

# WRAP IT *in* GREEN



Laden with gifts, guests leave the wrapping party. All the wrapping was recycled from materials that otherwise would have been thrown away.

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LEFT: Two patterns of color-coordinated wallpaper scraps give this small gift ethnic appeal. The beads, brass washer, and hemp string outshine a plain bow. HERE: Buttons, beads, and scraps of this and that combine to make packages almost too pretty to open.



Make the package  
part of the gift  
and make a party of  
wrapping it up.

**I**N THE MIDST OF ALL THE HUBBUB, it's easy to forget that the holidays are meant to be a time for connecting with others and that gifts are a happy token of kinship with those we love. This year, turn what's usually a harried, solitary to-do into a fun excuse to get together with friends by throwing a wrap party. A little food, some holiday music, and lots of great ideas for eco-conscious wrapping make for a creative, festive, and productive afternoon.

We gathered seven creative, environmentally aware friends and asked each to bring a half-dozen gifts that needed wrapping. We prepared a light, healthy selection of sandwiches (wraps, of course!), fruit, and bite-size cookies to nibble. The real smorgasbord, however, was the table laden with wrapping materials: recycled papers crumpled to resemble Florentine fabric; colorful, eclectic wallpapers cut from discarded sample books; raffia, hemp, and jute string; an intriguing pastiche of baubles and tags; and rubber stamps, stickers, and colorful pens to put a personal stamp on the packages.

After a couple of hours—and a heaping helping of enjoyable chatter—everyone had an armload of stunning, unique packages to share with others.



## Crushed Paper

■ Transform paper that looks unfashionably utilitarian into something that has a handmade texture resembling crushed silk. Paper that would otherwise be too stiff to use as wrapping can be crumpled and crushed to make a soft paper that wraps beautifully and defies its roots. The secret is to first ball up the paper, then unroll it, then crumple it repeatedly until it crushes easily into a small ball. Unroll it, smooth it out, and it's ready to wrap.

### what to recycle (and re-create!):

- newspaper or newsprint
- brown paper bags
- kraft paper
- manila envelopes
- wallpaper scraps
- white bond paper
- old sheet music
- maps
- last year's wrapping paper



## Recycled Wallpaper

■ Wallpaper comes in a dizzying array of colors, patterns, and materials. Many share the same palette and are designed to look beautiful together; they're made to mix and match, so they're ideal for decorating packages. For instance: Use a wide swath of a floral wallpaper to wrap the package, cut a thin band of a stripe to make a color-coordinated ribbon, and cut out a paisley or a medallion to decorate the tag. And because wallpaper patterns change with each new season, wallpaper sample books are often free for the taking. Look for books full of more "paperly" wallpaper; vinyl-coated wallcoverings are too thick and stiff for wrapping presents.

### where to find wallpaper scraps:

- wallpaper and paint stores
- interior decorators
- some fabric shops

**be sure to** call first and explain that you're looking for last season's sample books that would otherwise be discarded. Retailers are usually happy to see them put to good use.



## Baubles, Beads, and Tags

■ Use your imagination to top off a package: Raid the junk drawer, the hardware aisle, the bead and button jar, and the recycling bin to find beautiful baubles. Stationery supply shops or craft stores' scrapbook sections are great places to look for adornments such as alphabet beads. To personalize the packages, have available a rubber stamp alphabet or letter stickers. Old-fashioned manila-colored tags with strings (available in an office-supply store) look pretty when stamped or written on with metallic ink.

### what to try:

- old game pieces
- antique keys
- seashells
- large metal and glass beads
- alphabet brads
- soda-bottle tops
- brass washers
- fancy brads
- tags and stickers from the office-supply store
- string
- raffia
- yarn



Many hands make light work and lots of laughter. In addition to creative ideas, each guest can take her favorite recycled materials to continue the eco-conscious wrapping at home.



Keep the party small and intimate so everyone has enough room to work. Food can be simple because it's not the main event. Ask each guest to bring six or eight smallish gifts that need wrapping. No bicycles or hula hoops, please.





## Dreaming of a Light Christmas

Americans throw away 25 percent more trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's than at any other time of year, according to the Use Less Stuff newsletter. Here are some ways to lighten the load as you celebrate:

- Reuse pretty papers, bows, and ribbons. Have a pair of scissors handy when opening presents so you can unwrap them without tearing the paper. Set up three bags next to the tree: one for real trash, one for paper to reuse, and one for ribbons, bows, and cards that can be reused next year.
- Recycle holiday cards to use as gift tags the following year. Cut the illustration into smaller pieces and use the back for your holiday message.
- Christmas card envelopes can also make clever tags. Colorful envelopes often sport a lovely holiday stamp or an interesting postmark.
- If your packages are wrapped with newspaper, paper bags, unprinted tissue paper, or crinkled manila envelopes, you can burn the paper as part of your holiday merriment. (Be sure to remove all glue or tape before wadding it up and tossing it into the fire place.) For hard-core recyclers, paper can be torn into strips and tossed into the compost heap, where it will eventually degrade.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Old sheet music from the junk store adds a lyrical note to packages. ■ The basic wrapped package ready for embellishment. ■ Mixing and matching different patterns creates rich visual texture. ■ The hardest part is choosing from all the possibilities. ■ A tag decorated with alphabet brads make a one-of-a-kind package. ■ Crumpled paper hangs ready to use next to the work table.

## Set the work table

A little organization and a few tools will get your party off to a great start. Have a couple of wrapped presents on display to fuel everyone's imagination.

- Create a space to display papers and to fan out wallpaper pieces. Use trays or plates to organize the baubles, stickers, rubber stamps, and string. Arrange these as you would a buffet, then set up a large work table for wrapping. If possible, reserve another space where guests can sit and decorate their packages.
- Scotch tape struggles to adhere to wallpaper, so try a double-sided, pressure-sensitive adhesive such as Glue Dots (GlueDots.com). Nontoxic and easy to use, they'll stick wallpaper together nicely and adhere three-dimensional objects such as old keys or seashells to packages.
- Have multiple pairs of scissors and a pair of pinking shears handy. You'll also want a hole punch and a stapler. Have available an assortment of pens for writing messages; metallic ink pens are especially nice.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: A flurry of activity on a December afternoon yields a stack of lovely and unique packages. ■ A cancelled stamp and postmark torn from the envelope of a card makes a colorful gift tag. ■ An old Scrabble game from a flea market yielded wooden alphabet pieces to put an appealingly cryptic message on this package.