energy. When Christmas is over many of these trees are deposited in the local landfill where they take up valuable space.

For years we have created our own Christmas "tree" from evergreen boughs from trees around our property – many that required pruning. Sometimes a single branch from a white pine makes a nice "tree." While the tree isn't as thick as commercially grown ones, it looks nice, smells good and is perfect for putting gifts under. Other times our tree is created using several boughs from evergreen trees. Lynn, Gleannan, Liam and I enjoy wandering the property in search of suitable boughs from trees that could do with a little pruning. When Christmas is over we place the branches next to the bird feeder where they provide shelter for some of our feathered neighbours.