

# GREENING NEWSLETTER

## TRIMMING YOUR PROPERTY'S WASTE OUTPUT CAN BENEFIT THE ENVIRONMENT— AND YOUR BOTTOM LINE

TRASH PILES ARE SHRINKING across the United States as a growing number of hotels are opting to divert waste previously destined for landfills. Adopting greener waste-management practices offers a handful of benefits. It aligns your property with state and local waste-reduction laws that, if not enacted in your area yet, likely will be soon. It demonstrates a commitment to environmental responsibility, which can be an appealing draw for socially conscious clients. And it can yield significant savings when done right.

"Diverting waste from landfills is a growing concern in our industry, and it's smart business," says Randy Gaines, vice president of engineering, housekeeping and laundry operations, Americas, Hilton Worldwide. That's because diverting waste often results in bottom-line savings for a hotel. A few years back, Hilton Worldwide switched from delivering complementary print copies of *USA Today* to every room to instead offering digital editions of the newspapers automatically available on guests' smartphones and tablets. Lower subscription costs aside, fewer newspapers in the garbage across all 12 of the company's brands means much less waste and a subsequent slash in disposal costs.

Beyond offering e-newspapers, hotels have more opportunities than ever to taper the amount of trash targeted for landfills. As the nation as a whole pays more attention to reducing waste, organizations are cropping up to help businesses—hotels included—dispose more wisely. By working with such partners, Hilton Worldwide slashed its waste output across its property portfolio by more than 26% between 2009 and 2013 (exceeding a 20% goal the company had set). Combine that with additional reductions in energy use, water use and carbon output and the brand saved a staggering \$388 million over four years. "We are saving a tremendous amount of money," Gaines says.

If you're looking to make a dent in your own property's disposal costs, food waste is a good place to start. Because of its weight, food waste can be pricey since disposal fees



are based on tonnage. Rerouting it strategically can cut costs significantly. That's why so many full-service hotels, especially those with

large banquet facilities, partner with local soup kitchens and shelters to donate unused yet perfectly edible food for people in need. Hilton donates used cooking fats from its kitchens to local farms, which use it for animal food. Many rendering companies also have an interest in such waste, which they also convert into animal food as well as cosmetics, soap and other products. Some provide storage barrels and free pick-up for hotels willing to donate.

Food waste that can't be repurposed or donated can be composted on-site or even mechanically "digested" using an environmentally-friendly food digester. Machines like the Eco-Safe Digester from BioHitech America convert food waste primarily into water, which can be flushed through standard sewer lines. BioHitech America offers its digester via lease or purchase; the cost varies depending on a hotel's specific size requirements. "In some areas of the country, waste transportation and disposal costs can be in excess of \$100 per ton," says BioHitech America CEO Frank E. Celli. "So a larger facility using one of our units can eliminate enough food waste to save up to \$100 a day, which over time is fairly substantial. On that savings alone, our customers are sometimes capable of achieving paybacks in one-and-a-half or two years. So it offers a pretty attractive return on investment."

Bulky, heavy mattresses—which, by the way, never decompose—can be recycled.

In fact, mattress recycling is now mandatory in three states—Rhode Island, Connecticut and California. After a mattress is collected and filleted, the steel from its springs can be made into construction items, the foam into carpet padding and the cotton into insulation. Wood from the box spring can be chipped for mulch or burned for biofuel.



Since 2009, Hilton Worldwide has diverted more than 20,300 mattress and box springs from landfills through its partnership with Global Sustainability Solutions in Manassas, VA. Hotels embarking on renovations may see substantial savings by recycling mattresses rather than trashing them. "Nine times out of 10, we can beat the cost to landfill," says Jessica Stracener, president of Global Sustainability Solutions.

Because landfill costs differ by region, the company provides cost analysis proposals to hotels interested in its recycling services, which—if clients prefer—include the installation of new mattresses as well as the removal of old. In its cost analysis for Hilton Worldwide, the company found it could recycle mattresses and box springs for an average \$20 per set versus the \$50 average it would cost to landfill them. "Also by using our services, you establish yourself as an eco-friendly property," Stracener says, "which generates consumer interest and improves your brand image."

Every day in the United States, hotels discard 2.6 million partially-used bars of soap. By collecting your property's soap stubs and sending them to a non-profit recycling organization like Global Soap or Clean the World, you can not only whittle away dumpster waste, but also help combat hygiene-related illnesses, which claim more than 1.7 million lives a year globally. These soap recyclers convert used bars into new full-size bars, which they then send to developing countries or disaster areas where soap is scarce. Global Soap estimates that 1.4 million deaths a year could be prevented through simply handwashing with soap.

