



Homemade and Heartfelt

Do-It-Yourself Stocking Stuffers

by Meredith Montgomery

“With the volume of household waste soaring 34 percent beyond normal levels in the weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day it’s particularly important to remain eco-conscious during the holidays,” says Anna Getty, author of *I’m Dreaming of a Green Christmas*. “It’s easy to get so wrapped up in buying gifts and decorations that eco-friendliness goes out the window.”

This year, consider giving the family’s stocking stuffers a sustainable makeover by gifting homemade items. Getty observes, “Useful, thoughtful homemade gifts can be really sweet... and green.”

A Jar for Everyone

With a ribbon and label of instructions, inexpensive canning jars and glass containers filled with homemade goodies can become creative and practical gifts for everyone on the list.

Sugar body scrubs offer a simple and affordable home spa experience. Combine two cups of sugar with one cup of oil (sweet almond, grapeseed or olive) and add 10 to 20 drops of essential oils to scent. Try a combination of rosemary and peppermint for an invigorating morning scrub or lavender and vanilla to unwind later.

Fill jars with ingredients for some simmering home aromatherapy. Labels instruct recipients to boil the contents in a small saucepan of water, and then reduce heat to simmer, adding water as needed. Combine evergreen sprigs, cinnamon sticks, cloves, dried apple peels and citrus rinds for a festive holiday scent. Lemon, rosemary and vanilla afford a refreshing alternative.

For family grill masters, obtain bulk spices for barbecue rubs at a health food store. A basic recipe from *DadCooksDinner.com* combines four tablespoons paprika, four tablespoons brown sugar, two tablespoons chili powder, one tablespoon freshly ground black pepper, two teaspoons garlic powder, two teaspoons onion powder and one teaspoon dried thyme.

Upcycled and Sewn

Experienced crafters can follow online guidelines to upcycle fabric scraps and unwanted clothing and linens. An old sweatshirt or sweater becomes an iPad case and colorful T-shirts morph into tote bags and scarves.

Creating therapeutic hot/cold bags can be fairly simple, even without a sewing machine. Cut a 16-by-eight-inch piece of flannel, cotton, fleece or terry-cloth and fold it in half with the finished

side inside, lining up the edges. Using sturdy thread, sew a quarter-inch seam along the open edges, leaving a half-inch opening. Carefully turn the fabric right-side-out through the opening and fill the bag three-quarters full with long grain white rice. Tuck in the opening's unfinished edges and sew closed.

To treat aches and pains, the giftee can microwave the bag for 30 seconds at a time until achieving the desired temperature or place it in the freezer to use as a cooling or freezer pack. For aromatherapy, mix the rice with a couple of drops of lavender essential oil before filling. At room temperature, the scented version doubles as a soothing eye pillow.

Seeds to Throw and Grow

Guerilla Gardening's (GuerillaGardening.org) recipe for seed bombs makes fun gifts for gardeners and nature lovers. Choose flower and herb seeds that grow well in each recipient's region.

Combine five parts clay soil or potter's powder (from art supply stores), one part compost and one part seeds, with water to bind. Form the mixture into balls approximately one inch in diameter and let dry for one to two days in an empty egg carton. Wrap seed bombs in recycled paper or cloth tied with a ribbon and instructions. Toss them in the yard or garden and watch them grow.

Creative and Kid-Friendly

Enlist Santa's elves to assemble a fort-building kit for children, inspired by Saltwater-Kids.com. Stock a pillowcase with two sheets, clothespins, plastic clamps, rope, suction cups and a flashlight. Tie up the pillowcase with rope and a cute label, and watch old linens come to life with a little imagination.

Give broken and unwanted crayons a second life with fun-shaped recycled crayons. Fill greased muffin tins or cookie cutters on a foil-lined cookie sheet with broken crayon pieces (paper removed). Bake at 150 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until the crayons melt. Allow them to cool completely before removing from the molds.

"I like to encourage families to focus on creating memories and rituals as a way to avoid excessive holiday consumption," says Getty, who is renowned for her home-cooked gifts packaged in reusable tins with recycled bows. She notes, "These become a tradition that people know and love."

Such heartfelt gifts open the door to special moments and memories celebrating the true spirit of the season.

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Holiday waste report source: epa.gov