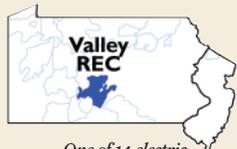


# Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

## Straight talk needed to secure our energy future



by Wayne Miller  
President & CEO

**THIS YEAR** has marked the beginning of a new era — one that has dramatically altered the primary mission of electric utilities. Delivering reliable and low-cost electric service is no longer the only standard by which we are judged.

Environmental and energy proposals currently being debated in Congress have the potential to

threaten electric reliability, raise electric bills and increase our dependence on foreign energy sources. That is why it is so vital that we think, plan and act strategically at this time. We must educate policymakers and lawmakers on what it takes to balance electric reliability and economic stability with environmental stewardship. We must also position ourselves to deliver electricity dependably and affordably regardless of legislative outcomes.

So, as cooperative members and employees, what should we be telling our representatives in government?

First of all, we must make it clear that technology is vital to solving our energy crisis. Over the next decade, \$2 billion a year must be devoted to research and development in areas such as carbon capture and storage and clean coal technology. The success of these projects would mean a significant reduction in power plant emissions, such as carbon dioxide, which are blamed for contributing to climate change. Only a sustained commitment

to innovation will deliver the solutions our nation needs.

Secondly, we must communicate the importance of nuclear power as a viable energy resource. Nuclear power is a proven, low-emissions producer of base-load generation, and is a valuable tool in meeting growing demand. It must be given top priority, with a national initiative to accelerate the construction of new plants.

Next, renewable resources, such as wind and solar, should be included in our generation mix. Although they can't provide us with adequate base load power, they are important investments, particularly in areas of our country where their potential can be maximized.

Finally, we should insist that energy efficiency be made a national priority. For example, federal assistance could be used to help the poorest 20 percent of households make their homes as efficient as possible. Adequate insulation, thermal doors and windows, Energy Star appliances and efficient heating and cooling systems all trim electric demand and, more importantly, lower painfully high monthly bills.

Electric cooperatives across the country are currently engaged in a grassroots campaign called "Our Energy, Our Future: A Dialogue With America" to ensure that these important policy considerations are made a priority. Please visit [www.ourenergy.coop](http://www.ourenergy.coop) to join this crucial conversation.

Let's let our lawmakers know that actions they take regarding our energy challenges carry enormous consequences for the folks back home. It's time to make our voices heard. 

# Rural Holiday Decorating

Seasonal ideas that  
are easy on the wallet  
and the environment

BY SUSAN R. PENNING

*Director of Member Services*

**FEW THINGS** signal the official kickoff of the holiday season more than seeing our rural landscapes ablaze with colorful lights and decorations. This year, however, will the trappings be a little thinner as folks “tighten their belts” to weather this country’s current economic storm? Well, they don’t have to be. By employing some creative ideas, we can decorate stylishly, save money and be environmentally responsible all at the same time.

Often the most beautiful decorations are those made from natural materials. So before you head out to the store, take stock of what’s available right in your backyard.

## Wreaths

Wreaths symbolize growth and everlasting life and are by far one of the most versatile seasonal decorations. And they can be a low-cost and eco-friendly decorating option as well.

Central Pennsylvania supports the growth of numerous evergreen shrubs and trees, including



barberry, boxwood, cedar, fir, fire thorn, hemlock, holly, juniper, laurel, pine, rhododendron, spruce and yew. All of these species can be used in wreaths, garland and trim.

To make your own holiday wreath, first gather flexible vines or branches and form them into a circle. Then attach various tree and shrub clippings collected from your property. (Hot glue or green floral wire can be used to secure the pieces.) Try mixing evergreens for a richer and fuller look. To add an extra touch, consider adorning your wreath with other natural elements such as pine cones, feathers, acorns, holly or cranberries. Once completed, these wreaths look majestic when placed on doors, barns and fences. The best part? After the holidays are over, they can be taken apart and composted.

## Trees

When everything else on the landscape is dead or dormant, Christmas trees remind us of better times to come — the return of a lush landscape in the spring. And they infuse greenery into a season dominated outdoors by white, gray and brown. To enjoy your Christmas tree all year long, consider purchasing a balled evergreen from your local tree farm. They are prepared, root and all, so you can plant them after the holidays are over.

Those who prefer cut trees can be environmentally savvy as well. The trunks and branches can be ground into mulch or discarded in a lake or pond (trees make excellent fish beds.)



