

Dreaming of a Green Christmas

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An ethical, eco-friendly Christmas is the best present we can give ourselves - and each other - according to experts from the University of Birmingham.

Each December in the UK 150 million cards and packages are posted, 83 square kilometres of wrapping paper gets issued and £4 billion worth of Christmas gifts are unwanted. However, from recycling fir trees to fairtrade selection boxes – it is possible to enjoy a guilt-free Christmas and help save the planet too.

Doctor Trevor Shields, the University of Birmingham's Sustainability and Environmental Advisor, says the key to a green Christmas is to follow the Rs: Reduce, Re-use and Recycle, known as the 'waste hierarchy'.

He says: "Christmas is a great time, but it can also be a season of great waste. Many people don't realise just a small change like turning off some fairy lights can make a difference if we all try. So, in this season of goodwill to all mankind, let's do our bit for the planet by really thinking about what we use and how we use it. Otherwise the ghost of Christmas future could come knocking much sooner than we think."

And the university is leading by example. On 11 December a Farmers' Market will be on campus, with local and seasonal produce. Winterbourne Botanic Garden, which will

sell its own honey at the market, has a range of gifts and decorations, including star shaped bird feeders, nesting pockets and cotton bags for life. The university has also bought itself a real winter warmer of a Christmas box, in the shape of the super fast and eco-efficient Accelerator Composter which will re-cycle some of the season's food and green waste.

How to be an eco-angel this Christmas:

Reduce:

– Carbon emissions: Switch off Christmas lights and other appliances. Opt for alternatives like solar powered chargers, remembering to buy re-chargeable batteries. Make sure your home is well insulated and save on those heating bills. And when it comes to visiting relatives, look at transport options such as car sharing, cycling, public transport and walking

– Consumerism: Don't add to a pile of unwanted gifts. Buy vouchers or give your time instead by babysitting or pet walking. Ethical gift ideas include sponsored tree planting, buying a goat for a family in Ghana or a boat for a fisherman in India. If you must buy a present make sure gifts are durable, avoiding an overload of plastic

– Packaging: Buy goods and food without excess packaging. Do you really need to buy metres and metres of gift wrap?

– Buying locally is good for local business and for the environment. For an even whiter Christmas, make sure food is Fairtrade and free range

Re-use

– Charity shops are a great way of finding a perfect Christmas gift. Acorns on campus range from books to box sets

– Log on to free giving and exchanging web sites like Freecycle and Efreeko, where you can swap your goods with other eco-friendly shoppers

– Most of the eight million Christmas trees bought in the UK will end up as festive landfill waste. Re-plant your fir tree, decorate existing garden trees or buy from a small-scale sustainable supplier. Most councils run Christmas tree recycling schemes or visit www.letsrecycle.com

Re-cycle

– Add a personal touch to Christmas with hand made cards and decorations

– Recycle Christmas waste, from paper and bottles to food and green waste

– Finally, no Boxing Day would be complete without cold turkey sandwiches. Use your left-overs to create other festive feasts, including curries and soups

Ends

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