Green Gift Guide
Eco-Friendly Alternatives from Deirdre Imus

Magical Moments
This year, create a safe “holiday harbor”

Vaccine Whistleblower
Autism Research Corruption at the CDC
ENVIRONMENT-ENHANCING Holiday Gifts

These safe, non-toxic, and eco-friendly alternatives are sure to be a hit with everyone on your gift list this year!

BY DEIRDRE IMUS
The holiday season elicits a range of emotions, depending on your station in life. For some, this time is pure, overwhelming, uncontrollable joy. These people are mostly children.

For the rest of us, these most festive days conjure up stress, whether from preparing to host a ridiculous number of people at your house, managing family drama, fretting over what to buy for whom (and doing it on time!), sorting out travel plans, or coping with all of this amid the daily struggles of caring for a child on the autism spectrum. Sure, it’s the most wonderful time of the year—if you can drown out all the noise.

And yet, there’s something about showering the ones you love with things they will hopefully love. It’s an opportunity to teach kids the importance of giving, and of being a gracious recipient. To let your spouse or partner know you appreciate everything they do for your family. To say a big, hearty thank you to the teachers, aides, therapists, counselors, and other amazing human beings who support your children in school, whether they are on the spectrum or not. It takes a (very exhausted) village to make it through each day sometimes.

MINDFUL OPTIONS
As you and your people try to figure out the who, where, when (and why!) of the holiday season, I hope to help you think a little less about the “what to buy.” It’s easy to get caught up in the flurry of seasonal gift giving, and to temporarily abandon principles we hold sacred throughout the year. Whether we like it or not, what we buy says something about who we are, and the things we collect for ourselves and others impact the human body and the environment in countless intangible ways.

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KEEP THINGS LOCAL
Children love few things more than presents, and in many cases it almost doesn’t matter what the gift is—if it’s wrapped, it’s new, and it looks cool, they’re interested! Seize this opportunity to enhance their environment by purchasing nontoxic, sustainably produced items that won’t leach chemicals into their skin or lungs. The earlier you introduce these healthier toys, the less your child will recognize cheap, plastic playthings as the norm, or expect them as gifts.

Also, buying local doesn’t just apply to your produce (where it absolutely should apply!). Regardless of where you live, someone close by is likely making some gorgeous product with their own two hands, using few synthetic or toxic components and lots of TLC. From candles and lotions and cards to coffee and pickles and honey, there is no shortage of artisans purveying their crafts these days. In fact, there’s an entire website devoted to it: it’s called Etsy, and it’s fantastic. You can use it to buy pretty much anything for anybody, and read all about the individual or small business making the product.

When you avoid big box stores in favor of small, local shops unique to your hometown, you also cut down on the amount of time it takes a product to travel from the manufacturer to your door—which preserves fuel, and reduces your gift’s carbon footprint. Supporting local businesses has never been more important, and really binds you to your community in a way a behemoth corporation simply cannot.

BEST BETS FOR TINY TOTS
For the brand new baby in your family, check out Giggle’s Better Basics line of bath accessories, like a towel, wash mitt, and even a stylish hooded bath kimono.

They’re all made from 100 percent Egyptian-certified organic cotton, and don’t contain any harsh chemicals that could irritate baby’s skin. Any similarly natural bath or bedding accessories made from organic fibers will be sure to please parents and infant alike.

Other good options for the littlest family members include toys made from quality wood (pine, ash, birch), formaldehyde-free...
plywood; or even certain plastics. For instance, the company Green Toys manufactures its wide range of products in the U.S. from 100 percent recycled milk jugs, and they don’t use any toxic chemicals like bisphenol-A (BPA), polyvinyl chloride (PVC), or phthalates. They make blocks, trucks, tool sets, and teethers, to name just a few fun options.

Paints and finishes of ANY toy that may wind up in your tiny tot’s mouth (and let’s face it, they all do) should be totally non-toxic. The blog Natural Baby Mama recommends buying wooden items that are either unfinished, or finished using beeswax or an organic oil, and ensuring any painted toys use non-toxic water based paints or vegetable dyed wood.

