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Eco Task Force

Inform, Support, Encourage



Sustainable Christmas Guide for busy people! 2024



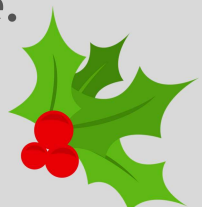
Introduction and Welcome

Do you look forward to wearing your Christmas jumper, singing carols and eating mince pies? Or does the idea of the having all the cards to write, gifts to buy and food to prep make you feel, well, a bit anxious? Then of course there's the environmental impact of this season; so much waste and a ridiculous amount of packaging and unwanted presents.

This guide is designed to help you find ways to have a Christmas that's kinder to the planet, to your pocket and to yourself. They are ideas and tops tips from the Eco Group of Churches that meet from across York. Before you get stuck into the nitty gritty of the ideas, though, we just want you to do these things:

1. **BREATHE!** This guide is about doing LESS and spending LESS, not more. Any extra things you choose to do, should be FUN and reduce stress, not add to it.
2. Don't try to do everything. Maybe one or two things that will work for you and your lifestyle. Prioritise the things that will have the most positive impact for you.
3. Get others on board if you can - it's easier (and more fun!) if your friends or family are up for this too. Tell them what you hope to do and why you want to do it.
4. Do not beat yourself up about the things you can't do. The fact that you are reading this guide and thinking about these things already, means you will be doing better than you realise.

Have a peaceful Christmas from the Eco Team





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You know the old 'reduce, re-use, recycle' right? Use that as your starting point. Think about gifts that won't take more energy and packaging to give or lots of miles to get to you. Then work your way up. Anything that will also save shopping time is also a bonus!

1. Gifts of Time. Offer to babysit, do someone's ironing or bake the a cake, offer to teach them to knit. Make it work for whatever you can do for that person. Get a Christmas card, or type up a 'voucher' with the details. Instant present and the recipient is always very grateful!

2. Buy pre-loved. It's not everyone's cup of tea to give as a gift, but there will be some friends or family who will be up for it - maybe you can challenge yourselves to spend no more than a fiver in a charity shop. It doesn't to be all or nothing either - a second hand book as a stocking filler for example. Ebay and Vinted are popular websites for pre-loved too.

3. Do you need to buy all of your friends/colleagues a gift? Can you agree to do a 'secret santa' and all agree to buy just one present? Do you buy presents for 'children' age 18+ because you always have? Maybe you can agree with their parents that you stop. Grandchildren are of course not included in this!!

4. Before you buy, ask yourself if they really need it. It's easy to get carried away with those little extras, especially for children, but will they really get use out of them after Christmas?



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5. Make your own presents. Health warning! Only to be done if it's your thing, something you will enjoy and will be relaxing to do it! Even better if you can do it with others - have a crafting or making day that will be enjoyable for everyone. Making jams, chutneys, sweets, aprons, cushions, or whatever! Check out 'pinterest' for dozens of ideas. Use up things you have lying around or can get from a charity shop before buying anything new. Can you upcycle an old pair of jeans to make a brooch for example? Got a button box? Make a design out of buttons and frame it.

6. Charity gifts. There are plenty of gift cards you can buy which represent something beneficial like bicycles, seeds, health care or access to water. Oxfam or Transform Trade or Embrace the Middle East have lots of choice.

7. Buy things that are easily repairable so they have a longer life of being used. Equally, buying refurbished items is kinder to your pocket and the planet.

8. Buy local artisan work. If you are buying a new item, support local artists and makers. It's usually fewer transport miles and is often something a bit different and quirky. Sometimes it's more expensive, but buying less and better quality is sometimes the way to go.

9. Go for experiences over 'stuff'. From a wintry walk in the park with hot chocolate at the end of the trip, to theatre visits, or magazine vouchers or vouchers for an activity.



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10. Check out recycled and fair trade gifts. Oxfam, Ethical Superstore, and various local shops which sell recycled goods are worth trying. Many charities have on-line shops too.

11. A skills swap. Do you have a friend or family member with a skill you appreciate? Suggest a skills swap instead of exchanging physical gifts - bake them a cake if they will teach you to take up trousers for example.

12. Make a simple 'kit'. This is really beautiful and personalised and doesn't have to cost a fortune. Make a gardener a 'kit' of seeds, lolly sticks for plant labels, a pair of gardening gloves and put it in a decorated shoebox. They will love it. How about a 'movie night' for a film lover, with a box containing favourite drinks and snacks and indoor cosy socks!

13. If you do buy new things, try to choose gifts with less packaging and plastic.

14. Can you also simply buy less? There may be some friends with who you can agree between you not to buy for this year - maybe you can agree to go for a meal or coffee in the new year instead.



Packaging and Cards



This is one of the things that makes us twitchy; when you see the mountains of wrapping paper and plastic packaging littering the floor on Christmas day! Even despite your best efforts, there still seems to be binbags full! Don't beat yourself up, just keep making those one or two good decisions!

1. Re-use gift bags. This is definitely more common these days. We receive a lot that have blank tags so they can be re-used. And it's easy to do the same, if you are giving a gift bag, then write the receiver's name in pencil, or leave it blank!
2. Re-use gift wrap or brown paper. The latter can be made festive with stamps (potato print stamps or bubble wrap print can work well and the kids and grandkids love doing it).
3. Old Christmas cards can make great gift tags.
4. If you are handy at origami - or want to have a go anyway - there are lots of instructions around to make stars or whatever you fancy, for a decoration. You might have old ribbons or bows that you could give a new lease of life to.
5. A lot of people are now choosing to donate to a charity instead of giving cards. Christmas card writing can become a chore when there are so many to send. Instead, try just sending a few to those you know would appreciate one and take your time over it, thinking about that person. E-cards are also becoming popular.



