

Media Release



For Immediate Release

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**Dreaming of a Green Christmas?
*RCBC's Guide to Eco-Conscious Holiday Dinners***

December 8, 2009 – Vancouver, B.C. – For many people, Christmas and New Year's Eve are the most anticipated and important holiday events of the year. Friends and loved ones gather under one roof to celebrate the season with food, presents and parties. And while we'd all like to do our part to help the environment, sometimes it seems well nigh impossible during this time of seasonal excess.

This year, the Recycling Council of B.C. is here to help you leave a smaller holiday footprint on the earth by providing a few simple eco-ideas for your Christmas and New Year's Eve dinners. This stuff is easy to do and may even save you money!

FOOD

One of the best parts of the holiday is gathering with your loved ones to celebrate and share a meal together. A dinner planned with sustainability in mind will not only be easier on the earth, but might also spark some interesting conversation and inspire your friends and family to think of sustainability during their own meals throughout the year.

If you look at the labels on much of the food we buy at the grocery store, you may find names of places that are anywhere from 500 to 5,000 miles away from where we live. According to getlocalbc.com, "The average North American meal travels 2,400 km to get from field to plate." That's like driving the entire Trans Canada Highway in B.C. two and a half times. That's a lot of travelling, generating an incredible amount of greenhouse gas emissions.

Don't panic! There are a number of ways you can prepare an amazing holiday feast that is both bountiful and environmentally-friendly. Follow the tips below to get started on your eco-friendly holiday meal:

Make a difference:

- **Only cook enough for the people you invite.** It's helpful to get advance confirmation on how many guests will be arriving, so that you can prepare your meal portions adequately.
- **Buy organic food.** Organically grown foods generate less pollution because they are produced with smaller levels of chemicals such as pesticides and preservatives and the meats are healthier. **The Certified Organic Associations of B.C.** have a searchable database on their website where you can find farmers, meat producers, and processors who handle organic products. Visit <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/>, and enter your region in the search field to find growers, distributors and retailers who offer organic food in your area.
- **Locally-sourced food** can play a big role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as well as supporting our local farmers and helping to protect farmland in B.C. Visit www.getlocalbc.org to find out where to get locally sourced food in your area. The site has a list of retailers, growers and producers of local and organic food in many B.C. communities.
- Certain **farmers markets** are open through the winter, and are a great way to support local farmers, buy local food and ensure the freshest goods for your holiday feast. Visit www.bcfarmersmarket.org to find a market near you. Use the 'Advanced Search' tool to find markets that are open in the month and area of your choice.
- **The 100 Mile Diet** is a healthy and eco-conscious movement that was started in Vancouver. Visit www.100milediet.org to learn more about eating local.
- **Try less meat. Really.** Meat production on an industrial scale is environmentally damaging. We can help leave a smaller footprint by eating locally produced organic meat and by decreasing the amount of meat we eat. Try the following links for vegetarian Christmas menus and recipes:

The Veggie Table

<http://www.theveggietable.com/recipes/christmas.html>

The Vegetarian Society (England, UK)

<http://www.vegsoc.org/cordonvert/recipes/christmas.html>

Celebrating Christmas – Vegetarian Christmas Menu

<http://www.celebrating-christmas.com/recipes/vegetarian-christmas-menu.shtml>

INVITATIONS

Sending out invitations for your Christmas or New Year's Eve dinner is a great way to create anticipation for the evening. It's also a great way to plan, because you can keep track of how many guests to expect and prepare adequately. There are a few ways to add this extra flourish to your event without creating waste.

Make a difference:

- **Try emailing your invitations.** E-vites are free invitations that you can e-mail to your guests. And your invitees can RSVP online, helping you keep track of how many guests are coming. Visit www.evite.com for more information, or to get your invitations started.
- If online invitations aren't suitable, paper invitations are a nice touch. You can purchase invitations **made from recycled paper**, or better yet, **reuse your old Christmas cards** to make new invitations. Visit the following site for some tips, and get crafty! <http://www.allfreecrafts.com/christmas/new-cards-from-old.shtml>

PLACE SETTINGS, CUTLERY AND NAPKINS

Most people don't give place settings and cutlery much thought when preparing for a party, but a lot of our garbage from the holiday dinner comes from disposable plates, cups, cutlery and napkins.

Disposable paper plates are not recyclable as 'mixed paper' in your municipal recycling programs because they are commonly lined with wax, and are also contaminated with food residue. While there are a small number of companies that take plastic forks and spoons for recycling, the options are few and far between. This aspect of the holiday dinner is one where the first of the three Rs - Reduce - is certainly the best way to go.

