



I’m dreaming of a greener Christmas...

*Yes, you can make the festive period more sustainable – without becoming Scrooge in the process – says **Hattie Garlick**. Here are her top eco hacks*

I see you eyeing up the first mince pie of the season. Did you know the UK's Christmas gorging creates the same carbon footprint as a car circling the globe 6,000 times?

Or perhaps you're contemplating treating yourself to a nice party outfit. But are you aware eight million garments bought for Christmas end up flung on to landfill after just one wear? Bah humbug.

It's that time of year, when charities and – yes – newspapers delight in feeding us Christmas-themed climate change statistics. Largely accurate, certainly urgent but also... rather a dampener on the festive fun. Well, not this time. For 2019 marks the moment eco-friendly festivities went mainstream.

Supermarkets and department stores are falling over themselves to produce plastic-free crackers, cards, wrapping and packaging. Countless small businesses are producing covetable gifts that sit on the cutting edge of cool as well as sustainability. New technology has made buying Christmas dinner ingredients from sustainable suppliers almost as easy as the supermarket shop. Rejoice! You really can have your (organic) Christmas cake and eat it.

A TREE IS FOR LIFE

Real, or artificial, that is the question. Or is it? In truth, the carbon footprint of your Christmas tree is more nuanced than that.

"We found the typical carbon footprint of an artificial tree was roughly 40kg [88lb] of CO₂," explains Myles McCarthy of the Carbon Trust. "As long as you dispose of a real tree responsibly, the footprint is pretty small because it absorbs a lot of CO₂ in its growth. We estimate it at 3.5kg [8lb]. So, 10 to 12 times less than an artificial tree."

Most local authorities offer Christmas-tree schemes that will recycle your tree into compost or woodchip mulch. The

eco-friendly choice, then? Perhaps... "If you have an artificial tree and keep it for over 10 years, its footprint will actually be smaller," says McCarthy. No need to feel guilty about your artificial tree, then. Just use it year after year.

Equally, if you still want a real tree, then more power to you. Each tree is estimated to store around 20lb of carbon dioxide in its "above-ground tissue" and similar quantities in the roots. Plus, 95 per cent of UK plantations provide habitat for wildlife. So, advises Emma Gilmartin of the Woodland Trust: "We'd encourage you to ask questions about its journey – has it come from an FSC forest? How far has it travelled? Find one that has roots."

One point though: "There's a difference between pot-grown trees and ones dug up with their roots and placed in a pot for sale," says Gilmartin. "If you have a live tree that's pot grown, you can keep it in your garden and bring it inside every Christmas."

The RSPB, she points out, run Pull a Pine events, where members of the public can remove an invasive conifer to help manage and protect its reserves. This year's is at Arne, on Dec 7 (go to rspb.org.uk for more details). The Forestry Commission also lists responsible, local sales centres on its website. Frustratingly, none are local to us and (according to research from Michigan State University) it only takes around a 10-mile drive to produce the quantity of carbon such a responsible tree would have sequestered.

Instead, we source our tree from The Christmas Forest, a family business which sells sustainable, pot-grown trees across London. For each one sold, another is donated to Tree Aid and grown in the drylands of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali and Niger. Come Boxing Day, I will put mine in the garden, re-potting it every few years as it grows.

I am not quite finished, however.

“We need to double UK tree cover to help the fight against climate breakdown, and your Christmas tree can be part of this,” says Friends of the Earth campaigner Emi Murphy, who is calling for people to buy an entirely different tree species this year, to boost biodiversity and support wildlife. Thus, in what might be the ultimate act of middle-class-activism, I buy a holly tree in a metal planter from Waitrose.

GREEN CHRISTMAS DINNER

Next on the list: greening-up my Christmas dinner. It has been estimated that the traditional meal creates 20kg (44lb) of CO₂ emissions – 60 per cent of which is created by the turkey. You know where I’m heading with this, don’t you? Vegan Christmas dinners are all the rage this year.