By forwarding soap scraps, hotels stand to benefit, too. "Hotels reduce their trash bills by diverting a considerable amount of waste from the trash bins each month. Then, by sending the soap and amenities to Global Soap, they're able to take advantage of a couple of tax deductions as well," says Executive Director Samuel Stephens. "The first deduction is any cost that a property incurs in getting the soap to our factory in Las Vegas—it's considered a deductible charitable contribution. In addition, the soap itself is considered an 'in-kind' donation, which is also deductible."

Since 2009, Marriott International has donated more than 271,000 pounds of soap and 175,000 pounds of bathroom products through its Clean the World partnership. These have been recycled into thousands of hygiene kits that help children in impoverished communities around the world live healthier lives.

## BUYING BETTER

Fundamental to good waste management is information. Having a solid understanding of your hotel's waste flow (what goes in, how it's disposed, what the associated costs are) can generate savings through more effective decision making at the front end: purchasing. When Hilton Worldwide hired a company to help analyze the economics of its waste flow, it discovered it was often paying extra to dispose of items categorized as hazardous waste, specifically, mercury-containing lightbulbs and oil-based paints.

"So we decided to change how we do things," says Randy Gaines, vice president of engineering, housekeeping and laundry operations, Americas, Hilton Worldwide. "We said, 'Let's buy differently. Let's stop using some of this stuff.'" The company made the move to environmentally-friendly bulbs that are easily recyclable. It also replaced oil-based paints with recyclable paint with low VOCs, or volatile organic compounds.

BioHitech America offers a picture of a hotel's food waste situation through smart technology available in its digester. Customizable to a hotel's needs, the BioHitech Cloud can provide data on everything from the type and amount of food introduced to who is introducing it and when. So, for example, if every day at 10 a.m. someone in the kitchen is disposing of a pound of chopped meat, management can receive that information and adjust its purchasing accordingly.

"Reducing waste is truly the greenest alternative," says Frank E. Celli, BioHitech America CEO. "And it offers our customers the most economic benefit."

## CONNECT THE DOTS

Hoteliers don't need a degree in environmental science to reduce waste and save money. Here are a few simple tips:

- **FIND THE RIGHT RECEPTACLE:** If you place a plain brown box outside a door, nobody will think it's a recycling bin. Buy the standard, clearly-marked containers to place around the hotel.
- **CHECK THE FREQUENCY OF TRASH COLLECTION:** Most haulers make a contract based on 100% occupancy. If you're at 40% capacity, why would you want them to show up at your door every day?
- **EASE UP ON SINGLE SERVINGS:** Do you really need to have individual creamers during breakfast service? Go to a

small pitcher.

- **STOP THE STYROFOAM:** Forgo those non-recyclable cups in the employee break room. Instead, suggest staff members bring in their own coffee mugs.
- **PLACE ORDERS SENSIBLY:** Plan out food and office supply orders so you don't get a giant cardboard box with just two heads of broccoli or a couple of notebooks.

Tumolo, Jolynn, Trash Talk: Trimming Your Property's Waste Output Can Benefit The Environment—And Your Bottom Line, Lodging Magazine, January, 2015, p. 25-27

## What's in a Mattress?

A mattress is made up of metal (mostly steel), wood, cotton batting, paper, fiberfill, urethane foam and other miscellaneous textiles.

It typically has 9 pounds of cotton and 25 pounds of steel. Its composition is roughly:

- 30% metal
- 38% cotton
- 10% foam
- 4% wool shoddy

Overall these numbers vary, and continue to change as manufacturers adjust how they make beds and the materials they use to make them.



[http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2714&q=482160&deepNav\\_GID=1645%20](http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2714&q=482160&deepNav_GID=1645%20)

## Union Square Hospitality Group To Eliminate Tipping

Union Square Hospitality Group has announced a major change in the way that it runs its business and compensates its employees. Starting in November 2015 the company will eliminate tipping at the Modern restaurant. This will be followed by its other New York City restaurants throughout 2016. Union Square Hospitality Group started in 1985 with the opening of the Union Square Cafe. This was followed in 1994 with the Gramercy Tavern. Since then the company has grown to include 13 restaurants. In a letter to customers, Chief Executive Danny Myers wrote:



Dear Friends, I am writing to share some important news about Union Square Hospitality Group that we want you to understand before your next visit to one of our restaurants. Recently, our entire company has been engaged in a robust conversation about how we can provide even more meaningful career opportunities and advancement for our 1,800 employees. It has become increasingly clear to us that a major obstacle in this endeavor is the practice of tipping.

There are countless laws and regulations that determine which positions in a restaurant may, and may not share in gratuities. We believe hospitality is a team sport, and that it takes an entire team to provide you with the experiences you have come to expect from us. Unfortunately, many of our colleagues—our cooks, reservationists and dishwashers to name a few—aren't able to share in our guests' generosity,

even though their contributions are just as vital to the outcome of your experience at one of our restaurants.