6. For those cards you do buy, select Charity cards or choose small cards which use less paper. Avoid ones with cellophane.
7. You could make a few of your own cards out of some card you already have. A simple shape like a holly leaf or a Christmas tree and fairly easy.
8. Use up cards you already have - have you already got a box full of cards that are all from previous year's half used packets?!
9. Make simple re-usable gift bags from bits of fabric and tie with some ribbon or string with a tag. You can often pick up scraps or ends of rolls of fabric from fabric shops.
10. Much of the wrapping paper is plasticised and can't be recycled. The easy way to test is if it passes the scrunch test. If it starts to unfold after scrunching, chances are it's got plastic in it. There is now plenty of wrapping paper around that doesn't use plastic.
11. Can you save some of the wrapping or bags you have received and re-use it for next year?
12. For those who belong to groups such as societies or faith groups - can you get one card from everyone rather than lots of individual cards? Get everyone to sign their name and pin it up for everyone to see.



Food



Why do we ALWAYS over cater at Christmas?! Extra things get shoved in the trolley 'just in case'. Remember, the shops are closed for only 1 day! Here's some ideas to help you buy wisely at Christmas.

1. If you can, plan ahead. If you have a menu plan, you are less likely to overbuy. Plan in things you can make ahead of time that can sit in the freezer or fridge. You might be more inclined to make things instead of buying lots of ready-made things (though don't get us wrong, sometimes that's handy!!).
2. If you do get those 'extras', make sure they have a decent use by date so you can just buy less after Christmas.
3. Try having a few meat free meals over Christmas or cut down your meat and dairy use in some way. There's plenty of vegetarian or vegan recipes around. It's not as scary as you think and it's delicious! It can be as simple as buying plant-based mince pies instead of the all-butter ones.
4. When you do go for meat, try to go organic, free-range and support local, small-scale farms where possible.
5. When buying your Christmas food shop, try to buy things with little or no packaging as much as you can.
6. Try the BBC Good Food leftovers recipes to minimise waste.



Food



7. Christmas treats always seem to come in so much packaging. What about, instead of a selection box, you get the individual sweets and wrap a festive ribbon around them? Bars of chocolate also tend to contain less packaging than individual sweets.

8. We somehow feel compelled to buy that tub of chocolates from the well know brands. So much plastic and wrapping and we eat more than we really need to (and usually regret it!). What about bars of chocolate to watch your Christmas movie rather than a plastic tub? Or even a box of the sweets instead of a tub..? It all helps.



Decorations and Other



1. Advent Calendars. Those of us over a certain age will remember that Advent calendars never had chocolate and that there was just one to share with the whole family. The chocolate ones we have now have plastic moulds. Instead, you can get boxes with little drawers or fabric with pockets to put individual chocolates in that you can use again and again. That could be a Christmas present for your child so they can use it next year. Or if you do the 'elf on the shelf', maybe they could have a chocolate coin with them instead!

2. Reuse decorations. All too often it's tempting to change the colour theme of your decorations each year, with the shops beckoning with their bright and sparkly new decorations. That gets expensive and has a big environmental impact. Work with what you have or just decorate it differently or maybe just pick up one or two new ones. Avoid plastic if you can. One of the team likes to pick up a decoration on holidays or when they have been to special events and putting up the tree is then a special time, reminiscing while you decorate.

3. Make decorations. Going old school can be a lot of fun - making paper chains out of paper and card you have lying around can be a lot of fun. Again, the same health warning we gave for making your presents applies here - it has to be a fun activity that reduces rather than adds to your stress!



4. Fancy outfits. If you have a fancy dinner to go to, can you hire rather than buy a new outfit. Chances are the new outfit will be sat in the wardrobe for all of next year! Or go to preloved websites or charity shops to pick up a bargain.
5. Christmas jumpers or outfits. Since you only wear them a handful of times, you don't need to buy a new Christmas jumper every year. Children will, of course grow out of theirs, so can you hand yours on to friends with younger children? Hopefully there will be another friend who can do the same for you!
6. Christmas Crackers. If you have time (and it's something you want to do!), you can make your own Christmas Crackers. You can get kits that come with the hat and the strip that makes it go bang and all you have to do is fill it with a small gift, avoiding the usual plastic jumping frog or spinning top you always get! Or you can use kitchen roll, fabric and ribbons and re-use them. You can also buy recyclable crackers.
7. Take unused Christmas decorations to the charity shop. There will be some items that you never use, that you think keep just in case but just end up going back into storage every year. They might be just the thing someone else is looking for.
8. A Reverse Advent Calendar. This is when you have a box and add a food item into it every day, then take them to a foodbank. It's a good way to remind children of the need to think about other people at this time of year, not just the pile of toys they hope to get!



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A Final Thought



Finally, when you feel yourself getting stressed by your to do list, take a step back and take a breath. Nothing has to be perfect; the world will not fall apart because you don't have matching Christmas jumpers or elaborate table decorations. Sometimes things are perfect because they are *imperfect* - the mismatched 'emergency chairs' and forgetting to put the parsnips in! Remember why this season is important to you. Chances are, it's not the 'stuff' that you feel we have to do or buy, it's the chance to spend time with family and friends or to reflect on what brings a sense of meaning, purpose and belonging in your life, whether that is your faith or something else.

The Methodist Church has a theme this year of 'Hush the Noise', taken from the Carol *It came upon a midnight clear*. There is a line in the Carol which goes 'Oh hush the noise ye men of strife and hear the angels sing'. It's an invitation to hush the noise of the busyness and commercialism of the season and make time for what is important.

Our prayer for you this season is that you find the time to feel loved and blessed and to love and bless others.

The Eco Church Team