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GREENING THE HOLIDAYS:

16 Tips to Save Energy, Water and Stay Safe & Healthy

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With all the festivals being celebrated all over the world, there are many concerns in regards to the environment on how to make them greener. From the volume of the people participating in it, to environmental consequences and the impact to the economy, it is time we took a closer look on how to make it more sustainable. As you can imagine, with millions of participants and spectators, these events generate a lot of waste and there are ways we can do our bit to help keep Mother Earth healthier for future generations.



Tip 1: Reuse & Recycle Costumes

This has been said time and again, but perhaps this is the time to act and practice what we preach. If you look at any festive occasion, even take Halloween as an example, many families buy costumes from stores only to throw them away after it is over. This is so wasteful and leads to plastics being dumped at landfills and this pile just keeps growing every day. Make your own costumes – this also becomes a family project which will bring everyone closer together. Take a look at your wardrobe and bring out that old costume or mix and match or even trade with your friends.

Tip 2: Donate

There are many others less fortunate than us. We may think to throw away an old sweater we don't want to wear because it is out of fashion, but it could be just the thing another needy person needs this winter. This Christmas or whichever holiday you celebrate, donate your clothes, toys and warm things. We all get gifts for our respective holidays, we can definitely package the good things we have, but don't want and donate it. You can be sure someone else will treasure it more.

Tip 3: Use LEDs & Be Energy Efficient

We need light to do our daily work, but we can be smart in our choices. Every festival is celebrated with various light appliances, but light bulbs are not energy efficient. Both heat and light is emitted in all directions which means you are wasting energy, not to mention that your electricity bill is slowly racking up. LEDs emit light in a specific direction, so this means that you get more light for your money and it lasts way longer. In addition to being sturdier and more resistant to breakage, LED holiday lights also last longer and consume 70 percent less energy than conventional incandescent light strands. Going the LED route means you'll have more light this festive season, for longer.

Did You Know?

Americans spend \$2 Billion on Halloween Costumes every year.

There are half a million homeless people in the US. According to studies, 1 out of 50 children will be homeless each year.

LED lights last 35 – 50 times longer than incandescent and up to 10 times longer than fluorescents.

Tip 4: Use Light Timers and Power Strips

Timer controls allow you turn lights on and off at specific times, while staying in the holiday spirit. When decking your house in holiday lights, use timer controls to lower energy consumption and save money. The holidays can take a toll on your home's energy consumption. Plug your electronics into a power strip and turn it off to reduce your energy bills.

Tip 5: Water Conservation

We tend to become jollier when a festive season comes around. This means more cooking, cleaning up and this leads to a lot of water being wasted. There are many ways to conserve water, even during the holiday season. Using low flow fixtures and water efficient faucets can save you hundreds of gallons of water during the holiday season. Consider using an energy star certified dishwasher. Hand washing one load of dishes can use 20 gallons of water, whereas water- and energy-efficient dishwashers use as little as 4.5 gallons. Use water Judiciously- simple things like washing vegetables and fruits in a large bowl or tub of water and scrubbing them with a vegetable brush instead of using your faucet as a power-washer or turning off the faucet while brushing your teeth or washing your hands can save a lot of water. Now imagine when you have guests and relatives over and all of them keep the water running. Choose tap water over bottled – it takes about 1.5 gallons of water to manufacture a single plastic bottle (how crazy is that?) and plastic bottles are always made from new plastic material.

Did You Know?

Even when you aren't using lights and electronics, they still draw small amounts of energy - at an average cost of \$100 a year for American households? Such electric loads are called phantom loads!

The average American household uses up to 400 gallons of water a day!





Tip 6: Use Less to Create Less Waste

It's no secret that this generation loves to have more. To really shed light on things, Christmas is considered to be one of the most wasteful days in an entire year. This is when gifts are exchanged; things are bought and thrown away. From tin foil to wrapping paper, all materials used in making our homes and lives pretty for the festive season get chucked away. This means millions of tons of waste collected each year. This can get a lot to handle. The advice for this holiday season would be to use less. Cherish what you have and make an effort towards reducing wastage in your home.

Tip 7: Grow Your Own Tree

When it comes to Christmas, it is almost mandatory to have a Christmas tree. What home is complete without a beautifully decorated tree under where all the gifts are placed? But we buy them just for that one season and then throw them. Why not grow your own tree. If this is not a feasible plan, then there are many options for a green consumer. As it is biodegradable, you can chop it up and use it as mulch.

Did You Know?

It is estimated that 13,350 tons of glass is thrown out from the UK alone over the Christmas period. If recycled, this would have saved around 4,200 tons of CO₂ (also the equivalent of taking 1,300 cars off the roads for one entire year!)

There are approximately six million trees wasted over the festive season.

Tip 8: Get Creative & Make Your Own Decorations

In a way, this also refers to general wastage. When you buy products and discard them after one use, it holds no value to you. But if it comes to wrapping paper, greeting cards or even tree decorations, everything has more value and each of them would hold memories that you would like to hang on to. A card made by a loved one, a drawing as a gift – these are cherished presents that we keep as memories. This means fewer things are thrown away.

Tip 9: Use Natural Products for Decorations

This will probably come in handy for Halloween. Forget about the plastic scary decorations and paper spooks. Make your own! Carving out your own pumpkins is a much more fun project and one the whole family can indulge in. Place a candle inside the jack-o-lantern to get the eerie glow from your very own creation.