Some of these toys might be a bit more expensive than the typical, cheap, plastic fare from China, but can you really place a value on any child’s safety? Plus, consider the quality: well-crafted toys made in this country are much more likely to stand the test of time, and won’t need to be replaced as often—or at all.

KID STUFF
For slightly older kids, indulge their need (and maybe your own!) to get their hands dirty with Eco-Kids Eco Paint, an environmentally-friendly, powder-based paint that encourages creativity without sacrificing health. Conventional finger paints are comprised of chemicals such as toluene, which is classified as a developmental toxicant, and synthetic dyes containing metals like arsenic, cadmium, or lead. Avoid exposing the entire family to these carcinogens, while simultaneously promoting creativity and expression.

As an added benefit, art has been shown to be particularly therapeutic for children on the autism spectrum, some of whom receive art therapy, which uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages, according to the American Art Therapy Association. They note that artistic endeavors can increase self-awareness; help people deal with stress and traumatic situations; enhance cognitive abilities; and foster a positive, happy environment—which, if you think about it, sounds pretty darn beneficial for anyone of any developmental ability.

THOSE TEMPERAMENTAL TEENS
Teenagers are picky—haven’t you heard?

And even though nothing their parents do or buy could possibly be considered remotely cool, we have to at least try. A reusable water bottle may just be the thing that won’t embarrass them in front of their friends, while also buying you some much-needed street cred. Klean Kanteen offers a variety of beverage containers of different shapes and sizes, all made of 100 percent recyclable, high-quality, food-grade stainless steel. Aside from being lightweight when empty, they are incredibly durable, and should last your temperamental teens well into adulthood, while teaching them an important lesson on the wastefulness of plastic water bottles.

DON’T FORGET YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER
For any special lady in your life, you simply cannot go wrong with a bag. Or, really, anything from the online retailer Uncommon Goods, which attempts to minimize its environmental impact by working with artists who use sustainable or recycled materials, and choosing environmentally friendly packing materials. Check out their Sari Bag, which is handmade by craftspeople in India from recycled saris. It doesn’t get much more unique, and your girl is sure to feel special carrying this tote around town.

There’s also some great stuff for dudes at Uncommon Goods, like a barbecue tool set made from repurposed hockey sticks, or cufflinks made of material salvaged from the seats of famous ballparks like Shea Stadium, Fenway Park, or Wrigley Field.

THANK THOSE THERAPISTS & TEACHERS
As for the kind souls who help guide your children through this world, whether by teaching them important facts or administering necessary therapies, there are many eco-friendly ways to say thank you this holiday season.

For the plant lover, or even the plant novice, something gorgeous and green not only enhances the décor of any room, it also offers numerous health benefits. Plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, which helps
us breathe better. They also increase humidity indoors, which can help keep everything from dry skin to the flu at bay. Plants also improve indoor air quality, boost healing, and may increase memory, according to various studies.

Whether the holiday season really is the most wonderful time of year or not, it is a time to step back, take stock of how lucky we are to have certain people in our lives, and to let them know how we feel. No matter what you celebrate, or if you celebrate nothing at all, it’s difficult to refute that concept. This year, seize the opportunity to show off your environmental savvy, and maybe spread the gospel—which would be the greatest gift of all to this enchanting Earth we all call home.

Note: Information provided herein is not intended to treat or diagnose any health condition. As always, consult your healthcare provider with any questions or health concerns.

The Season of Giving

Sometimes, the best gift you can give is the gift of nothing at all—by which I mean, make a donation to an eco-friendly charity in someone’s name. No matter how organized we all try to be, almost everybody’s home is rife with at least some amount of clutter. Making a donation draws attention to a worthy cause, while also reducing waste (no wrapping required!). For a list of worthy causes, check out Project Greenify’s list of the best eco-friendly charities, which include the Wildlife Conservation Network, The Sierra Club, Greenpeace and other wonderful choices.

Polly's Place

Polly’s Place is an international boutique featuring handmade products beautifully crafted by people with autism and Asperger’s and their families.

Every product sold gives 50% back to the artist & 50% to THE AUTISM TRUST to invest in the futures of people with autism.

shop online at GIVEAUTISMACHANCE.COM or get in touch at info@theautismtrust.com to get involved