Ikea has ousted the turkey from its 2019 Christmas menu, substituting a root vegetable tarte tatin and vegan mince pies. Boots has just launched three vegan Christmas sandwiches, while Iceland’s new vegan Christmas range is more woke still, managing to be not

Happy crackers

This is the last year that John Lewis and Waitrose will sell crackers with plastic toys. From 2020, crackers will be embossed, not coated in glitter, and contain metal and paper toys

only palm oil-free but largely plastic-free, too.

But if the idea of turkey-free dinner makes you tearful, there are other ways way to ease your guilt and footprint.

“Any organic ingredients you include will help to combat climate change,” says Rob Percival of the Soil Association. “The world’s soils contain three times as much carbon as the atmosphere, but this is released when they are farmed intensively. Organic farming helps to keep carbon in the ground, while also capturing carbon from the atmosphere.” Plus: “Organic farms have 50 per cent more abundant wildlife, with a third more species on average.”

In fact, buying an organic turkey could help save the rainforest. “A third of the soya imported into the UK and EU as animal feed is implicated in deforestation, habitat loss and damaging land-use change aboard,” says Percival. “That soya is fed to poultry, including turkeys. But Soil Association organic standards prohibit deforestation and land-use change for feed crops.”

Christmas is also, says Percival, a good time to support local producers. Luckily, there are hacks to help you achieve smug sustainability without stress. London-based start-up Farmdrop allows you to



shop online and have everything from fruit and veg to ready meals and beer delivered to your door. Much like Ocado, with the important exception that your money goes directly to local farmers and producers.

Happily, it is offering *Telegraph* readers £30 off their first orders over £80 with code telegraph30. Sadly, the service is only available in the capital, plus parts of Surrey, Hertfordshire, and Essex. If that isn't you, visit the Soil Association's website instead, where you can find a plethora of box schemes selling fruit and veg, eggs, meat, herbs, honey and more from producers local to you.

What about the snacks required to sustain you through cousin George's orations on Brexit? Crisps, for example, are on the sustainability black list since their packets are not recyclable. Well, rejoice again. Two Farmers – a business run by, you guessed it, two farmers from Herefordshire – has come up with the UK's first biodegradable crisp packet. This Christmas, it has also launched a 100 per cent recyclable sharing tin. Yes, they are more expensive than a packet of Pringles but they are also infinitely more delicious and *Telegraph* readers can claim 10 per cent off their first orders until New Year's Eve, using the code TEL10 (twofarmers.co.uk).

If you need further persuasion that eco-friendly no longer equates to crusty, may I present Selfridges, whose

6,000

The UK's Christmas eating habits create the same carbon footprint as a car circling the globe 6,000 times

Christmas range is now packaged in 100 per cent recyclable card and home compostable cellulose film.

So if you want sustainability matched with affordability, there's Iceland. If you want it blended with desirability, there's Selfridges.

DO-GOOD
DECORATIONS

John Lewis & Partners and Waitrose have announced this Christmas will be the last in which they sell ones containing plastic toys. From next year, crackers will be embossed, not coated in plastic glitter, and contain metal and paper toys.

They are already stocking plastic-free options. What, however, of the tinsel and tat that traditionally decorate the rest of the house? "So long as you've got permission to forage, the hedges have all sorts of lovely things you can decorate your home with," sug-

gests Sarah Diligent, of ethical Hampshire florist Floribunda Rose. Her own Christmas table will be decorated with “vintage jelly moulds... soup terrines, punch bowls... I try to use anything beautiful that doesn’t really get used anymore. You can pick them up for peanuts. I plant them with paperwhites and hyacinths. Once the celebrations are over, I put things like cyclamen and violas back in the garden.” You can also send guests home with them as gifts.

Worried about wilting? “Dried hydrangea heads are wonderful right now,” she suggests. “There’s an amazing network called Flowers From the Farm. Go to its website, enter your postcode, and you’ll find growers near you. You can also buy dried flowers from lots of them.”

