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## Easy ways to make the holidays green and jolly

By Tom Watson

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Enough with the gray! There's no better way to break the spell of the damp, dark Seattle winter than with a house full of festive holiday decorations.

Unfortunately, decorating for the holidays can take a toll on the environment and your wallet. But you don't have to go down that path.

Whether your holiday decorating style leans toward the traditional, the contemporary or the downright quirky, follow these tips for low-cost, eco-friendly decorating.

### Traditional green décor

Remember the way your grandparents' house looked during the holidays? You can rekindle that warm, old-fashioned feeling, but with a lighter footprint.

It all starts with the Christmas tree. More than 15 area farms in the Puget Sound Fresh program offer traditional Christmas trees (pre-cut or "U-cut") and wreaths. Many of these farms use minimum pesticides and other green growing practices, and plant one or more trees for every tree harvested. Several local growers also sell wreaths at the Ballard, University District and West Seattle farmers' markets.



ILLUSTRATION BY SUSAN JOUFLAS / THE SEATTLE TIMES

#### Information

**Puget Sound Fresh:** [www.pugetsoundfresh.org](http://www.pugetsoundfresh.org)

**Puget Sound Energy:** [www.pse.com/solutions/foryourhome](http://www.pse.com/solutions/foryourhome)

**Celebrate Green:** [www.celebrategreen.net](http://www.celebrategreen.net)

When you're done with your tree, make sure it gets "treecycled" — turned into compost or mulch through your yard-waste collection service or a community pick-up or drop-off program.

Instead of buying new versions of vintage ornaments and decorations, take advantage of the abundant selection of used originals at thrift shops and consignment stores. You also might want to ask older relatives or friends if they have any extra vintage decorations you can use. They will probably be thrilled to get them out of the attic.

Brighten up your faded or slightly damaged ornaments with a little nontoxic craft paint. Older decorations may contain paint with lead or other heavy metals, so don't let the kids play with them.

To add a warm glow to your traditional holiday décor, Big Dipper Wax Works (206-767-7322 or [www.bigdipperwaxworks.com](http://www.bigdipperwaxworks.com)) in South Seattle makes natural beeswax candles, including scented pillar and votive candles in red, green and white, and long-burning Hanukkah candles for the menorah.

### **Eco-contemporary decorating**

Many folks like to combine classic holiday-decorating styles with new touches. For example, as an alternative to the standard cut Christmas tree, consider a living tree. These potted Christmas trees are usually smaller than cut trees and should only be kept in the house for about a week, so they don't start sprouting new growth.

You can keep the tree outside, haul it in to enjoy it at Christmas time for several years, and then eventually plant it in the yard or give it away. If you don't have a good place to keep the tree all year, Swansons Nursery (206-782-2543 or [www.swansonsnursery.com](http://www.swansonsnursery.com)) in North Seattle offers a program where you can bring back your living tree after the holidays, and they'll plant it at Carkeek Park.

An artificial tree might also be considered green, since you reuse it every year. However, many artificial trees are made from the problem plastic PVC (polyvinyl chloride), so consider a used vintage aluminum tree instead.

LED (light-emitting diode) or solar-powered lights add a modern look to your holiday decorations, and may save you \$30 or more on your winter electric bill. Many area retailers now carry LED holiday lights, and some offer discounts on Energy Star-rated LEDs and other energy-efficient lighting through a Puget Sound Energy program. Nearly all Christmas lights, including LEDs, contain PVC plastic and sometimes lead in the wiring,

so keep those out of reach of children and wash your hands after handling them.

Instead of going heavy on the lights and trinkets, if you keep things simple you can save money and your holiday décor will have a cleaner, more contemporary feel. Natural decorations such as a pyramid of oranges in a bowl make a strong visual impact.

### **Green and quirky**

Based on purely anecdotal evidence, the Seattle area is a hotbed of quirky holiday decorating. This can be the greenest decorating of all, since it usually involves reused or repurposed items. That thrift-store Santa or angel can be painted wild colors, or kids' art and photos can be reinvented as a funky family Christmas tree sculpture.

Off-the-wall holiday decorating often includes a dash of social or political commentary. A Seattle dentist once took a clear plastic ornament and filled it with red and green candies and several dozen rotten teeth he had extracted over the years. It looked colorful and pretty hanging on the tree until you examined it closely, and then it made an unforgettable statement about holiday sweets and tooth decay.

For Hanukkah, menorahs can be made from practically anything, including salvaged plumbing fixtures. Buy distinctive recycled menorahs online or make your own. The Sammamish-based Celebrate Green Web site ([www.celebrategreen.net](http://www.celebrategreen.net)) describes menorahs created from old flower pots, used water bottles and even potatoes.

It wasn't that long ago that any efforts to green up the holidays seemed eccentric and quirky. But eco-conscious holidays have become the new normal, and that's just another reason to celebrate.

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