

Unique Forest-related Gifts this Year

For many people, shopping at this time of year can be a daunting task because it is difficult to find that perfect gift for someone special. But if that someone owns forest land, uses firewood, or is interested in the Island's natural environment, the Forests, Fish and Wildlife Division has a number of interesting ideas and suggestions for you this year.

The recent rise in energy prices has led to a dramatic increase in the use of firewood on PEI. In many cases people buy their wood blocked, split and delivered but for those who use a chainsaw to cut and block their own wood there are a number of affordable and effective pieces of safety equipment well suited to holiday gift giving.

For instance, a Safety Helmet can help to minimize the impacts of falling branches on the head. When combined with a face screen and ear defenders you can help the chainsaw operator to prevent damage to eyes and hearing. Safety or Cutter's Pants are made of nylon and Kevlar, a unique material used in bullet proof vests, can offer a measure of critical protection to the workers legs. Should the cutting teeth kick back or hit the leg, these specially designed pants will slow them down, providing a few critical seconds and help to avoid serious or life threatening injuries. These pants are comfortable to wear and suited to outdoor work in all kinds of weather and operating conditions.

Many people wear steel-toed work boots when operating a chainsaw but boots suited to a construction site are usually not suited to work in wet, slippery forest conditions or next to a high speed chainsaw. Cutters' Boots are special rubber boots which incorporate Kevlar, steel toes, and gripping soles designed for work on wet slippery ground. These boots are also brightly coloured to help the operator see where their feet are in relationship to the chainsaw bar and thus prevent accidental strikes to toes and feet hidden in the brush or snow.

Once the wood is home and ready for use, you can help to maintain air quality in your neighbourhood by using only properly dried and seasoned wood and ensuring your stove is clean and burning at top efficiency. Most stove businesses sell environmentally-friendly, and reusable wood carrying bags to help get the wood from the pile to the stove. Indoor wood storage racks can also be purchased to keep the wood off the floor so that it stays dry and ready to use.

For those who own land and want to manage it for any number of reasons, the Forests, Fish and Wildlife Division offers a number of programs for private forest owners. The Forest Enhancement Program www.gov.pe.ca/forestry/FEP provides funding to help land owners have a management plan prepared for their forest. This plan offers ideas and strategies designed around the capabilities of the forest and their personal needs and goals. Studies show that forest harvest and management decisions based on accurate and timely information, result in healthy productive woodlands. These healthy forests provide many different services and benefits to the owner, the environment and the economy.

The Island Nature Trust www.islandnaturetrust.ca offers a unique program through *Trees In Trust* for anyone who is looking for a different environment relate gift. *Trees In Trust* helps people to quickly and easily dedicate a piece of forest as a gift, a memorial or to reduce their carbon footprint. The gift recipient does not actually own the trees, but instead the piece of forest land is held in their name forever as a way to protect important woodlands in perpetuity.

Buying natural Island Christmas Trees and wreaths is also the environmentally friendly way to celebrate the holidays. In the late 1990s, the Institute for Air and Environment in Sweden conducted a study comparing the growth and development of a natural ten year-old fir with a typical artificial tree available at many retail outlets. The study found that most artificial trees were made of PVC plastic and metal. These trees were made in southeastern Asia and had to be transported at least 20,000 kilometers to local stores in Stockholm using an enormous amount of fossil fuel. Once the trees wore out, they were consigned to the trash heap where they can take thousands of years to degrade.

The same study noted that natural trees were usually grown close to the local market on nearby Christmas tree farms. Often tree farmers used lands that were not suited to other farm or forest products. As the trees grew, they held soil in place and provided nesting space, forage and cover for several native birds, insects and mammals. The amount of fossil fuel required to grow and market these trees was minimal and as they grew, they produced 45 kilos of oxygen per hectare every day. Once the holidays were over, the natural trees were composted, used as a carbon neutral fuel, or chipped for gardening mulch instead of going to the dump.

Gift certificates for native trees and shrubs can help home gardeners to beautify their property with species suited to the Island's growing conditions and natural insect and diseases. Garden Centre certificates can also be used to buy compost to enrich the soils without the need for chemical based fertilizers.

By keeping safety and forest health in mind this year, you can give unique and meaningful gifts that will last a life time.