

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

University of Georgia Family & Consumer Sciences • Volume 7 • Number 4 • December 2023



Inside this issue:

- Reducing Holiday Waste
- Radon is a Health Problem
- Annual HVAC Maintenance
- Dangers in Your Home
- Healthy Home Hacks



Pet Friendly Holiday Tips

- ♦ Choose pet friendly plants like holiday cactus, moth orchids, or bromeliads.
- ♦ Store candy, especially chocolate, out of reach
- ♦ Avoid mistletoe and holly
- ♦ Use flameless candles
- ♦ Keep pets out of the tree



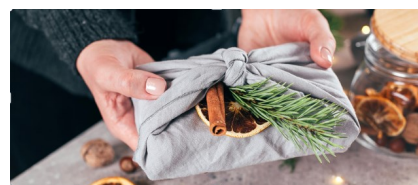
(Images Source: Pamela Turner)

Reducing Holiday Waste

Written by Teresa Adkins, 4-H & FACS Extension Agent, Decatur County

The holiday season is one of the most exciting times of the year. Many people plan for special meals and anticipated traditional activities. According to the latest reports, though, over six million tons of waste are left behind in America at the end of the holiday season. It's easy to believe those statistics when we look around our homes at the end of holiday parties and gatherings with family and friends. Yes, we had a great time, but where did all the paper come from? And this trash? Why are there so many table scraps? And what are we supposed to do with all this mess? Thankfully, there are some solutions to these problems, and they are good for your wallet, helpful for your sanity, and good for the environment.

The easiest place to begin the process of economic and environmental reduction is with paper. When it comes to wrapping gifts, one of the easiest solutions is to use reusable gift bags, especially those made from decorative cloth. Also, gifts can be wrapped inside another gift such as a nice scarf, a pair of socks, or even a new towel. Just think of how many gifts could be tucked into a colorful beach towel! Consider putting gifts in tote bags, reusable shopping bags or even storage containers like buckets or baskets. This way the packaging becomes part of the gift. Thinking creatively can turn a small gift into an exciting experience. You could even give an experience instead of a wrapped gift. Many people would prefer making an unforgettable memory over the quick time spent unwrapping a gift.



(Image Source: Canva Pro)

To reduce table waste, use cloth napkins and table coverings to turn the day into a memorable event. This is the opportune time to use the embroidered table runner you inherited from your Great Aunt Susie, or the crocheted tree that has been stored in the attic for years. Using vintage items is a great waste reducer and it is also a way to cherish memories from the past. Ditch the paper and plastic and use reusable plates and tableware. It requires a bit more work washing up, but sometimes the best memories can be made in the kitchen during cleanup time. Pretty much everyone would be glad to help, especially if they understood the proactive reasoning behind the additional work.

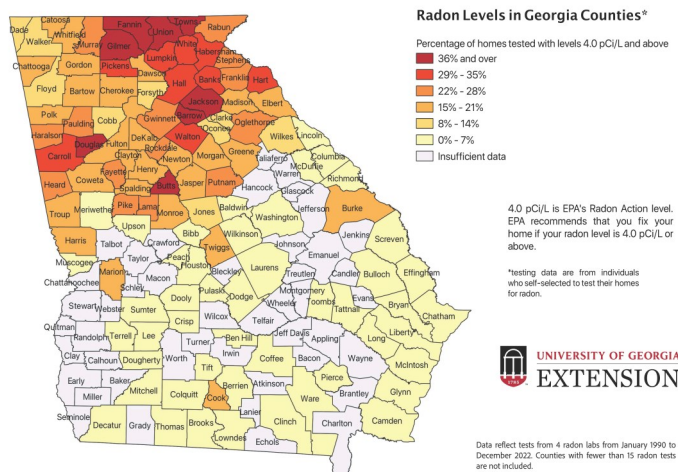
When it comes to leftover food, special containers can be set out for folks to share the meal leftovers. We probably all have special memories of carrying home yummy leftovers to be enjoyed later. It's sometimes easy to overlook how important leftovers can be when appreciating the memories of the holidays once they are over.

Radon is a Health Problem with a Solution

*Written by Susie Burton Medina, CEC & FACS Extension Agent,
Banks and Habersham Counties*

When I was told to test my home for radon, my first instinct was to close my eyes and plug my ears. “I’m way too busy to worry about that, and I’m a little scared of what my results might be,” I thought. After all, radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer. It’s a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that could be in the air my family breathes, day and night. In short, radon is scary. But radon is a problem with a straightforward solution. All you need to do is test, mitigate, and breathe easy.

You can perform the test yourself by ordering a kit from the [UGA Extension Radon Program](#). The \$15 price includes shipping, lab processing, and follow up service if the test results are elevated. If your home tests high (above 4 picocuries per liter), you will want to consider hiring a certified radon professional to install a mitigation system. The cost varies but is usually between \$1000 and \$2500. In rural counties there are some loans and grants available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for home safety improvements for limited-income seniors and families. If you have questions, your county UGA Extension office is happy to connect you with resources and information about radon and radon mitigation. So, is radon serious and a little scary? Yes, but it’s a health concern with a solution.



(Image Source: radon.UGA.edu)

Visit the [interactive radon map](#) to learn what the radon level is where you live.

