

Caring for Creation Challenge – Zero Waste Gift Wrapping

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This series is a small effort to encourage readers to learn more and think about ways that we each can contribute to caring for creation, God's gift to us.

One Way to Care for Creation: Zero waste gift wrapping

Wrapping papers lead colorful, but very short, lives. When you consider that Americans spend \$12.7 billion each year on a product that's thrown away within 60 seconds, it's pretty clear that gift wrap accounts for an enormous part of our annual holiday waste – environmentally and economically!

Did you also know most wrapping paper contains plastic? Especially paper that has glitter. Actually, all glitter unless otherwise noted is literally just tiny pieces of plastic, which also keeps wrapping paper out of the recycle bin.

Here are some zero-waste gift wrapping ideas. Start now to collect items to wrap your gifts in the coming year!

- **Brown Paper Grocery Bags** - Next time you forget your reusable shopping bag, opt for the paper bag and save it! Rip it up as needed to use as kraft paper. If you're feeling bored or extra artsy, draw or stamp designs onto it.
- **Empty Boxes** - There's a good chance you have a lot of cardboard boxes lying around the house that could be put to better use than just being tossed into the recycling bin. Why not use them to wrap your holiday gifts? Try cereal boxes, cracker boxes, Amazon boxes, and any pretty or unique box you can save.
- **Furoshiki** - Furoshiki is a minimalist way to wrap gifts in the same manner as traditional Japanese wrapping cloths typically used to wrap and/or to transport goods. You can use pretty much anything you have on hand: scarves, fat quarters, leftover fabric, etc.
- **Glass Jars/Cookie Tins** - Create a whole gift with a glass jar or metal tin. Give someone a single (or double) serving of a recipe for any baked goods, stock it with a favorite candy or chocolate covered nut, create a flower display or other homemade decoration, or even use the jar as a way to gift small items such as ChapSticks, moisturizers, a propagated plant, etc.
- **Newspaper/Magazine Pages/Old Maps** - Have some newspapers lying around? Use them as wrapping... or stuffing. Pick out interesting or funny articles to highlight and place on the top of the package. Or use pictures of fashionably dressed models in magazines. Comic pages are great for wrapping children's gifts, while old maps are great wraps for friends/family who love to travel.
- **Old Clothes** - Have an old shirt that was headed out of the door? Having trouble letting go of clothes that don't fit? Repurpose them into a sustainable wrapping paper alternative. Give it a try yourself or Google instructions to turn a shirt into gift wrap.



- **Recycled Wrapping Paper** - If you're not ready to give up wrapping paper but want to make a choice that's substantially more sustainable, give recycled and recyclable wrapping paper a try. It's not fully zero waste, because paper can't be recycled indefinitely, but it's a big step in a greener direction.
- **Reusable Fabric Bags** - You can reuse the same reusable gift wrapping bags year after year – and simply mend if they need it and reuse again. They can be monogrammed, embroidered or screen printed with the recipient's name, or attach a simple paper tag with twine.
- **Tea/Kitchen Towels** - Who couldn't use more towels? Use a tea or kitchen towel to wrap large items. Use pins, a tiny bit of thread, or tie it together to make the wrapping sturdy. With a variety of colors and patterns your gift will look beautiful under the tree.
- **Tote Bags** - Tote bags are often given out for free, so there's a small chance you might have one too many. This year keep a couple of good ones, but consider using a tote to replace wrapping paper. Add some cute tissue paper to spice it up and tie it off with twine or another sustainable material for an extra oomph. *Technically tissue paper is recyclable but it's difficult to process at most facilities — it is compostable as long as it doesn't contain foil, glitter, or other extras.*
- **Wicker Baskets/Straw Bags** – This zero waste gift wrapping also doubles as an added present. You can find these at pretty much any vintage and secondhand store. They look great with any type of sustainable gift inside and you can even top it off with some flowers, fresh baked goods, cans of homemade jam, etc.

Ties and accessories - It's estimated that Americans throw away roughly 38,000 miles worth of ribbon each holiday season. That's enough ribbon to wrap around the Earth once leaving plenty to tie a bow with. Ditch the disposable embellishments and switch to these more sustainable gift decorating options that you can reuse, recycle, repurpose, or compost later on.

- Hemp
- Leather chords or straps
- Paper tape
- Real plants — sprigs of lavender, thyme, etc.
- Reusable fabric bows
- Scrap fabric
- Twine or natural string
- Vintage or costume jewelry

Not doing the traditional wrapping paper thing feels a bit weird. But what feels even better is *not* picking up a trash bag full of paper that can't be recycled and feeling guilty about the waste.

Even if you can't do it for everything, try using a sustainable gift wrap for a few presents or one party. **Start small.** And it's okay to ask for your reusable wrapping back (that's how it's traditionally done in Japan). The feeling of accomplishing something a lot of other people aren't willing to try *and* the feeling of knowing you're helping to keep trash out of the landfill will help you along.