But: beware, beware the Christmas wreath. “Floral foam is a single-use plastic,” says Diligent. “It ends up in lots of tiny pieces that gets washed down the drain. We use a lot of chicken wire and twine instead. Made of wool or hessian, it’s completely compostable. If I made a garland using evergreens, dried flowers and twine to hold it together, the whole thing could go on the compost pile afterwards.”

Diligent is running wreath and table decorating workshops over the Christmas period but, should you (like me) prefer to delegate the work, suggests that you “just ask your florist if they use floral foam. If they say yes, ask if they could do it a more traditional way. The skills haven’t disappeared, foam has just become the easiest method.”

If, like me, your home is host to a cupboard of shame,

stuffed with previous years’ plastic decorations, resist the temptation to throw them out. Reusing is infinitely more eco-friendly than buying new decorations, even if they are made from less sustainable materials.

“I use lots of old baubles,” agrees Diligent. “And I buy one special bauble every year. It’s a tradition and when I open them up, it brings back lovely memories. I also use lots of candles. And get all your best stuff out, like the crockery you don’t get a chance to use otherwise.”

FASHION WITH A CONSCIENCE

For some, Christmas is a time to ruminate on the big question: what would Jesus do? In the case of fashion, I think I have the answer. He would step away from the novelty Christmas jumper.

Putting aesthetic arguments aside, throwaway fashion creates greenhouse emissions of 1.2 billion tons a year, worse than the impact of international flights and shipping combined. Christmas jumpers are often so poorly produced that even those dropped at charity shops are too tatty to sell, and end up piled on to landfill sites instead.

There are only two good excuses for wearing a Christmas jumper. One: you are a child. Two: you are taking part in Save the Children’s Christmas Jumper Day fundraiser on Dec 13. Luckily, there is one good fix in both cases.

On Save the Children’s website you can purchase a box of 200 jolly “Christmas Jumper Day” badges for £40, enough to decorate the whole family’s ordinary, tasteful jumpers. For another £3, you can offset your festive outfit with an excellent cotton shopping bag bearing a bulldog in a Father Christmas hat. Perfect for your plastic-free food shopping.

Should your desires be directed at a



Foraged decoration
Liven up recyclable brown paper wrapping (or even this very newspaper) with sprigs of holly and twine you can reuse later in the garden

quality, became the measure of love: the more we give you, the more we love you. The knee-jerk reaction at Christmas became to buy everything.”

International development charity Send a Cow has just concluded a study of the top 10 gifts on Amazon’s Christmas list that uncovered, among other dispiriting finds, a ladies’ dressing gown containing as much plastic as 21 carrier bags.

By contrast, says Fisher: “If you got one gift, that was a little more expensive, that you loved and you knew you could feel good about... Wouldn’t that make you much happier than 10 disposable gifts you could really live without?”

Fisher is an expert at sustainable gift giving. This year, her Zero Waste Christmas Markets are coming to Manchester, (today), London (Dec 4 and 7) and Brighton (Dec 15). All the businesses trading will have passed her eco-audit to ensure they put the planet first.

“There’s so much innovation happening in this space at the moment,” says Fisher. “Independent brands are creating amazing products out of things we would have previously considered rubbish like bottles, tyres and even discarded tents. You wouldn’t know it, because they’ve been produced so beautifully. You’d look at it and say: that’s a luxury product.”

Shopping sustainably, then, no longer necessitates purchasing scratchy slippers that smell faintly of goat for your loved ones. Fisher’s top tips? Consider a family Secret Santa, so everyone buys (and receives) just one, high-quality, thoughtful gift. Try to buy from independent businesses founded on sustainable principles, rather than high-street names employing a trendy greenwash to their products. Forget buying wrapping paper that it so often plastic-based and single use. Wrap your gifts in this very newspaper, using some of the twine you bought for eco home decorations, and paper tape. It doesn’t get much more convenient than that, does it?

Most of all, says Fisher: “Have fun with it. Christmas is meant to be a gathering of people. If you have your loved ones around you, and you’re spending time with them, that’s the greatest gift you can give.”