## Lights

While everyone enjoys holiday lights, no one likes the holiday electric bills that go along with them. Fortunately, there are a couple things you can do to curb the extra electric use without hampering your holiday style. First, consider LED (light-emitting diode) Christmas lights. They offer a savings of up to 80 percent over traditional holiday lights. In addition, LED lights have a longer life span, lasting up to 50,000 hours with normal use. And they are cool to the touch; they emit a very low amount of heat (unlike traditional lights that can be a fire hazard).

Solar-powered Christmas lights are also an option. They carry the same benefits as LED lights, but do not need outlets or extension cords.

## For the birds

As the holidays get closer, our winged friends have less available to eat. Why not add a few well-placed bird feeders to your decorating motif? Not only are bird feeders an excellent opportunity to bring nature a little closer for the holidays, you will be rewarded with the sights and sounds of brightly colored wild birds throughout the season. Pennsylvania supports many species, including cardinals, chickadees, crows, doves, hawks, juncos, nuthatches, owls, sparrows and woodpeckers.

Traditional bird feeders are not the only way to attract and feed wild birds. Your local pet, hardware or variety store should offer ornaments made of bird



seed that will complement your existing decorations. Or for a traditional outdoor Christmas tree, string popcorn and dried fruit together for a tasty garland; hang a few seed ornaments, a few ears of corn and some ribbons to fill the branches. Your feathered companions will thank you.

The most important thing to remember when adorning your acreage is to be safe and have fun. Decorating for the holidays should not feel like a daunting chore. The elements you use should reflect your taste, creativity and, most importantly, what the holidays mean to you. By using the “natural resources” around you, you already know your decorations will be inexpensive, beautiful, meaningful and unique. And you’ll have the added bonus of supporting our environment.

Happy trimming! 🌟

# Let the sun power your new year

**MAYBE YOU'VE ALREADY** resolved to be more energy efficient in 2009. Whether or not you've made that commitment or even thought that far ahead, here's a helpful tip: Let the sun into your home, especially on cold days. It's the most powerful source of energy around us.

Although the capability to harness solar power in Pennsylvania is limited because of our state's many ridges and valleys, we can still take advantage of the warming rays that do reach us.

Here are a few solar baby steps:

**Clean your windows.** Even the sun can't peek through window panes covered with grime. Wash the outside and inside of the panes. If you can't reach them all, consider hiring a professional window cleaning company to help you.

**Trim your hedges.** Overgrown shrubs



and trees can shade your windows too much. On cold days, the unobstructed sunlight that beams into your rooms will help warm them and help give your heating system a break.

**Open your drapes.** If privacy is a concern, add light-colored sheer panels that

you can keep closed without blocking the sun's rays.

**Choose shiny surfaces.** Add some polished brass or chrome to bathrooms and other sun-deprived areas of your home. They'll catch and reflect even the minimal amount of sunlight that makes its way into the rooms. Throw in some shiny tile on the floors and around sinks as a decorative back splash.

**Hang mirrors across from windows.** They'll not only make your rooms look bigger, but also bounce sun rays all around the room.

**Paint everything a light color.** Light colors like white, cream and yellow reflect sunlight and will make any room look brighter. Semi-gloss and satin paints can also help boost the reflection.

**Use solid-colored fabrics.** Patterns absorb light more than solids. The goal is to bounce the rays around the room so they reach other objects.

For more information on increasing the energy efficiency of your home during the year's coldest months, visit [www.valleyrec.com](http://www.valleyrec.com) and follow the HomeEnergySuite link.

## Need a GIFT idea?

**VALLEY REC GIFT CERTIFICATES** are thoughtful presents for the cooperative members on your holiday shopping list.

To purchase one, simply complete the form below. If you'd like to surprise more than one person, please list the names, addresses and amounts for each on a separate sheet. Then mail the form with your check or money order for the total amount to: Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 477, Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477.

When we receive your payment, the co-op member's account will be credited with the amount you've specified. The certificate may be mailed directly to the recipient, or it can be sent to you for personal delivery.

Recipient's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of Gift (\$5 minimum) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*(Make check or money order payable to Valley REC)*

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (including area code): \_\_\_\_\_

- Return certificate to me
- Send certificate directly to recipient prior to \_\_\_\_\_ (date)
- I wish to remain anonymous