Make a difference:

- **Use reusable plates, cutlery and napkins.** It can be challenging with a larger group of people, but if you're hosting a party of 10 people or more, this one step could save you a garbage bag full of waste.
- If you are using disposable drinking glasses, make sure they are labeled so people can reuse them throughout the night and **try to use plastic numbered 1, 2 or 5** as these types are accepted by most curbside recycling programs.
- If you need to use disposable plates and cutlery, you can purchase the type that can be washed and used for future parties. They are generally lighter and more compact so they can be easily stored for the next party. Or try the new style of **cutlery made from bamboo**. These are compostable when you've finished with them.
- There are some communities in B.C. that offer a **food scrap collection program**. If you live in one of those municipalities, keep in mind that disposable paper plates and napkins can be composted. Call the RCBC Recycling Hotline for more information at 604-RECYCLE in the lower Mainland and 1-800-667-4321 in the rest of B.C.
- If you live in the greater Victoria or Vancouver area, check out **Pacific Mobile Depots**. They run monthly drop-off sites that accept household amounts of rigid plastics, including plastic cutlery and plates. To find their locations, accepted materials and fees, visit www.pacificmobiledepots.com.

DECORATIONS

There's nothing quite like putting up decorations for the holidays. It's amazing how simple things like ornaments and decorations can bring back childhood memories

and light up a room bringing everyone into the spirit of the season. However, it's not unusual to find garbage bags full of ornaments and decorations at the end of the holiday season, sitting at the curb and headed for the landfill. It's also quite common to see a spike in household energy bills with all the lights and electrical gadgets we use to decorate our homes. We can bring the light and warmth of the season into our homes without adding weight to our garbage bins or to our energy bills.

Make a difference:

- **Avoid plastics and non-recyclable decorations.** Reuse old decorations or use decorations that you can recycle and compost.
- **Try re-using old greeting cards** by making cut outs that can be used as decorations. Not only does it extend the life of old Christmas cards, it's also recyclable at the end of the holiday season, provided that you keep the glue and glitter to a minimum. It's also a fun project for kids. For more re-use ideas, check out <http://www.allfreecrafts.com/christmas/index.shtml>.
- **Bring nature inside!** Cedar and pine tree branches, acorns and even potted plants can bring plenty of color and life into a room. They can also be composted at the end of their use, so no branch or leaf has to go to waste.
- If you are considering replacing your current light strings, **purchase energy-efficient LED light strings.** They're also a lot brighter, cooler to touch, and longer-lasting. Remember to recycle your old light strings. Call the RCBC Recycling Hotline to find a depot near you that accepts old holiday light strings or drop them off at a [BC Hydro collection point](#) to benefit the Burn Fund.
- If you've got a bunch of electrical decorations around your home, **consider plugging them into a timer.** These devices are available at most home hardware stores, and can be programmed to turn your electrical decorations on or off within a certain period of time. Remember to unplug your electrical decorations when they're not in use.

AFTER THE PARTY

Argh - the morning after the night before! Drink lots of water before you go to bed and clean-up won't be quite so painful the next day.

Make a difference:

- Pack up the left-overs and refrigerate or give take-home containers to your guests as they leave.
- Be sure to separate your recyclables and your compostable materials from the true garbage. The more material we divert from landfill the longer these facilities will last us.
- Sort table decorations that are still reusable. Pack them carefully to preserve them until the next party.
- Use only non-toxic cleaning products in your home. Check the [Toxic Nation Guide](#) for information.

DINING OUT

Want to skip the cooking and prepping? Everyone needs a break now and then. There are a lot of ways to dine out during the holiday season, while still keeping the environment in mind.

Make a difference:

- Try vegetarian restaurants. Non-meat products are less resource-intensive during production and generate less pollution.
- Eat organic. Organic food is produced with less or no preservatives and pesticides, and are less likely to be genetically modified.
- Some restaurants feature locally-sourced food. Not only are they serving fresh, seasonal food, but they are also supporting local farmers and producers.

Here are some links for finding a dining experience that is eco-conscious:

Open Table

<http://www.opentable.com/home.aspx>

Online restaurant booking database, with listings from across B.C. Has a category for restaurants with organic menus.

Ocean Wise

<http://www.vanaqua.org/oceanwise/>

Focuses on sustainable seafood. Has an online restaurant finder for B.C. and other provinces in Canada.

EarthSave

<http://www.earthsave.ca/>

Has a list of vegan and vegetarian restaurants in B.C. They also host local vegan dine-out events in several areas in BC, as well as recipes for vegan meals.

For more information about greening your holidays, including which kind of Christmas tree is best and a host of green gift ideas, visit the RCBC web site at www.rcbc.bc.ca. And don't forget to check back with us about where to have your tree chipped when the holidays are over.

The Recycling Council of British Columbia is a multi-sectoral, non-profit organization promoting the principles of zero waste through information services, research and the exchange of ideas.

Founded in 1974, RCBC is Canada's longest-serving recycling council and has earned the reputation of being one of the most widely respected environmental organizations in the province today. RCBC has played a major role in the establishment of the many ground-breaking product stewardship programs in the province, which are emulated around the world.