After a thoughtful, company-wide dialogue, I'm proud to let you know that Union Square Hospitality Group will eliminate tipping throughout our family of restaurants. Starting at The Modern in late November, you will no longer find a tip line on your check, and there will be no need to leave additional cash at the table, the coat check or the bar. Our other New York restaurants will make this change over the course of the next year.



Once these changes are implemented, the total cost you pay to dine with us won't differ much from what you pay now. But

for our teams, the change will be significant. We will now have the ability to compensate all of our employees equitably, competitively and professionally. And by eliminating tipping, our employees who want to grow financially and professionally will be able to earn those opportunities based on the merit of their work.

We are making a bold decision for our team and our guests, and we don't take this lightly. We remain more committed than ever to our promise of delivering excellent dining experiences with warm hospitality—and we hope that you will support our team and join us on this journey. With gratitude, Danny Meyer

<http://hospitalitybusinessnews.com/20151023761/union-square-hospitality-group-to-eliminate-tipping>

## Keep Birds from Splattering Your Property and Brand

When the iconic red-shingled roof at the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego began to look milky white because of incessant bird splatters, Sonny Cataldo knew it was time to take action. As the hotel's director of facilities, he wanted to control the protected seagull population that had turned the tiered topper into an avian lavatory. "I hired a falconer," says Cataldo, explaining that every hotel has its distinct bird challenges. Hotels on the sea coast routinely share an invasion of hungry—and smart—gulls who find delectable pickings on hotel patios, walkways and parking lots.

How smart are these birds? Smart enough to recognize birds of prey patrolling the hotel grounds and to actually detect a pattern of schedules when the falconer and his hawks show up. "We have to stagger the schedule to keep the seagulls on high alert," Cataldo notes. With that sort of unpredictability accomplished, the gulls now simply stay away from the grounds.

The innovative bird management program has not only discouraged the congregation of birds, but also inspired guests to participate in enriching interactions with the falconer. "It's been a win-win and highly cost-effective," Cataldo says.

Of course, city hotels face other sorts of problems with seemingly immovable populations of English sparrows, European starlings and the king of all nuisance nesters—pigeons. "All three were introduced from overseas, and they now compete with our native birds for space and food," explains Kim Lewis, division manager for bird control, Rentokil North America. "They are considered pest birds."

Because pigeons do not migrate like other birds or move to

fields for summer feeding, they are a year-round problem. Shannon Sked, entomologist and manager of specialty services at No Fly Zone, in Tom's River, NJ, explains that pigeons are simply doing what comes naturally. "Pigeons are native to the rocky mountain cliffs of northern Egypt, so when they see a building ledge, it looks a lot like Alexandria to them," he says. "They don't know they're in New York or Chicago."

The typical broad, straight ledges found in urban architecture are perfect for breeding, roosting and loafing behaviors. As for nesting, "Pigeons require three points of contact to nest—so the inner corner of a ledge is perfect," Sked says. Indeed, any protected area invites birds. "Check your rooftop, ductwork, HVAC units, soffits and canopy overhangs," Lewis suggests. "If there is an area that will support birds, they will come."

While the birds may feel protected, hotel properties are at risk, standing to lose millions in bird-related damage to property, machinery, ventilation systems, vehicles and even brand image. In addition, there's biohazard associated with nests and droppings, Sked says. This biomaterial can transmit more than 60 diseases to humans, including some that are actually fatal.



Lewis agrees, adding that even when direct contact with droppings is avoided, the particulates can be drawn into the ventilation system and circulated into guestrooms and public areas. Furthermore, the droppings can clog gutters and promote slippery surfaces.

Droppings also make for sick buildings, Sked warns. "Because birds do not urinate, they expel uric acid within their droppings, which is caustic to substances like concrete. With long enough exposure, your concrete can erode." He also notes that birds involved in nesting behavior can damage buildings as they pick away at caulking, insulation, flashing and sealants to use as nest-building materials.

So what can a property manager do to control the bird population? It's all a matter of thinking like a bird, Sked says. "Once you know what the birds like—covered parking garages, ledges in entrance porticos, granite ledges—you can go about modifying them to make them less bird-friendly. The real solution to bird problems is to remove the conditions that attract them. Also, be sure to cover trash areas. An uncovered dumpster is like an engraved invitation."

Some of the most effective control paraphernalia include exclusion netting, spikes to discourage perching, wiring deterrent systems in parking garages or under porticos, and even slanted surfaces and bird flashing that will not allow a bird to rest or nest. "There are also repellants available and gels that bother their feet," Lewis says. "But in general, people love birds. We don't want to hurt them. We just want to make properties unattractive to them so they will move on."

