Our twelve tips for a greener Christmas

How can we be better at caring for creation and each other through healthy, eco-friendly and sustainable choices at Christmas? The ideas below could make a world of difference, and a difference to the world. Take time to pray, reflect, and consider acting on one or two, or however many you like! You may find the change is for life and not just for Christmas.

1) Start with your advent calendar. Support overseas farmers by ensuring that your advent calendar, and any Christmas chocolate, is Fairtrade. You'll be helping those farmers to make a decent living, and encouraging them to farm in a more ecologically sustainable way with every bite.

2) Rent a tree. Did you know that, in the UK, 6-8 million real Christmas trees go to landfill every year? With a Christmas tree rental scheme you can enjoy a real tree knowing that it will be replanted later. Alternatively, dress up a living tree in your garden – add lots of bird feeders and fat balls, and some outdoor fairy lights to make a feast for your eyes and the birds. Or, visit the British Christmas Tree Growers Association to find out about buying an organic, FSC-certified, or locally grown Christmas tree.

3) Go for a natural wreath and decorations. Holly sprigs, ivy trails, pinecones, rose hips... Take a bag, go for a walk, and see what you can find! Make sure that you have permission from the land-owner before you start snipping. Don't take too much and do leave some berries for the birds. Source as much as you can from what's already dropped. Then get creative and make a beautiful wreath and Christmas decorations from natural materials.

4) Re-use cards and wrapping. Help reduce the huge amount of trees that go into making Christmas tags by re-using old Christmas cards. Recycle the section that carries the greeting, cut out the picture and use that as a tag. You could use fabric remnants and ribbons to make simple, drawstring gift bags in various sizes. Use these for your family and close friends and they could be reused for years to come. Recycled brown paper has a much lower ecological footprint than Christmas wrapping paper. Young children might enjoy decorating it and that might buy you five minutes to get all those other Christmas jobs done!

5) Create homemade gifts. Baked goods for example, or buy gifts from a charity shop – you'll be amazed at what can be found. You could buy an attractive glass or vase and fill it with chocolates or flowers. Kilner jars, and other glass jars, filled with small items also make attractive gifts.

6) Make sure your gifts don't cost the earth. Many beauty products contain palm oil. Its production causes mass deforestation, air pollution and human rights abuses. Read labels carefully. Avoid products with unsustainable palm oil. This palm oil free list can help you choose products and retail outlets that are less destructive to the natural world.

7) Give the gift of time. Too many unwanted gifts end up in landfill. Here's an idea. What about a gift of cooking for someone once a month for a year, taking them for a coffee, babysitting, house cleaning… or whatever. Just make a 'gift of time gift voucher' and put it in a card for them.

8) Dim the lights but not the joy! LED Christmas lights help to save energy and money. You could make your table festive with some candles, scented ones perhaps. Use eco-friendly candles made from beeswax, soy or other vegetable alternatives – avoid paraffin-based candles. And empty jars with some ribbon make beautiful DIY candle-holders.

9) Remember the reason for the season. Practising generosity and hospitality is a great way to show Christ's love at Christmas. Invite someone who'd otherwise be on their own, to join you on Christmas Day. It's also a way of reducing energy consumption as they'll share your heating and cooking!

10) Try a meat-free Christmas meal. A high-meat diet causes environmental problems, be it overgrazing of land, pollution, or the intensive use of water or fossil fuels. Have a conversation about this with the people you'll be eating with. Would they consider a meat-free Christmas? Would they be willing to try a tasty new vegetarian recipe? If you do eat meat, make sure it's free-range or organic, and buy it from a local farmer or independent retailer.

11) Recycle right. More waste ends up in landfill over Christmas than during the rest of the year, so it's a great time to review your recycling set up. Different local authorities offer different recycling provisions, so find out exactly what you can recycle at home by entering your postcode here. For information on how to recycle anything you're not sure about see here. *Don't forget – most wrapping paper is not recyclable. You can test it by doing the 'scrunch' test. If it springs back, it isn't recyclable. And always remove the sellotape before recycling.*

12) Carry on caring for God's earth throughout the year. Nature needs us more than ever. By giving regularly to A Rocha UK, you'll be helping nature flourish here in the UK. You can make a one-off donation or give regularly here.

Choose a change to make this Christmas. Be gentle on yourself and be realistic, but challenge yourself too. To help you make changes beyond Christmas, sign up to Wild Christian for more ways to enjoy, nurture and defend nature. To take action as part of your church community, explore our Eco Church resources here.

Don't forget to share your green Christmas journey by tagging us on social media!