Tip 10: Eat Healthy & Organic

What we eat also has an impact on the climate. For this we need to understand the energy consumed in the processes involved to produce it. Meat production takes up 70% of all agricultural land use and the sheer numbers involved produce a huge amount of green house gases. As the processes involved in growing livestock are quite inefficient, it has been estimated that livestock production is responsible for 18% of greenhouse gases. Try going vegetarian. If that's not up your alley, going organic is definitely the greener way to go. Fewer chemicals sprayed on your food, and fewer toxins are released into our atmosphere.

Did You Know?

The Christmas season alone sees enough wrapping paper wasted that the amount could circle our planet 9 TIMES!

The world's largest Jack-o-lantern was carved on the 31st of October 2005 by Scott Culley. The pumpkin weighed 1,469

Approximately six kgs of grain is used to produce 1 kg of beef.





Tip 11: Travel Green

Come holiday season, all of us head to friends or relatives' houses to have a fun together. If you're planning to drive, how about renting a car or even car pooling? There are many initiatives and forums that promote car pooling. This is a great way of meeting interesting people as well! If you cannot carpool, one way to reduce fuel consumption is to empty your car after all your driving trips -- an extra 100 pounds in your vehicle could increase gas costs by up to \$.08 a gallon according to energy.gov website.

Tip 12: Waste Management

Ever wonder where all those bags of garbage go after a holiday? You may have one or two big bags of garbage a week, but come the holiday season, you'll find up to ten bags waiting to get picked up by garbage disposal. It's time we became smarter on how we manage our waste. We tend to cook a lot during this time, for friends and family – why not throw the biodegradable waste and make compost if you have a garden? This way you also save on fertilizer. Being aware of what you buy also affects how much gets sent to the landfill.

Did You Know?

When you carpool, you can use the HOV lane which means you can zip by the huge line of cars stuck on the highway as they travel to their holiday destination.

300,000 tons of additional garbage is generated between mid-November and New Year's Day in Canada alone!

Tip 13: Use Biodegradable Utensils

Nobody really wants to do the dishes after a particularly heavy meal, especially if you are with friends and family you haven't seen in a long time. This leads to many plastic spoons and plates being used which are then promptly thrown in the trash. Many festivals are green in many ways. Feasts in Onam are served on banana leaves and many liquid refreshments are served in clay pots for some other festivals. All these are natural, biodegradable and do not clutter up landfills, taking thousands of years to decay. Research and buy edible spoons and forks – not only are these great conversation starters, these will also make your gathering a memorable one. Avoid plastics this holiday season and you will do your bit in helping Mother Nature survive a little longer.

Tip 14: Safety

With any celebration comes a certain responsibility. If you have little ones, you have to definitely keep harmful things out of reach. We can get carried away in times of joyful celebration but it is during these times that many accidents can happen. Avoid keeping candles burning throughout the night.

Help keep your family safe by reading about what you buy and where it is made. If you are buying fireworks, purchase it from a manufacturer that has fair standards and does not employ child labor or has unfair work practices. This way you can help another person have a happy holiday as well. If needed, make your own. With the internet bringing everything to our fingertips, it will be a good project to undertake at home.

Did You Know?

It takes plastic an average time of 450 years to completely degrade. Some plastics even take up to a thousand years!

Fireworks are a huge contributing factor to air pollution, causing Delhi, India to top the list of being the world's most polluted city.





Tip 15: Crime Watch

Festivals bring a huge amount of people together. While this should be a time to rejoice, it is also a time where many people can take advantage of the good will feelings and commit crimes. This is a time when everyone knows that spending is in the air. That means people wear their best and this means that there are jewels and cash lying around for those careless enough to lose it. But theft leads to stress and also leads to more buying.

This could be to replace a child's toy, certain gifts which will lead to more products eventually heading to a landfill. We may think that this is not related to sustainability, but this is a world that runs on demand and supply. When we have our goods stolen, we get everything replaced to make sure that our family's holiday is not ruined. This leads to an increased demand of that product. If the product is made of plastic, it means more waste that will take years to break down. Keeping an eye out on your property and your neighbor's property as well as being careful this holiday season will save you and your family a little heart break.

Tip 16: Causing Less Public Nuisance

Being more considerate of your neighbors should be common sense, but often that flies out of the window when it comes to times of celebration. We play loud music, burst crackers and the general noise quotient does go out of hand. However, we must remember that not everyone like to hear loud noises in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning. Even the bursting of crackers at certain hours can be a disturbance to others. We must remember, just because we love the festival we celebrate, not everyone else shares the same feeling.

Did You Know?

As compared to the National average, residents of Arizona are nearly 46% more likely to file a theft claim during Christmas.

During Diwali, the sound emitted could reach up to 125 decibels which is a sound range higher than a plane in flight. The sound range suggested for night time is 45 decibels. These high levels can cause deafness, heart attacks and much more.

Festivals and holidays are a great time to embrace the human spirit. In many ways, these festive occasions bring us all closer together. A great example would be the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. After being struck by hurricanes, they were in no position to celebrate. With a devastated city, there were no funds to organize the Mardi Gras. But the people rallied together and the festival that culminated was a sign of the resilience of the people. It was taken as a positive message that things always get better after a storm and that people can shoulder through thick and thin, especially when everyone sticks together.

There are the 3 pillars of sustainability – our planet (Nature), the people and profit. Being in sync with these three will ensure that we can all live happily in harmony. Festivals exist to celebrate life and to also show that these celebrations go beyond certain boundaries. Whether those boundaries are of religion, caste or creed, these lines cease to exist in a festival. This is a time when all ill-will is put to rest and universal brotherhood is the order of the day.

Perhaps the one thing we can learn from any festival is that it fosters unity in diversity, a oneness that brings humanity and mankind together in a celebration of life.





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