Dangers in Your Home

Written by Brittany Harrison, CEC & FACS Extension Agent, Baldwin County

Exposure to chemicals, and air and water pollution may come to mind when you think of environmental hazards. Chemicals are ingested or inhaled by our children, and ourselves when we eat, breathe, and drink. Nevertheless, there are ways to reduce exposure to harmful chemicals found in and around your home. For instance, pesticides are frequently used on fruits and vegetables. The easiest way to prevent being exposed to pesticides is to wash produce before eating it. If you use pesticides in your yard, you need to take care not to bring it inside on hands and feet. It’s advisable to remove outdoor shoes and leave them by the door. Also, everyone should wash their hands when they come indoors. Another common concern is lead paint. If your house was built prior to 1978, there’s a chance that it contains lead paint. Regularly cleaning windowsills and vacuuming the floors can help to reduce exposure.

We can never be too cautious when it comes to creating a safe and healthy indoor environment. There are eight helpful tips to creating a healthy home.

Keep your home:

- DRY. Repair leaks.
- CLEAN. Leave shoes at the door.
- VENTILATED. Use exhaust fans.
- PEST-FREE. Seal cracks to keep bugs out.
- SAFE. Remove tripping hazards.
- CONTAMINANT-FREE. Test your home for radon.
- MAINTAINED. Clean the gutters.
- GREEN. Conserve water and energy.



Image Source: Canva Pro

For checklists and publications about mold, home maintenance and home safety visit <https://site.extension.uga.edu/hie/>.



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

Why Annual HVAC Maintenance Is Important

Written by Jackie Ogden, FACS Extension Agent, Chatham County

The HVAC equipment in your home provides seasonal comfort year-round with warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer. Regular preventive maintenance is the most important step in keeping your heating and cooling (HVAC) equipment operating at maximum efficiency. Just like your personal health, your home's health will decline without regular (HVAC) care and maintenance check-ups. Responsible homeowners and property managers should have home heating and cooling systems inspected with a maintenance check-up by a HVAC professional once per year.



(Image Source: Canva pro)

Properly maintaining your heating and cooling systems will retain the energy efficiency of the HVAC equipment. Whether your air ventilation ductwork is your ceiling or floor be sure that ductwork is attached so warm or cool airflow is not blowing into the attic or crawlspace. Here are ten areas that the HVAC technician will inspect during a service call to keep your system operating at peak performance and keep repairs to a minimum.

1. Check thermostat settings and calibration.
2. Clean evaporator (indoor) and condenser air conditioning (outdoor) coils.
3. Check refrigerant operating pressures and adjust charge if necessary.
4. Clean and adjust blower components and measure for correct airflow.
5. Tighten all electrical connections and measure voltage and current on motors.
6. Check all gas (or oil) connections, gas pressure, burner combustion, and heat exchanger. Monitor for carbon monoxide (CO) while service is being done.
7. Lubricate all moving parts.
8. Check and inspect the condensate drain.
9. Check controls and starting capabilities of the system.
10. Inspect and clean or change air filters. (They should be changed every 3 or 6 months depending on your system and the type of filter,)

It's a great idea to establish a HVAC maintenance plan and keep all your equipment manuals and warranties for future reference. If you sell or rent your home you will have excellent records to validate the service maintenance on this equipment.

Healthy Home Hacks

Contributed by Stephanie Benton FACS Extension Agent, Early County



Decorations

Decorations that haven't been used in a while may add just the right touch to your holiday décor by repurposing them or transforming them into new decorations.

- Paint or add some bling to liven up old decorations.
- Incorporate ornaments or other decorations into table décor or on a wreath.
- Still have a pumpkin from Halloween? Paint can transform any size pumpkin into a Santa Claus, snowman, or any holiday scene.
- Excess or small pieces of leftover wrapping paper can be used to shape onto a cone form to create trees of various sizes or used as candy horns to hang on your tree.



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

(Image Source: Canva pro)

Healthy Home Hacks

Contributed by Stephanie Benton FACS Extension Agent, Early County

The holiday season is deemed as the most wonderful time of year. The festive spirit, decorations and many colors of the season put us all in the holiday spirit. Here are some helpful holiday hacks that are creative and cost effective to make your holiday season merry and bright!

Holiday Scents

Give your home the smells of the season by using any combination of fresh, overripe or dried fruits and your favorite spices, simmering them in a crockpot or on the stove. Create your own favorite simmering scent! (Be sure to ask family and friends about respiratory concerns and sensitivities.)



(Image Source: flavorandsavor.com)

- ♦ Sliced apples, orange or lemon slices, cranberries
- ♦ Cinnamon sticks, cloves, allspice, whole star anise
- ♦ Rosemary sprigs or bay leaves
- ♦ Evergreen branches from fir, cedar or pine

Storage

Packing up holiday decorations can sometimes be a challenge but organization and good packing tools can help to keep things tidy, as well as protect your decorations. And don't forget to label boxes!

- ♦ Old egg cartons, paper cup holders and plastic cups are great for housing ornaments that can be stacked inside a box or plastic tote.
- ♦ Coffee filters are soft and flexible and are an inexpensive way to protect ornaments from getting broken
- ♦ Toilet paper or paper towel rolls cut open can be used as a cuff to keep wrapping paper rolls from unrolling



(Images source: Pinterest)



UGA Extension [Healthy Indoor Environments](http://healthyhomes.uga.edu)
(healthyhomes.uga.edu)



Co-editors: Dr. Pamela R. Turner, Professor and Housing and Indoor Environment Extension Specialist
Dr. Diane W. Bales, Professor and Human Development Extension Specialist