Newitt, Valerie Neff, Keep Birds from Splattering Your Property and Brand, Lodging Magazine, November, 2014, <http://lodgingmagazine.com/keep-birds-from-splattering-your-property-and-brand/>

## Westin Bonaventure Takes a Serious Approach to Water Sustainability

Water conservation and recycling can no longer be considered trendy programs in the hotel industry—they are quickly

becoming necessary components to any hotel's operation—especially in California. While there are hundreds of hotels in the rapidly drying state that have incorporated sustainable practices into their daily routine, one particular property stands above the rest for its water-reclamation initiative. The Westin Bonaventure Hotel & Suites Los Angeles, which is managed by US-based global hotel management company Interstate Hotels & Resorts, has taken extensive steps to markedly reduce its water consumption, saving a precious resource for a state that is in the third year of a severe drought.

A key player in the Bonaventure's water conservation program is Michael Czarcinski, the hotel's managing director. Czarcinski's passion for the Bonaventure's green programs has ensured that the hotel has met, and often exceeded, its



sustainability goals since he joined the team seven-and-a-half years ago. "Personally and professionally, I've always been interested in sustainability," Czarcinski says. "My family comes from a little town in New Hampshire called Wilton,

which has always been known for its sustainability practices. It actually had one of the first landfills in America. We called it a recycling center, and that's where we took our waste every weekend."

About a year after Czarcinski began working at the Bonaventure, he was approached by the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board to be a front-runner in sustainable lodging practices. This involved getting the property Green Seal certified, ensuring that the hotel's processes met a certain level of sustainability. Since the Bonaventure became Green Seal certified, water-reclamation has become one of its top eco-initiatives. The latest upgrade to this program is the laundry-reuse system from AquaRecycle, a company that specializes in reducing water waste. Installed in 2014, the system cleans and stores the water used for hotel laundry, which totals almost 7 million pounds a year. "The City of Los Angeles offers rebates for water-reclamation programs, so once we were able to confirm that it was economically feasible, we decided to do it," Czarcinski says. Today, almost 80% of water in the Bonaventure's laundry system is reclaimed.

The laundry-reuse system is just one way that the Bonaventure saves water. In 2008, the hotel removed the second showerhead from all the guestrooms, reducing shower water consumption from 5 gallons per minute to only 1.9 gallons per minute and saving 10 million gallons of water per year. The hotel also installed new toilets, which reduced use from 1.6 gallons per flush to 1.27 gallons per flush. Urinals and faucets were also replaced with more efficient options, reducing water usage by 60% and 120%, respectively. Finally, the hotel reduced its interior plantscapes by 75%, saving money and water on their care. Combined, all of these initiatives have contributed to reducing the property's water bill by a reported \$213,939 per year, Czarcinski notes.

Additionally, utility savings extend to other categories beside water. The Westin Bonaventure is paying less in sewer fees because it's using less water. And, because the water being used for laundry is recycled from previous cycles, it is already hot, and bringing it up to the appropriate temperature requires less gas or electricity.

While the cost savings of the hotel's water-reclamation

programs is significant, the millions of gallons the hotel no longer uses are even more important because of the ongoing severity of California's drought. In April, Governor Jerry Brown asked the state as a whole to cut down water usage by 25%, beginning the process last month. Some communities were asked to cut back even more, as much as 36%. The Bonaventure was asked to cut down its water usage by 16%, based on its water bill and water consumption from the previous year. "We're already exceeding the mandate," Czarcinski boasts. Since the drought, the hotel has cut down water usage by 22%, all because of the installed system.

Water sustainability isn't the only green focus at the Bonaventure. The hotel also has an extensive recycling system, composts its food waste and uses light sensors to save on energy and electric costs. Looking to the future, Czarcinski says the Bonaventure intends to continue pushing the limits of its water-reclamation program by adding another washing machine and storage tank to its laundry system before the end of the year to save another half a million gallons of water. "We're also looking into options that would allow us to divert shower water through our reclamation system and use it for laundry, which would save another 20 to 30 million gallons of water per year," he says. "We're always looking at ways to improve our carbon footprint."

**10 MILLION Gallons of Water**  
the Westin Bonaventure saves per year  
after changing its showerheads

**GOOD ADVICE:** Michael Czarcinski, Managing Director of the Westin Bonaventure Los Angeles, shares some tips on how to set up a profitable sustainable water program.

- 1. Look beyond simply saving water.** "Since we're using less water, sewer fees decrease. And, because the temperature of the water getting recycled is already hot, we don't have to heat the water as much, saving on gas and electric."
- 2. Partner with a certifying body.** "Partnering with Green Seal helped us meet comprehensive, measurable criteria. It is a great way for a hotel to participate in sustainability programs because it is quantifiable."
- 3. Change your habits as team.** "You really have to change the culture of your staff. You have to change the way people think about water usage in their day-to-day lives and make it a passion for everyone involved. Today, it's very important to our team that we be known as a sustainable hotel."

