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Remember to go green when wrapping your gifts

It's easy to get carried away with the spirit of the season

It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, but one can keep their environmental sensibilities and be a good gift giver.

Toronto Green Community has been sharing tips for green wrapping options for six years at the Mountain Equipment Co-op on King Street downtown, but they decided the time was right to spread the message even further.

"It's always been very popular at Mountain Equipment Co-op, but we've always seen that as our target market...We thought it was time to stop preaching to the converted and spread the message," said Paula Messina, executive director of the organization.

This year the Eco-Gift Wrapping program has been expanded to BMV books at 471 Bloor St. W. and the Yonge Eglinton Centre. The program at all three locations began Dec. 11 and runs until Dec. 24.

Toronto Green Community also ran the program as part of Ten Thousand Villages' Christmas Fair Trade show at Harbourfront Centre the last weekend of November.

Volunteers - of which more than 200 have signed up this year - use brown recycled paper to wrap presents and add paper raffia ribbon and greenery to dress up the package. They also received donations of posters from the film festival and opera to use as gift wrap.

"They may not be eco-friendly in terms of how they're created, but they would have ended up in landfill or a recycling bin if we hadn't taken them," Messina said.

The goal of the wrapping program is to educate people about how to be greener during the holidays, but it is also a fundraiser for the organization as it accepts donations for the gift wrapping service.

Messina shared other tips for those who want to wrap in an eco-friendly way at home including using gift bags, which may not be green but they can be used again and again, or she suggested finding a way to give a gift without wrapping, such as using a tea towel to wrap kitchen items. Waste during the holidays is a big problem with the annual waste from gift wrap and shopping bags in Canada equaling about 545,000 tonnes.

Even enthusiastic environmentalists can fall off the wagon and increase their eco-footprint during the holidays.

"It is easy to get carried away in the spirit of the season and forget about it," Messina said.

But small differences such as weaning off traditional wrapping paper, buying one less gift and giving electronic holiday cards can add up to make a big difference.

Tips for reducing waste from Toronto Green Community:

- * Wrap the lid and bottom of a box separately so it can be reused.
- * Collect used maps, posters, wallpaper scraps and newspapers for gift wrapping. When finished reading, use this page to wrap a gift.
- * Hunt for beautiful fabric scraps from fabric stores or ask friends who like to sew.
- * Use seed paper to wrap gifts. The receiver can plant it and remember you as their wildflowers grow.
- * Avoid using tape unless you can find biodegradable tape. Instead use ribbon, clothes pins or diaper pins to hold the wrapping together
- * Use natural ribbon, fabric ribbon, wool, twine or paper raffia.
- * Collect decorations from your garden such as flowers or pine cones or add some fragrant greenery from an evergreen tree.
- * For packing delicate items, use shredded paper from your office or crumple up old newspapers.