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News Release

12 Days of Green: Going and Saving Green for the Holidays

‘Have a little less *jingle* in your pocket this year? You can still have a lot of *jolly*, especially as you consider some green this holiday season! According to the National Retail Federation (NRF), two-thirds of Americans (65.3%) say the economy will affect their holiday plans this year, with the majority of these consumers saying they are adjusting by simply spending less (84.2%). Small efforts in “going green” can help the year’s holiday celebrant stay “out of the red” by conserving money and resources as they enter into 2010. Whether you have experienced a job loss, a decrease in pay or just need to reduce expenditures, talk as a family about potential creative, inexpensive ways to decorate and celebrate. The following are 12 pocket and planet friendly suggestions to consider for the upcoming days of the holiday season.

1. Green Sleeves: Roll up your sleeves and begin planning and determining a comfortable budget for holiday purchases. Some tips to bear in mind with your plan are to shop with a list, use credit judiciously, beware of sales pitches and track your spending. **Extension Extra: Pick up a free 2010 Money Management Calendar at the St. Clair County Extension Office today or download a printable copy from www.aces.edu.*

2. Fuel Duel: Still some hustling and bustling for holiday gifts in your future? Plan ahead and map out your shopping trips in an order to save travel time and gas. Also, incorporating and running all of your errands at the same time will save you some gas money. Regarding eco-driving, every time you take a short trip from a cold start, your car is using twice as much fuel as a longer trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.

3. Gift Packages: Employ creativity in gift wrapping. Remember no-wrap options that exist within reusable tins, boxes and baskets for gifts. You may even make your own wrapping paper from magazine pages and similar ideas. If you buy wrapping paper, consider some made of recycled paper. When shipping gifts, recyclable materials can offer you thrifty and often readily accessible options as space fillers.

4. Season’s Greetings: You may decide to send some greetings by email this year. Many free and unique options exist that allow personalized cards to be sent to email addresses. Also, making some personal phone calls this season to express holiday greetings and

wishes may be a welcomed alternative for friends and family. If you send greeting cards, options from recycled materials exist and bulk-boxed may be the route for large numbers.

5. Deck the Halls: This year you may opt to create “2 for 1” ideas with decorations! Bowls of nuts or fruits and vegetables including colorful squash, apples, pomegranates, whole pineapples and more can create a wonderful holiday look that can later be enjoyed as healthy snacks. Other decorations can be creative family projects such as candle-wax or painted pine cones, string or wire popcorn, gingerbread houses and homemade cards.

6. Fresh Purchases: You may consider local farms and farmers markets available within your county for vegetable, fruits and other food items. Alabama has more than 93 farmers markets and 175 farm stands. These venues, touted for providing fresh, season-peak produce, may provide some economical choices for your holiday meals.

7. Food Fahrenheit: Adjusting the temperature in your refrigerator and freezer can unfreeze some extra dollars. Of all household appliances, refrigerators reportedly use the most electricity. Setting your refrigerator at 37 degrees and your freezer at 0 properly maximizes your appliance’s efficiency as well as conserves energy dollars.

8. Light Insight: With the influx of light decorations this time of year, energy consumption increases. In striking a balance in celebration and energy conservation, consider switching out old holiday lights with energy-efficient LED (light emitting diode) holiday lights. LED lights are environment and energy friendly, useable both indoors and outdoors and last longer than standard bulbs. Despite your light preference, the green choice involves conservation smarts. So consider the times that you will keep lights on and remember to establish times or be conscious to turn them off.

9. Tree Treatment: Putting up a tree this year? Choosing an artificial tree will more than likely be a non-recyclable option; however, it can be a green alternative if reused each year. If you decide to buy a live tree, there are organic selections that are grown without pesticides or chemicals. To keep it green after the holidays, look for ways to recycle or reuse your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. Check with your community solid waste department and find out if they collect and mulch trees.

10. H₂O Overflow: Do your holiday plans include house guests? This could mean a number of extra showers, which ultimately results in a higher water bill. A great way to minimize this expense is to install water-conserving showerheads. Changing over to a more efficient model can reduce your hot water usage by up to 60 percent.

11. Holiday Heat: A big cost during the colder months is the heating bill. Be smart about heating your home this holiday season. Make sure to pay attention to your thermostat; turn it down or off when you’re not going to be home. Also, when heating your home, factor in the extra heat sources like the oven and manage the temperature accordingly.

12. Greenless Value: Parents may decide whether to communicate with younger members in certain terms regarding possible holiday changes due to the economy however; sharing a few “greenless gifts” this holiday may prove to be more fruitful.

- **Gift of time together/memories:** One of the best gifts a parent can give is time. From family games to time spent reading holiday books, watching movies or looking at holiday lights together, these moments are timeless.
- **Gift of creativity:** ‘Have a special family tradition? Start one this year such as opening one special gift with just your family that has special meaning or decorating the tree as a family. Be creative and these traditions can add to the holiday joy and strengthen families.
- **Gift of volunteering:** You may decide to share a lesson in giving through volunteering this season. Kids and the entire family can donate items to charities, service organizations or other causes. Volunteering also comes in various forms such as donation of time in the community. This lesson might be initially difficult for kids, but can leave a lasting impression.

For more information on this or related topics, please contact Synithia Williams, Regional Extension Agent in Family and Child Development for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System at (205) 338-9416 or (205) 329-1148 (cell) or email willisl@aces.edu