Moccia, Melanie, Westin Bonaventure Takes a Serious Approach to Water Sustainability, Lodging Magazine, July 2015, <http://lodgingmagazine.com/westin-bonaventure-takes-a-serious-approach-to-water-sustainability/>

**PARTNER MEMBER SUCCESS STORIES**  
(Continued)

Our Sep/Oct issue focused on success stories of GHA's hotel members. We love sharing these very successful stories, and here's one more you'll love reading . . .

## The King's Daughters Inn

To boast a green property in Durham, NC is a bold statement. They are a community of heightened sustainable awareness on every street corner. When Colin and Deanna Crossman began restoring **1-year PARTNER MEMBER The King's Daughters Inn**, protecting the historical architecture of the house, as well as the landscapes surrounding the residence, was of utmost importance. Their successful green renovation is largely due to combining the most innovative technology available, alongside tried-and-true renewable practices. What once was a home for elderly women became a renowned 4-diamond luxury bed-and-breakfast.

The historic elements the Crossmans restored and preserved include the two-story box columns of the front portico, monumental arched windows, a grand staircase with second floor balcony, original doors with working transoms, heart-of-pine floors, fireplaces with marble mantels, plaster moldings and even push-button light switches with brass cover plates. With the exception of one wall, the existing layout remains, thus preserving the original corridors, parlor, dining room and sun porch. While historic preservation focuses on protecting our architectural past and green building emphasizes the current and future impact of a building on its environment, the two practices complement one another perfectly.

The Crossmans immediately initiated widely-used conservation methods seen in hotels today, LED lights, ultra high-efficiency Niagara flapperless toilets, relaxed towel and bedding procedures. In addition to these, the Crossmans also implemented state-of-the-art, 10,000-gallon rainwater-collection cisterns through Allen Grading, native-plant rain



garden utilizing a special blend of 50% dirt with 50% sand and pervious concrete, which significantly reduces irrigation needs. Deanna fully recommends the use of the

Total Energy Management System by Inncom. According to Deanna, the EMS has been one of the most beneficial budget savers by far, with a consistent 35% reduction rate of energy cost. Each room is supplied with an infrared sensor connected to the thermostat that recognizes when the room is occupied. There is also a sensor on each of the doors. If neither infrared sensor picks up on any guest activity after 30 minutes, power to the room is reduced. Of course, there is always available power remaining for light switches and charging phones or laptops. This system also helps regulate temperature in the room, allowing slight fluctuations of the thermostat, which always adds up! These green adjustments have all been so lucrative, the Crossmans plan to continue these ideas for future endeavors.

Naturally, all endeavors haven't been as beneficial as one would hope. The gray-water system, through Acme plumbing allows captured drain water to be filtered and recycled for uses within the building. In our case, the laundry water is filtered and recycled to flush the toilets. Between their commercial washing machine and their high-efficiency toilets, one load of laundry is enough for 43 toilet flushes! However, as environmentally-sound as this procedure is, there were some bumps along this path. The filters used to clean the recycled-water clog frequently, and aren't quite able to withstand the

amount of lint a hotel produces. "It isn't for lack of trying," Deanna shrugs. It is a beneficial system, but there must be more efficient methods out there that have since solved this nitpicky problem.

The Crossmans continue to maintain a vigilant eye for environmentally-conscious practices for The King's Daughters Inn. Conservation, historical preservation and sustainable technologies are pillars contributing to the fantastic success of the property. It is through blending light-touch practices and the power of green technology awareness that have made The King's Daughters Inn a beloved, conscientious green hotel in an earth-loving community.

Learn more at [thekingsdaughtersinn.com](http://thekingsdaughtersinn.com).

## 7 STEPS FOR SANITIZING BATHROOMS

Housekeeping staff and cleaning professionals can play a crucial role in curtailing the spread of infectious diseases, says Matt Morrison, Communications Manager for Kaivac, a developer of cleaning systems. He recommends the following steps when cleaning property restrooms:

- Wash your hands in hot, soapy water before cleaning the restroom. Accept the fact that any surface you have touched before entering the restroom might have been contaminated.
- Avoid placing anything on the restroom counter or on the floor. Should the counter or floor be contaminated, germs and bacteria potentially could be transferred from the surface to your hands when you pick up the items.
- Use a paper towel to turn manual faucets off and on.
- Stand a couple of feet away from the toilet or urinal when it's being flushed to avoid any "spray" from the fixture.
- If cleaning an unusually soiled restroom, assume that every surface may be contaminated and take added precautions (wear gloves and goggles and avoid skin contact with soiled items or surfaces).
- Consider spray-and-vac cleaning systems to avoid direct contact with surfaces.
- Wash hands again after cleaning restrooms and have paper towels at hand so you don't have to grab them from a dispenser.



Morrison, Matt, Communications Manager, Kaivac, "7 Steps for Sanitizing Bathrooms," Lodging Magazine, January, 2015, p. 58

## How to Host a Sustainable Holiday Party

'Tis the season to be jolly—and green! The holiday season is a time when many give thought to the idea of gratitude. This makes it an appropriate time for an organization to emphasize environmental sustainability during office holiday parties and year-end celebrations, seeking ways to minimize its impact on the environment and maybe even giving back.

