

Protecting Clean Water Together Series: 'Tis the Season...
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CAPTION: Leading up to the holidays, our garbage explodes more than 25 percent. Much of it ends up fouling our roadways, creeklands, and waterways. Plastic bottles like this one never “go away.” They break down into microscopic bits that infest air, water, the natural environment — and the human body.

With leaf-peeping days in the rear-view mirror, can the holidays be far behind?

Though all the pleasures of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and other holidays are on the way, a messy story lurks behind those happy scenes: we create at least 25 percent more garbage than usual between the end of November and New Year’s Eve.

You can guess why. It’s not just the mountains of holiday ribbons and wrapping. It’s leftover food that doesn’t get eaten. Throw-away utensils and plates. Millions of plastic shopping bags plus boxes and bags from on-line purchases. And, surprisingly, millions of artificial trees that go in the trash every year.

The more trash we make, the more trash that escapes recycling and responsible disposal. Over-flowing or uncovered trash bins, wind-blown trash and spills during collection, litter thrown from cars and trucks, dumping by people who skip trash pickup and drop bags of garbage along roadsides...

It's not just ugly. It's a danger to wildlife, fish, and healthy creeks.

The good guys — like you — can't take up all the slack for the bad actors. But we can decide to do one or two new things this year to keep the waste to a minimum.

Here are a few possibilities.

Stick to your list when you go food shopping for Thanksgiving and special meals, and don't overbuy "just in case." If you can't help yourself and love to cook abundantly, ask guests to bring containers from home — or provide them yourself — so leftovers get eaten instead of trashed.

Consider buying a roll of light-weight brown kraft paper, and get creative wrapping presents — an ink-pad and a few holiday stampers will dress things up without even needing ribbon. If you NEED ribbon, think outside the box with red-and-white butcher's string or raffia, either recyclable paper or natural palm fiber. Scrunched up, the recyclable kraft paper can also replace styrofoam peanuts to cushion items you need to mail.

Imagine how you can "wrap" gifts in re-useables, too — cloth shopping bags, cloth produce bags, old mason jars, flea market pots and pans, scarves, tea towels, even mittens or socks for small treasures. Use pillowcases or throws or actual trash bags for big items.

And go ahead — get a real Christmas tree from a local grower. It's much more earth-friendly than artificial trees (90 percent of which are shipped more than 6,000 miles to get to stores in the U.S.). Buying real trees contributes to your local economy, and after the holidays you'll find many locations that accept the denuded tree for composting.

Throughout the creeklands of the Brodhead watershed, this is the time of year when life is settling down. Some creatures have stored caches of food, some hunker down under the leaf litter or den up, some even freeze solid to wait out the winter.

We humans gather with friends and family, light candles, sing old songs, and share special food. This year, why not commit to keeping it natural, and holding the line on waste?

Do you know how long stuff lasts when someone litters?

- Cigarette butts 1-5 years
- Plastic coated paper up to 5 years
- Plastic bags 10-20 years
- Nylon fabric 30-40 years
- Plastic six-pack holders up to 100 years
- Aluminum cans up to 500 years
- Glass bottles up to 1,000 years
- Plastic bottles basically forever

The Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member!

www.brodheadwatershed.org