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UNL Family Economist: Go Green, Simplify This Holiday Season to Save Money

LINCOLN, Neb. & Going green this holiday season not only can save families money but simplify the sometimes stressful holidays, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln family economist said.

From gifts to decorations and wrapping paper, simplifying the holiday season will not only give it more meaning, but give people things they really need while helping the environment, said Kathy Prochaska-Cue, family economist in the university's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"The holidays put too much emphasis on spending money," Prochaska-Cue said. "Giving people things they need instead of all this accumulation of superficial stuff that we end up with in our houses can help lessen our carbon footprints."

For example, for the person that drinks a lot of bottled water, buy him or her a nice aluminum water bottle that can be cleaned and reused, she said.

"Ideas along that line, the whole idea of using less and recycling," she said.

Another example would be volunteering for a community service project in your community.

"Maybe instead of giving gifts this year, buy a potted Christmas tree and donate it to a park, school or public place," she said. "Come spring, this could be your family's gift to the community."

When it comes to cooking this holiday season, be sure to cook just enough for what will be needed, and if there are extras, be sure to plan for them.

"So many of the things we do are in excess, from food that gets thrown away to gifts that end up in the landfill," she said. "Going green is the whole idea of being aware of what your needs are and the difference between needs and wants. Just think about what is really important."

When wrapping presents this year, think creatively.

Prochaska-Cue recommends recycling gift bags and bows and instead of gift wrap try the Sunday comics.

Other basics for avoiding that financial holiday hangover include:

setting a budget and sticking to it,
avoiding credit cards,
cutting back on how much you plan to spend,
planning ahead and making a written list, and
taking advantage of sales.

Before buying gifts, decide how much money can be spent and make a list of all the people gifts will be given to, she said. It's also important to decide how much money can be spent on each person and carry that list throughout the holiday season.

"Also, if you have any idea that your job might be in jeopardy, go cash this Christmas, use lay-away or start off by cutting back on how much you spend to begin with," she said. "While it may sound negative, people need to be realistic."

Prochaska-Cue said she thinks people will be cutting back this Christmas.

"Hopefully we'll see the state of the economy, industry and jobs improve, but that isn't going to hit by Christmas," she said.

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