Try the following tips to create a sustainable holiday soiree.

- Avoid paper invitations: Stick with electronic invitations if possible, using a service like Evite or Punchbowl. If it's the kind of event that calls for a physical invitation, use tree-free products that are made from 100% post-consumer materials.
- Choose an eco-friendly venue: Planners should look for a space that is known for its sustainable work and will make it that much easier to handle the meeting's logistics in an eco-friendly way. A venue that's either near the office or can be reached with mass transit would also be a good choice.



- Mind your décor: A major decoration to avoid is fresh flowers. Instead choose clay flowers, poinsettias and other reusable holiday flora.
- Do the dishes: If possible, the holiday party should use actual dishware that can be washed and reused rather than thrown out. Should it be necessary to go disposable, try to use products made from recycled or easily-compostable material.

reused rather than thrown out. Should it be necessary to go disposable, try to use products made from recycled or easily-compostable material.

- Give green gifts: A holiday party almost always includes a little something for the attendees to take home with them and remember the evening by such as organic or recycled gifts, or gifts that benefit the environment in some other way. A photo booth where attendees can get a photo they will want to keep, or providing services like a 15-minute massage are both great options.

Alderton, Matt, <http://www.successfulmeetings.com/Event-Planning/How-To/How-to-Host-a-Sustainable-Holiday-Party>

## Save your holiday greens to help the birds!

As bitter winter winds blow through the leafless trees and forest birds search for the shelter of an evergreen, we can offer them some help by repurposing our leftover natural holiday greenery. With the loss of woodlands, backyard habitats have become increasingly important for birds that stay with us through the winter months.



Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology has offered a friendly reminder that we can extend the usefulness of our holiday trees, wreaths and other greenery by putting them near feeders and in yards, among other things, to offer birds thermal refuge, instead of just tossing them to the curb.

Arranging evergreen branches near feeders and birdbaths can protect birds from wind and storms and provide hours of bird watching entertainment from the comfort of our homes. They can also be turned into birdhouses, which small birds will use in the winter if they're left up year round.

However, if that kind of project isn't in the cards for you, simply creating a pile of brush outside with leftover trees will also help provide shelter and create a refuge and hiding place for birds and other wildlife. Roosting in dense conifers in the cold of winter provides body heat for birds and can save them 1.3 hours of feeding the next day, according to the lab.

Our gardening habits can also help birds through winter. Some types of trees, including spruce and juniper, can be bought as plantable Christmas trees that you can add to your yard, or give away to other people or businesses if you don't have room for one. When spring returns and the garden

brings us outside, bird-friendly trees—including spruce, fir, cedar, yew, pine or shrubs—can be planted to help them through winter and to serve as cover from predators. Varieties including holly, crabapple and sumac, among others, offer berries and nuts that will continue to feed birds all winter when other food is scarce.

Nature has a plan to take care of wildlife though the cold of winter and being mindful of plants we see as weeds during the year, such as Joe pye and golden rod, can also help birds survive. According to the lab: Many people think of these as weeds, but during winter their seed heads stick up above the snow to provide an important natural food source. Goldenrod stems also house many gallfly larvae that spend the winter inside the plant's stems. These larvae are a rare source of insect protein in winter for birds such as chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers that can peck into the galls

[http://www.enn.com/sustainability/article/46843?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+Environmental+NewsNetwork+%28Environmental+News+Network%29](http://www.enn.com/sustainability/article/46843?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Environmental+NewsNetwork+%28Environmental+News+Network%29)

## Healthy Kitchen Tips: A Green Holiday Kitchen

'Tis the season to be in the kitchen, whether you're hosting an event, heading for a potluck or cooking a traditional meal for your family. Whatever the reason, you're probably going to buy ingredients, cook, clean—and enjoy some leftovers. Just follow these simple tips as you shop, cook, eat and clean:

**1. CHOOSE FOOD LOW IN POLLUTANTS AND ADDED CHEMICALS** - Food can contain ingredients we don't want to eat—from pesticides to hormones to artificial additives to food packaging chemicals. Some simple tips to cut the chemicals:

Make sure fresh fruits and vegetables are on the menu, and go organic when you can. Organic produce is grown without synthetic pesticides. Organic meat and dairy products also limit exposure to growth hormones and antibiotics.

It's okay to choose non-organic from EWG's "Clean 15" list of less-contaminated conventional fruits and vegetables, too. EWG's Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce ranks popular fruits and vegetables based on the amount of pesticide residues found on them.

Cook with fresh foods, rather than packaged and canned. Food containers can leach packaging chemicals into food, including the estrogenic bisphenol A that's used to make the linings of food cans. Go for fresh food or prepared foods stored in glass containers. Pick recipes that call for fresh, not canned, foods.

