As the leaves begin to drop and the crisp air returns, we begin to think about chilly nights, wet days, homemade meals and desserts, and all the raking that is ahead. As the autumn continues, it’s time to consider some ideas in how to reduce, reuse, and recycle our way to a better year!

**Landscape Waste** - The largest of recycling challenges in the fall is landscape waste as the leaves drop and fall pruning begins. As these items accumulate, this can overwhelm a green waste cart. Instead of burning the excess waste or disposing of this in other waste bins, consider composting. This can be done simply with leaves or form those more aggressive in having compost, can be spurred with chipped landscape trimmings and left over food waste. Cover the pile with a dark colored cover or use a compost container. This will reduce the number of trips to haul this away and provide a healthy soil amendment in the spring!

**Create Your Own Decorations** - Have a create-your-own-decorations party! Invite family and friends to create and use holiday decorations such as ornaments made from old greeting cards or cookie dough, garlands made from strung popcorn or cranberries, wreaths made from artificial greens and flowers, centerpieces using natural elements like pinecones or seasonal fruits and vegetables, and potpourri made from kitchen spices such as cinnamon and cloves. These items help reduce waste, create an impressive look, and can either be used year after year or create new each time.

**Event Planning** - Pick out how many dishes you’d like to create and don’t go overboard! If you’re like me, you wind up with 15 different dishes you want to make. Make a plan and then see where you can scale it back. Grocery shopping can be one of the most wasteful aspects of putting on an event. Keeping the list and preparation simple will help reduce waste. Simple food is delicious food, but it relies heavily on amazing ingredients. As you’re creating your plan avoid getting carried away with elaborate recipes. Pick one or two elaborate recipes, ideally things that can be prepped if not completed a day or two before your event. Almost 40% of all food we purchase is wasted. Estimate to avoid preparing too much food. Send leftovers you know you are not going to eat home with guests. Also use real dishes and cloth napkins to reduce waste.
Wreaths, Garland - Live trees, wreaths, garland, holly, and mistletoe, are a tradition for many families. After the holidays, these items can be placed into your green bin or dropped off at a composting facility. Another option is to purchase a potted tree and plant it after the holidays. For a listing of compost facilities, see our Turning It Around Directory in your local phone book or visit fresnocountyca.gov/recycling for a digital copy.

Reusable Bottles and Cups - Plastic water bottles are great for times of crisis. They're not so great if you have constant access to clean drinking water. 50 Billion plastic water bottles are consumed and disposed of each year. Since the recycling ban, fewer and fewer of these water bottles are being recycled. Plastic in the ocean is piling up with 8 million tons of plastic being dumped in the ocean annually. Using reusable cups is both economical and practical. If you are in your local coffee shop, order it in a mug and there is no additional charge. If you want to grab your coffee to-go, think about bringing along an insulated drink containers. A lot of coffee shops will even give you a discount for bringing your own travel cup or coffee mug.

Clean Up and Clean Out - We accumulate a lot of items from the summer months. Clear out those unwanted items either through donation, recycling, or using them to help with new projects around the house. For those hard to dispose items like bulbs, batteries, paint, pesticides and other chemicals, you can visit our Household Hazardous Waste website for a list of drop off locations. Visit fresnocountyca.gov/hhw for a list of site and how to properly dispose of these items.