



# SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

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Island County, Washington

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## How to Enjoy a Green Holiday

December is a wonderful time of year, when we can all celebrate with friends and family, and give gifts to those we care about. This issue is meant to share ideas on how to enjoy the holiday season and yet make choices in our activities that will have the least negative impact on our environment. We hope you enjoy this issue, and wish you the happiest of holidays and a happy and healthful new year!

## Which Tree is the Best Choice?

Which is best, a live tree or artificial? This is a difficult choice for many, and there is no choice that is guaranteed to be “correct”. Here are some things to consider when choosing a tree for your home.

### Live Tree

The smell of a fresh pine, spruce or fir in your living room certainly evokes the season, and the ritual of picking the perfect tree is a great family tradition. In our area, we do not have to rely on trees that are trucked in from long distances, as do people in many other states, and most that are available are grown locally on land that is not usually suited for better agricultural uses. These trees are usually raised as a sustainable crop, and trap more carbon dioxide than other tree forests. If buying from a tree lot or tree farm, check to see if they have been sprayed with pesticides, which you may not want to bring into your living room.

The pros of a live tree include not only the wonderful smell, but that they are also biodegradable, and can be chipped into mulch, compost, or wood chips for re-use in the yard or garden. If you don't have a chipper or shredder at home, some organizations like local scout troops collect trees at the end of the season to be turned into mulch for a small fee. You can also buy a living tree at a nursery, planting it in your yard at the end of the season. If you do so, follow the nursery's instructions as to how long you can have it indoors, and how to acclimate it to being outdoors again prior to planting. Think about how close it is to the house, whether the roots will impact a septic system drainfield, and whether it will block views you can't live without in the future.



Some organizations, like the Adopt-A-Stream Foundation, allow you to rent a 3' – 4' Sitka Spruce, Western Red Cedar, or Douglas Fir. When you return it after the holidays, it will be planted next to a salmon stream. For information, see: [http://www.streamkeeper.org/aasf/SITE\\_DIRECTORY.html](http://www.streamkeeper.org/aasf/SITE_DIRECTORY.html)

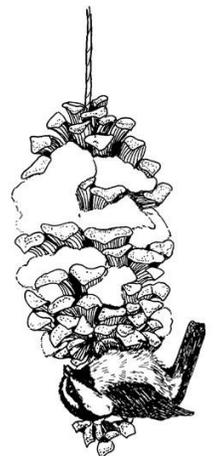
## **Artificial Tree**

Another popular choice is the artificial tree, available in many sizes and style, with some already strung with lights. For people with asthma or allergies, an artificial tree will cut down on exposure to pollen and mold. The advantages of an artificial tree are that they can be put up earlier in the season; they don't dry out or shed needles; they can be used year after year; and in the long run are a less expensive choice. The disadvantage is that they are often shipped long distances, usually from China; they are made of plastics and metals, including lead, and are not biodegradable and usually not recyclable. You also need to find a place to store the tree during when the season is over; they are not as aesthetically pleasing and do not have that fresh tree odor;

## **Creative Gifts for Friends and Family**

There are so many gifts that you can give that have the environment in mind, and also can be more interesting and useful than gifts bought at the mall. Of course, if your favorite teenage nephew was hoping for the latest video game, he might not appreciate a gift of homemade jam. But many adults exchange small gifts with friends, family and co-workers, and might like something made by you than another Santa coffee mug. Here are some ideas on simple environmentally-thoughtful gifts you can make or purchase:

- Reusable food storage containers: Glass containers with snap-close plastic or glass lids are found in many different stores these days, and in a variety of sizes. These are great alternatives to zip-lock sandwich and storage bags, which are usually thrown in the garbage after one use. Fill some of these with candy or your own special cookies, and you'll have a gift that will actually be used for years to come.
- Canvas or recycled grocery bags. No longer boring and plain, these are now available in a number of attractive designs and styles. Many new bags use materials recycled from other products, like plastic made from milk containers, and have fascinating labels explaining what they are made from. See if you can find bags that are made in the United States for added local benefit!
- Native plants: Many give a plant gift like poinsettias, which look pretty until their leaves drop, and then usually die. Consider giving the gift of a native plant. Decorate the pot to give it the festive look, and include instructions of how and where to plant in the yard, as well as information on why it is beneficial. Information on landscaping with local native plants can be found at <http://www.wnps.org/landscaping/index.html> or <http://green.kingcounty.gov/GoNative/Index.aspx>
- Dustless cloth: You can find fancy glass jars at your local thrift store, check your local antique store for an old and interesting jar. Spread several drops of lemon oil on the inside of the jar, preferably one with a screw-top lid. Put a cloth or soft rag in the jar and close it tightly. The dust cloth can be stored in the jar between washings or uses. Note: thrift stores often have an area where you can find unused fabrics with interesting designs or colors for the cloth. Cut a thin strip from the cloth to use as a "ribbon" for the outside of the jar.
- Bird Attractions: For the wildlife lover, make a long string of cranberries and plain popcorn for hanging on a tree, providing decorations that the birds can also enjoy. Or stuff pine cones with peanut butter and wild bird seeds. You can attach string for hanging, and hang them from branches, where you can watch the birds from your window.
- Field guides: There are several inexpensive field guides for your nature lover. These can enhance their experiences when walking in the forest, along trails, or on the beach. For those who like to go on beach walks, Periwinkle Press publishes guides for intertidal invertebrates and for sea weeds / sea grasses. You can see these guides at [http://www.beachwatchers.wsu.edu/ezidweb/ezid\\_cards/index.htm](http://www.beachwatchers.wsu.edu/ezidweb/ezid_cards/index.htm) These can be found at several local bookstores and gift shops, or you can contact Periwinkle Press at the email provided in the link.