**2. AVOID TOXIC CHEMICALS IN COOKWARE** - Using a great pan makes a huge difference. Skip the non-stick so no one is breathing toxic fumes that can off-gas from non-stick pans over high heat. For safer cooking, use cast iron and oven-safe glass. Even if cookware isn't advertised as "green" or "not non-stick," manufacturers do not have to release their safety data to the public.

If you're stuck with non-stick, cook safer with it. Reduce the possibility of toxic fumes by cooking smart with non-stick cookware: Never heat an empty pan, don't put it in an oven hotter than 500°F and use an exhaust fan over the stove.

**3. STORE AND REHEAT LEFTOVERS SAFELY** - Leftovers can extend the joy of a holiday. But be sure to avoid plastic when storing and especially when heating them. Skip plastic

food storage containers. The chemical additives in plastic can migrate into food and liquids. Ceramic or glass food containers such as Pyrex are safer.

Don't microwave food or drinks in plastic containers, even if they claim to be microwave safe. Heat can release chemicals into your food and drink. Microwave ovens heat unevenly, creating hot spots where the plastic is more likely to break down.

If you do use a plastic container, handle it carefully. Use it for cool liquids only; wash plastics by hand or on the top rack of the dishwasher, farther from the heating element. Use a paper towel instead of plastic wrap to cover food in the microwave. Avoid single-use plastic as much as possible—reusing it isn't safe (it can harbor bacteria) and tossing it out fills up landfills.

**4. CLEAN GREENER** - We recommend that you clean green because our kitchens aren't safe and clean if the air inside is polluted with chemicals from household cleaners.

Try natural alternatives like vinegar, baking soda and water. EWG's DIY Cleaning Guide is filled with recipes and easy tips on how to make your own non-toxic cleaners. Avoid anti-bacterials. Avoid the biggest hazards which are acidic toilet bowl cleaners, air fresheners, oven cleaners and corrosive drain openers.

Adopt safe cleaning routines. Open the window. Use gloves. Dust and vacuum often because dust often contains toxics.

Tips for the kitchen. Microwave your sponge. Wash your hands with plain soap and water—it's just as effective. Use a baking-soda-and-water paste instead of commercial oven cleaner

<http://www.ewg.org/research/healthy-home-tips/tip-13-your-green-holiday-kitchen>

## PIZZA-BOX COMPOSTING GETS COLLEGE TRY

College students love pizza. They also love recycling. But their pizza boxes are virtually unrecyclable, thanks to the cheesy, greasy residue left behind on the cardboard bottoms. What's a poor school to do? At North Carolina State University in Raleigh, the answer is the Pizza-Box Composting Project—dumpsters placed at eight locations around campus that since early last year have helped turn approximately 16,000 grease-stained boxes into fertilizer.

At their recent Homecoming, sophomore volunteer Wesley Phan moved a composting bin in front of a trash can so that it would be noticed by those disposing of their individual pizza boxes during the game. "It's a strategy," he said. "You force them to think." Colleges nationwide are in an arms race to out-green each other, as they endeavor to appeal to Generation Z, or those defined as coming after the Millennial generation, by touting their improvements in saving water (low-flow dorm shower heads) and plastic (compostable forks and reusable to-go containers in dining halls).

But pesky pizza boxes continue to pile up in dumpsters and dorm hallways—despite high profile campus recycling efforts—because cardboard is recycled in a water-based system, and water and oily pizza residue don't mix.

The problem goes well beyond campus and extends to cities across the US including San Jose, CA, and Washington, DC.

Industry giant Domino's Pizza delivers about 200 million pizzas a year nationwide, but says very few of those boxes are recycled because of municipal bans against recycling soiled cardboard. "It's not something we can control on our end," said Jenny Fouracre-Petko, Domino's spokeswoman.

Some schools encourage students to take half steps and rip off the unsullied top of a used pizza box and recycle it. The greasy bottoms then go in the trash, adding to the nation's waste and taking up space in US landfills.



A campaign by the anti-littering Keep America Beautiful organization touts recycling half a box "as better than none." But the non-profit group says while the US recycles about 63.5% of paper, people still trash enough paper and cardboard each year to fill 26,700 football fields in material three-feet deep.

Some other schools, like Smith College in Northampton, MA, have experimented with plastic pizza delivery containers that are usable hundreds of times. Smith dropped the newfangled containers, which can be expensive and unwieldy. Miami University in Oxford, OH, ended its dorm-based pizza-box composting program last year. "It did not work so well," said spokeswoman Claire Wagner, as few students participated and custodians struggled to keep the bins neat.

Like many schools, NC State in Raleigh has been composting for several years, by having cafeteria staff scrape plates of leftover food into giant bins. Last year the school added pizza-box composting by placing dumpsters with giant pizza emblems outside dorms.

