

HOW TO:

RECYCLE A CHRISTMAS TREE

SIMPLE PROJECTS FOR CONSERVATION

THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

The holidays are fast approaching. For those of you who plan to celebrate with a blue spruce or Douglas fir, the fresh smell of pine today will be replaced by dry, dead branches and lots of pine needles in January. But that tree isn't done yet! There are plenty of uses for it around your home and neighborhood.



Backyard Habitat

The simplest way to reuse your holiday tree is to throw it in the backyard – that's if your yard is big enough that a dried-out pine tree won't be an eyesore for you or your neighbors. Winter birds and other wildlife will appreciate the additional cover in your backyard. This is also a great spot for homemade bird feeders – pine cones smeared with peanut butter and birdseed that can be tied to the tree. You can even make garlands of popcorn and cranberries for your tree during the holidays and leave them on the tree for the birds to eat.

For a decorative approach, stand the tree up, anchor the base with some dirt, and use heavy twine and stakes to hold it in place. If the ground is already frozen, stand the tree up in a planter or other large container filled with sand. Be sure to remove anything non-edible from the tree before you turn it into a wilderness tree house.

REQUEST TO READERS

If you build a project based on this or other Outdoor America articles, or if you have an idea for a good conservation project, please e-mail us at info@iwla.org.



Garden Groundcover

Pine branches make excellent groundcover. They help hold moisture in the ground, keep soil in place . . . and smell much better than mulch!

Use a hand saw or pruning shears to cut small branches off the tree, then spread the boughs where needed around your garden. If you're laying groundcover around bushes or other perennial plants, you can leave the branches on the ground as long as you like. Dry pine needles make an excellent bed for fruits like strawberries that grow on the ground. If you're using your pine boughs to cover up a bed of tulips or other bulbs, remove the branches in the early spring so flowers can bloom.

Thick branches and tree trunks must be mulched before they can be used in the garden or be composted. You can also use these large pieces of wood to create stakes and trellises for large plants. Pine needles may initially increase acidity in your compost pile, but as the compost breaks down the acidity will move back to neutral (although it can take a while for pine needles to decompose).

Water Wonder

Anchored evergreens offer an economical solution to streambank erosion. Properly installed, these trees can slow bank erosion and provide a place for sediment to deposit and build. This method is particularly useful in small and medium streams where large machinery can't fit. Contact a natural resource professional for advice on how to get started. The League's *Handbook for Stream Enhancement & Stewardship* also offers helpful diagrams and how-to tips. You may need to apply for a permit, depending on your local and state regulations.

If your chapter isn't ready to take the plunge into stream erosion control, check with your state or local Department of Natural Resources to ask about local river, ocean, or lake erosion prevention programs that may be able to put your tree to good use.

Recycling Other Holiday Décor

Trees aren't the only holiday items that can have a life outside the landfill. Following are a few other ways to make your holidays more "green."

Green Greetings

An estimated 2.6 billion holiday cards are sold each year in the United States, enough to fill a football field 10 stories high. Before you throw the card from the Smiths in the recycling bin, consider other uses for it:

- Use this year's cards for gift tags next year.
- Make ornaments or decorations from those old cards using a pair of scissors, a hole punch, and some decorative ribbon or string. (These are both great activities for kids!)

Lights Out

If your holiday lights stop twinkling and your community does not recycle bulbs, you can mail your broken bulbs to:

Christmas Light Source Recycling Program
4313 Elmwood Drive
Benbrook, TX 76116

The bulbs will be recycled, and proceeds will be used to purchase books for the Marine Corps' Toys for Tots program.

HolidayLEDs.com
Attn: Recycling Program
13400 Watertown Plank Road, Ste. 34
Elm Grove, WI 53122

Eliminate E-Waste

When you buy a new electronic gadget, avoid throwing the old one in a landfill. The Electronics Industry Alliance offers a state-by-state list of electronics collection sites and recyclers at www.ecyclingcentral.com.