## Sustainable Stocking Stuffers

Stockings come in all shapes, colors and sizes. It can actually take quite a bit to fill up some of the stocking put out for the holidays. Here are a few ideas on small-sized parcels of caring to honor the tradition and keep Puget Sound in mind.



Caring sentiments from family leave a lasting impression. Some families today make it a tradition to write thoughtful notes about how they value someone and put those in each person's stocking. They can be handwritten on beautiful, recycled-content paper or produced on computer software programs that come on most computers. The most important thing is to let others know how we feel.

Another idea is to give people the gift of time. Fill someone's stocking with certificates for homemade meals, a night at the art gallery, a gutter cleaning, a week's work of whining-free dishwashing and whatever else you know someone will appreciate. If you choose to give a shared gift, offer to leave behind all electronic devices so that the other person is the center of your attention. In today's society, that is a huge gift unto itself. The key to these certificates is to actually follow-up on them and get them on calendars pretty quickly after the holiday hub bub dies down.

Lastly, fill stockings with useful items like toothbrushes, a favorite type of tea or coffee, a pomegranate or Satsuma oranges. There is little chance of these items winding up in the re-gifting pile.

## Resources

Our Favorite Green Gifts for the Holidays, Green America, November / December 2012, Green America, <http://www.greenamerica.org/pubs/greenamerican/articles/NovDec2012/green-gifts-and-traditions-from-green-america-staff-and-members.cfm>.

O, Sustainable Christmas Tree, Real Green Living Concerned Consumer, November / December 2004, Green America, <http://www.greenamerica.org/livinggreen/xmastrees.cfm>.

## Count the Birds

### **Christmas Bird Count: December 14, 2012 – January 5, 2013**

Every year, Audubon sponsors the worldwide Christmas Bird Count. Grab your binoculars and join friends and family in the 113<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count, as tens of thousands take part around the world, part of the largest Citizen Science project in existence. This is a great way to get outside and enjoy the company of others, while providing important data about the birds in the area. For more information, see <http://birds.audubon.org/about-christmas-bird-count> For information on the bird counts taking place near you, check out this site: <http://www.wos.org/cbc.html>

Information about the Pilchuck Audubon Society's bird count, for the Snohomish – south Camano area, can be found at <http://pilchuckaudubon.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page&pageid=212&sectionid=140> If you are in another area, check out the Audubon group near your location.

### **Shorebird and Seabird Surveys**

There are new citizen surveys being done to count shorebirds and seabirds. If you are interested in counting shorebirds in the Puget Sound area, check out: [http://www.ecoinst.org/ecostudies\\_pages/PFSS.html](http://www.ecoinst.org/ecostudies_pages/PFSS.html)

Information about the Puget Sound seabird survey can be found at <http://www.seattleaudubon.org/sas/WhatWeDo/Science/CitizenScience/PugetSoundSeabirdSurvey.aspx>

(Many thanks for Roxie Rochat for the above information!)

## Events

### Sound Waters: February 2, 2013

The best of old and new will combine in the upcoming 2013 Sound Waters Conference: great speakers, old friends, the energy of being together with 500 other folks passionate about our world. The keynote speaker is none other than Dr. Cliff Mass, professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Washington. You may be familiar with his voice on KPLU radio, or have seen his book, but on February 2 you can hear him in person and ask your questions. Dr. Mass's keynote address is entitled "Global Warming's Impacts on the Pacific Northwest: Separating Facts from Hype."

The 2013 Sound Waters conference will have a new venue, Oak Harbor High School. This location features a large Field House, where exhibitors old and new will have more room to display their information and talk with you. The day also features a total of 65 sessions. You can select your favorites from sustainability, wildlife, recreation, educating children, or history and culture. The hardest part is picking your top 3 choices! Learn about soils and gardening, fishing, a video tour beneath the Salish Sea, crabbing, the Elwha restoration, tsunamis debris, loons, groundwater, and the impact of noise on sea life. To see all the choices, visit the website at [www.beachwatchers.net/soundwaters](http://www.beachwatchers.net/soundwaters).

Registration will open on **January 5, 2013**. Check out the website, mark your calendar, call an old friend to share the day. Maybe this could solve that impossible holiday gift challenge, a day together learning more about our world.



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