

Do YOUR PART

Make Valentine's Day gifts earth friendly

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Make Valentine's Day more meaningful this year when you Do Your Part while selecting gifts for your sweetie. From the cards to the candy to a colorful bouquet of flowers, there are lots of creative ways to pick the perfect present and tread lightly on the planet at the same time.

Let's start with the card. Valentine's Day is second only to Christmas for most number of cards bought and delivered. Whether you pick one up at the grocery store or a card shop, look for ones made from recycled content. Check the back of the card for the recycled content information. Choose cards made with post consumer content, the paper you and I recycle.

You can also find cards that will double as a blooming plant in the future. Look

for ones made from paper embedded with flower seeds. After reading the card, your loved one can plant it and later watch the flowers bloom!

Flowers are of course a traditional gift for your Valentine. But, why not choose something that will smell sweeter and last a whole lot longer? A small pot of blooming tulips, daffodils, or hyacinth are a beautiful gift and can be planted outdoors where they will continue to bloom year after year.

If roses are a must on your list, consider this: most roses are imported from other countries and are heavily sprayed with pesticides and insecticides. Some of these chemicals are so toxic that American farmers are banned from using them. If you want to buy a bouquet that isn't blanketed in toxic chemicals, there are many alternatives.

Look for florists who offer sustainably grown flowers and specifically, seek out ones which offer VeriFlora certified flowers and plants. This certification is recognized as the environmental gold standard in the floral industry. Organicbouquet.com and CaliforniaOrganicFlowers.com are two good places to start shopping.

If candy is on your list this Valentine's Day, check out the

growing selection of organic chocolates. The cocoa beans are grown without chemicals, which is better for you, the environment and the farmers who grow them. These days, you can order organic chocolates online or find them in places such as Whole Foods or Dean and DeLuca. You can also support your local economy by searching out local candy makers where you live. They are sure to offer the perfect candy concoction for your loved one.

You're also sure to impress your valentine by planning a romantic (and environmentally responsible) dinner. If dining out is your choice, visit LocalHarvest.org to see which restaurants in your area are serving up meals made with fresh, local and organic ingredients.

If you'll be doing the cooking, the Web site also has information on finding farmer's markets, family farms and grocery stores which carry organic produce and meats close to your home. And, don't forget to pick up the perfect bottle of wine. Selecting an organic variety means the grapes are grown without toxic insecticides and pesticides. That's something to raise your glass to!

(Terri Bennett is a nationally recognized earth scientist and mom. To find out more about her Do Your Part initiative, visit www.terribennett.com.)