Recycling manager Analis Fulghum said the key to NC State's program is sending the boxes to a commercial composting facility large enough to absorb copious amounts of cardboard in its mix of discarded food, egg shells and coffee grounds. The school pays to dump the pizza boxes at the composting site, but says the program nearly breaks even because of a reduction of trips to the landfill.

The biggest challenge was keeping stray plastic out of the composting bins. One piece of plastic can get shredded into a composting mix and break into hundreds of tiny pieces. Contamination is a huge problem.

Many people have pizza several times a week. It's best to keep your cheese off your pizza boxes and recycle them, suggesting removal of the pizza from the box along with any underlying wax paper. Pizza-box composting should be praised, and consumers would do well to rip up pizza boxes and add the shreds as necessary carbon material in the backyard compost pile.

Bauerlein, Valerie, Pizza Box Composting Gets College Try, The Wall Street Journal, November 1, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/pizza-box-composting-gets-college-try-1446420961>

## German Cities Have a Burning Need for Eurotrash

Each day, trucks roll into this city filled with the latest hot import from the streets of Manchester, England: garbage. The destination is a power plant that makes a business of turning trash into electricity, or as it touts in a brochure, “spinning straw into gold.” The straw in this case is large, pillowy blobs of rubbish, neatly wrapped in plastic.

A waste-not, want-not attitude mixed with a national zeal for recycling has led to an awkward problem for Germany: It isn't producing enough of its own trash. Over the past decade, heaps of garbage-burning power plants and composting facilities were built throughout Germany as the country shut off all its landfills to new household trash. But instead of growing, as many thought it would, household-waste production flattened, in part because sparing Germans edged their already-high recycling rate even higher. Taken with the effects of a declining population and the global recession, plants in Germany were left short millions of tons of garbage a year, a quandary for companies that depend on a steady stream of rubbish to keep the lights on.



So the country turned to its trashier neighbors. Now by boat and by truck, waste is piling in from England, Ireland, Italy and Switzerland, among others, to plants, where it gets burned and converted to electricity that keeps German households on the grid. The

imports are made possible by a European Union directive to gradually phase out landfills. That has led to higher taxes on landfill use in countries like Great Britain, making the trans-border shipping economically feasible.

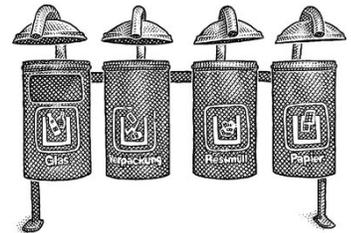
Today, the recycling rate here counts among the highest in the world, by some measures, at roughly 65% of household trash. Within houses and apartments, kitchen waste bins can have four or more compartments for sorting various categories of recycling.

Even at the Magdeburg power plant, recycling is a big deal. When the boilers are cleaned, metal from the coals is picked out with magnets, while the remaining ash is sold to an asphalt company, being reborn in the form of German roads.

Hamburg used to favor importing waste, and the city had a

small contract with an English city to take care of its trash. But Hamburg city officials—feeling embarrassed about their relatively low recycling rate of about 40%—made a big push to improve it. That meant less trash, which meant shutting down one waste-to-energy plant, leaving less free capacity. Closures like those in Hamburg are happening around the country for older and inefficient plants—welcome news for plants that can go on to charge higher prices to municipalities to dispose of their trash.

“We are definitely in a good mood,” said Peter Werz, spokesman for EEW Energy from Waste, which owns the Magdeburg plant. The mood is a shift from three to four years ago, when the German price for waste was far lower—around \$35 per ton compared with \$55 to \$80 per ton today, according to Tolvik Consulting.



Ultimately, such capacity reductions and rising waste prices may make it uneconomical for neighboring countries to ship their trash to Germany. But with declining trash production at home and other EU countries still phasing out landfills, the Magdeburg plant remains open, provided it has the space, to future imports of others' waste. “Not their waste,” corrects Mr. Werz. “Their energy.”

Brown, Eliot, German Cities Have a Burning Need for Eurotrash, The Wall Street Journal, October 20, 2015, [http://shipping.einnews.com/article/292433492/3XS\\_Yf2mnJhYwEaB](http://shipping.einnews.com/article/292433492/3XS_Yf2mnJhYwEaB)

**DESERT BLOOMS:** Chile's northern deserts have bloomed into the most impressive carpet of flowers seen there in 18 years. A period of frost-free weather and unusually heavy rains brought on by a developing El Nino transformed the desolate Atacama landscape into a colorful tapestry scented with exotic floral aromas. The various species of wildflowers that have adapted to cope with some of the most arid conditions on Earth have seeds that can lie dormant for years.



Earthweek, Houston Chronicle, November 1, 2015

## FINAL WORDS . . .

You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.

Jane Goodall