

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

The holiday season is in full swing, but our traditions don't have to be harmful to our health, other people, or the environment. They can be just as joyous (albeit perhaps less nostalgic) without doing any damage. Of course, the term "harmless" is going to be slightly subjective and most useful only in comparison to worse alternatives, and perfection cannot be achieved – so don't stress about it. Only you know your own holiday traditions, so only you can analyze what harm they may be doing or what feels right in changing anything about them.

These are just a few ideas to provoke a thoughtful, loving approach to the holidays and hopefully inspire new traditions or a makeover of old traditions that need an upgrade into a more modern world in which everyone's life matters greatly (including people we don't know, animals, and the natural environment which sustains us all).

Do you already think a lot about making a difference around the holidays? Maybe there is a family tradition that's been going on for generations that could be enhanced or expanded. For example, charities are often overwhelmed with support during December, and struggle to get enough donations the rest of the year. If your family already does a service activity, you might expand that into a plan for one service project each month of 2018. At the end of that year, each member of the family could briefly share which one was the most meaningful to them and why.

Do you consume an excessive amount of sugar or treats during the holidays which make you feel ill? If you're sick, it won't be as much fun, and you can't make as big a difference in your family, neighborhood, or the world. Maybe bake smaller batches of cookies, use healthier recipes, or enjoy treats only on the night they're made, then share them with friends or people who don't have as much. Meat consumption can also be a problem, as in most cases it creates animal suffering and harms the environment in a myriad of ways. If you don't want to give it up completely, try going one or two meals without meat and testing gourmet vegan recipes.

For gifts, have you considered how the items are made, how the producers are treated, or whether they harm the air we breathe or the water we drink? If it's possible and affordable to buy a more ethical gift, do so. Another option that many younger people prefer is to have experiences, not possessions. Family holiday outings, trips, service projects, unique or romantic adventures are often more memorable than a tangible, wrapped gift. Don't forget to be tourists in your hometown – there are often scenic areas that get overlooked!

Sometimes it's unavoidable, but travel increases our carbon footprint. Maybe you could purchase carbon offsets, carpool, take a bus or Amtrak instead? Eco-friendly hotels and bed and breakfasts are becoming more common, so seek them out if that's important to you. Overall, though, it comes down to what values you hold dear and creative ways to express the holiday hurrah without harming anybody. You could make a simple switch (use recycled gift wrap) or a flying reindeer leap (decorate a living wildlife feeder tree instead) but what matters most is that you

care to try. Begin somewhere, and keep going. If you do, someday we could live in a world in which doing the right thing is easy, and people must go out of their way to cause harm.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.