

## **Last minute reflections on how being a conscious consumer makes for a great holiday season and a better New Year**

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A green Christmas can be as easy or as difficult as you are willing to make it. Personally, I am in favour of things that make a busy and complicated time of the year, simpler.

Some of my green Christmas conscious consumer thoughts, include:

Consider the environmental footprint of your purchase. Did it travel half way around the world to be nestled under your tree? What were the environmental implications of making and shipping it? Maybe there is a better choice.

Pick presents that minimize the use of batteries. Discarded batteries are a hazard, and I am always forgetting to take my stash of dead batteries to the disposal kiosk at the hardware store.

Try to consider unintended or unexpected benefits. For instance, our office has mainly tap water and coffee drinkers, but after a SodaStream unit was acquired so clients could have sparkling water (and we would avoid the glass bottles) all of us are drinking more water. It is just nicer to be drinking tap water made fizzy by this clever device. Definitely a SodaStream sparkling water maker for home use is on my list.

Donations to charities and environmental groups provide benefits that go beyond the tax receipt. These organizations are important watchdogs and help ensure environmental progress.

*Try to learn something new. Ask yourself, can an experience displace a purchase?*

It is all about the experience. For instance, have you ever participated in a Christmas Bird Count? They take place in most communities in North America. In Ontario, there are events in 75 locations. Visit [Ontario Nature](#) for details, just bring the kids, enthusiasm and some binoculars.

*It can be a bright, festive and green holiday.*

A natural Christmas tree is the way to go in my mind. Many are grown in Ontario, often on marginal farmland and provide income to over 500 growers. Keep in mind, growing trees provide oxygen and habitat for birds and animals. After the seasonal festiveness they keep on giving - curb collected trees are made into mulch to augment soils and protect newly planted trees.

Just as Christmas trees can be a local product, so are many food stuffs. Foods from local farmers who are conscious of their pesticide use are a smart choice. Ontario honey deserves special attention on your festive breakfast table this year. Beekeepers have had a tough time when faced with the bee-killing

neonicotinoid pesticide. The recent announcement by the Ontario government to limit the use of these pesticides is another type of seasonal gift. Without healthy populations of pollinators like bees, there will be serious consequence for most parts of Ontario's agricultural sector.

LED Christmas tree lights use a fraction of the electricity that old screw-in bulbs do. Solar powered LED outdoor lights have improved dramatically in the last few years and deserve consideration. Especially, when you do not have to find the proper extension cord.

Anyone can be a conscious consumer. It doesn't necessarily save you money but I think in most instances it will. But, you will be empowered by being aware of the impacts of your consumer behaviour. It is not about doing without but rather about making choices that benefit you, society and the environment.

You may even find these conscious consumer decisions influencing your buying habits throughout the year.

577 word count.