In fact, gathering together with family or friends is among the most eco-friendly things we can do, as long as we do so using a sustainable means of travel. “Doing the cooking in one oven, heating just one house... it can really lessen your impact,” says McCarthy. I’ll raise an (organic) glass to that.



Home-made wreath
Make a garland using evergreens, dried flowers and twine to hold it together, and it can all go on the compost heap afterwards

new Christmas party outfit, there are a few ways to indulge without wrecking your carbon-footprint. Second-hand and vintage shops should be your first port of call but fashion rental is now also on the rise. This year saw the launch of HURR (hurrcollective.com) and By Rotation (byrotation.com), the UK’s first peer-to-peer clothing rental services, where you can find glitzy “it” dresses.

For those who want to hold on to their party frock, however, Lowie (ilovelowie.com), offers free repairs for life on all its clothes. The antidote, in other words, to fast fashion. The brand has a transparent, responsible supply chain, is fairly priced (compared to many which make truly sustainable fashion feel like the preserve of the truly deep pocketed). Most importantly: everyone from stylish grandmothers to savvy teens will find clothes to covet. Just call me fairy godmother.

GIFTS THAT KEEP GIVING

Presents are the true meaning of Christmas, am I right? “The purpose of gifting is to show someone you really care about them,” says Mel Fisher. “Somewhere along the line, that message has got mixed up. Quantity, not

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Yellow News...

Season's eatings

Hattie Garlick and her daughter Frida, six, tuck into jewelled fruit cake from Selfridges; the packaging of its Christmas range is 100 per cent recyclable



THE ULTIMATE GREEN GIFT LIST

Chosen by Mel Fisher of Zero Waste Christmas Markets, these items are the perfect presents for eco-warriors to give, and may encourage others to go green, too

For small children



Whirli, a toy subscription service allowing you to keep toys for as long as you want, then send them on to a new home. From £9.99 per month, whirli.com

For tweens



Billy Goats & Raincoats' playful and cool rain jackets made in Wales from tents abandoned at music festivals, £60, billygoats.co.uk

For teenage girls



The Eco Glitter Fun Christmas set of glitter includes six colours plus organic aloe vera gel and bamboo brush. £22, ecoglitterfun.com

For food lovers



Made in London, Fatty's Organic Gin is 100 per cent organic, Soil Association accredited and sustainable. Practically sin-free, in other words. £34-£45, fattyorganicspirits.com

For beauty enthusiasts



Upcircle's Full House Bundle contains products that are 100 per cent natural, using coffee grounds that cafés no longer need to make scrubs and serums, £39.99, upcirclebeauty.com




Safari Jungle Wooden Puzzle & Play is made from FSC-certified natural European beech wood and available from Conscious Craft UK, £28, consciouscraft.uk

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Yellow News...

For teenage boys




The Hoxton Backpack by Lost In Samsara is handmade in Cambodia from recycled cement bags and old tyres, £42, lostinsamsara.co.uk

For green fingers




The Gardener's Gift Set contains sustainable beeswax goodies and seeds and is made by Filberts of Dorset. £14.80, filbertsofdorset.co.uk

For budding interior designers




Loft & Daughter's Mono Hygge Basket is handcrafted from recycled PET bottles and makes rooms Instagrammable, £39, loftanddaughter.com

For outdoor adventurers



The Hauler Saddle Bag from Neesh is hip, hard-wearing and handmade from materials which were headed to landfill, £70, neesh.store

For aspiring eco warriors




Acala's Zero Waste Essential Bag contains a host of sustainable basics (including a bamboo toothbrush and hemp make-up wipes), £32.99, acalaonline.com

For tech addicts



No Bounds is a bluetooth speaker from House of Marley, who make headphones and speakers from sustainable materials, £29.99, thehouseofmarley.co.uk

For luxury lovers



The Valiant Collection from William Wood Watches have straps made from fire hoses. Some money goes to a firefighter charity, £499, williamwoodwatches.com



Elvis & Kresse's Square Tote is handmade from finest rescued leather, decommissioned fire-hose and reclaimed parachute silk lining, £270, elvisandkresse.com



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