



Sustainable Christmas Checklist

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Travel

It's never been easier to get around the state, around the country, around the world. New and cheaper modes of transport allow us to get together as never before at Christmas time. But spare a thought for the planet as you set off.

1. **Set off and offset**

If you have to fly to the family rendezvous, buy some carbon offset credits involving investing in renewable energy or planting trees, or make a large donation to an environmental group.

2. **Drive Right**

If you're driving, try to car pool, and remember that if you're driving slowly, you should cool down by opening the windows; if you're driving fast, wind them up and turn on the airconditioning to avoid drag (and for a full set of ecodriving tips, go to <http://www.ecodrivingusa.com/#/ecodriving-practices/>)

Presents

Giving Christmas presents isn't simply a matter of giving people you like things they'd like. Christmas exchanges are often a highly complicated system for sending messages about affection, debt, relationships, status, and mutual obligation. There are other ways to build these relationships that don't involve buying the latest gizmos. How many of those presents are really apologies – “Sorry I couldn't spend more time with you, have this soap instead”? How many recipients wouldn't rather have the time?

3. **If you can't cut it out, cut it down**

Trim your present list. If you cut off the outliers, would they be annoyed or just relieved that they didn't have to reciprocate?

4. **Lucky dip**

If you're tired of the Christmas hassle, go for a Kris Kringle and cut down the choosing and buying and wrapping. Before the holiday season begins, ask Grandmother or some other trustworthy member of the family to put the names of all the adult family members on slips. Take turns picking one name per adult – the name you pick is your gift recipient. Keep your chosen pick a secret to help maintain an element of surprise. You can now focus on a special gift for the person whose name you picked, without the difficulty and expense of finding just the right gift for everyone. An agreed spending limit will help prevent everyone feeling they have to go overboard.

5. **Make it work**

The most wasteful present of all is the unwanted one – a recent Newspan survey of 1200 Australians found more than half the people questioned received Christmas presents they didn't use. Cut down those figures by asking people what they'd like, or paying much more notice to hints throughout the year! Remember, it's the thought that really matters.

6. **Doing, not buying**

We all have too many possessions, and we keep building larger houses to put them in. This year don't add to them – instead, give your friend an activity or an experience: a mud spa, a ticket to a musical, or a balloon ride. You'll also save on wrapping costs.

7. **Think global, buy local**
Buy gifts from local craft stalls or shops. You'll be supporting local artists, rather than mass-produced objects made by offshore companies. Try Australian native foods like wild rosella jam or finger-lime marmalade. These support agriculture that's more suited to our climate.
8. **Give green**
Buy gifts that help someone else live sustainably, such as seedlings for a vegie patch (see <http://www.communitygarden.org.au/>) or a water-saving shower head.
9. **Get green**
If you don't already have one, put a composter or wormery on your Christmas present list. Many local councils offer these at reduced prices, as household composting reduces their waste bill.
10. **Give recycled**
Look for items made from recycled materials – stationery made from recycled paper, say.
11. **Give fair**
Avoid sweatshop goods. Buy Fair Trade coffee, tea and chocolates that ensure a fair price for farmers in developing countries.
12. **Give good**
Get a present that appeals to the recipient's good side. Give a donation to a charity in their name. Give them a card telling them that you have made a donation. Donate to your favourite community group online at the [Australian Giving Centre](#). Over 1000 appeals have been listed using this commission-free service. You can browse the list, or search for a group or cause you support.
13. **Do good**
Cut out the middleman and do the good yourself: give a card promising that you'll participate in tree planting or volunteer on Clean up Australia Day, for example.
14. **Buy good**
Many charities such as [Oxfam](#) have their own shops – can you get your presents there? Check out all the great places to shop using the [2008 Good Gifts Guide](#).
15. **Get good**
Ask your friends not to give you a Christmas present this year but instead donate the money they would have spent on you to a nominated community group. It'll make for a more meaningful Christmas than another pair of novelty socks.
16. **Give mine**
Give away something you already own. We all have more possessions than we really need – that's what makes eBay sellers. What do you have that others would prize? If you find the right gift, it's a win/win – they get the present and you get the storage space. To get others on board, suggest that your friends and family put in place a gift exchange this Christmas.
17. **Power up**
Switch over to [Green Power](#) for your Christmas event. Green Power is an accredited program which guarantees electricity supplied from renewable sources, such as solar or wind-power. Everyone with an electricity supply can choose to source some or all of their electricity from Green Power through their electricity supplier all year round.

18. **Walk to the shops**

When you go Christmas shopping, try to walk, or take the bus and a folding trolley. If you have to use the car, make only one big trip. This requires a lot of planning, and a shopping list the size of a senate ballot paper, but you'll soon get used to it.

19. **Discourage plastic**

Minimise your plastic bag use; use recyclable bags which you can also tie up with a ribbon and use for gift wrapping. Favour presents that aren't covered in five successive layers of plastic wrap.

20. **They live again**

Batteries contain toxic chemicals, don't biodegrade and are difficult to recycle. When you give a gift of battery-powered toys, throw in some rechargeable ones or try the new AA size USB rechargeable batteries. By opening the cap and plugging into a USB connector, you can recharge them pretty much anywhere there's a USB socket. You'll never have to search for a charger again.

21. **Heavy metal**

If you have to use non-rechargeable batteries, then buy the alkaline manganese variety rather than those that contain toxic heavy metals (cadmium and mercury). Get a battery charger – another item to add to the Xmas present list if you don't already have one!

22. **Batteries not included**

Better still, give 'battery-free' gifts – books or toys that require the child to use some imagination.

23. **Making it**

People really appreciate something handmade. What about whipping up a batch of kumquat marmalade, or home-made chutneys or cakes, or flavored olive oil with dried chillies, garlic or herbs, or vodka ditto? Break out your artistic talents and give a drawing or even a poem.

24. **Green glean**

If you want to go **really** green, do some gleaning (picking unwanted fruit or vegetables from public land or unused properties) and turn wasted fruit into jams or other presents.

25. **Give health**

Get the kids to appreciate the environment by getting them outside in it. Camping and sports gear, binoculars, and bugcatchers are popular gifts. Swimming and beach gear also get them out and about. Throw in a hat and some sunscreen for good measure.

26. **Ageing them**

Buy vintage; second-hand presents – anything from valuable antiques to garage sale or op-shop treasures. Take some time to find gifts you know your friends and family will appreciate.

27. **Aunty Fay had the right idea ...**

Go and get out the wrapping paper that you saved from last Christmas's presents. There's no point recycling if you don't reuse.

28. **Coloured paper is coloured paper**

You can wrap presents in newspapers with interesting headlines, or comics pages, or magazines.

29. **Give n' wrap**

How about making the wrapping part of your gift? Wrap crockery or kitchenware in dishtowels, and baby gifts in fluffy blankets. Or how about a wicker basket, a useful gift as well as a container?

30. **String it out**

Use ribbon or string instead of sticky tape to wrap presents. Sticky tape isn't biodegradable, and also prevents the wrapping paper being reused.

31. **Unplugged**

Better still, hide the presents in the house and garden and organise a treasure hunt so you can do away with wrapping altogether.

The Tree

32. **Under the tree**

Why not just hang the baubles on a tree or a shrub in your back yard? Most of them are water-resistant. Give your garden that extra sparkle.

33. **They live again, Part 2**

If you must have the tree in the house, you can still get a tree or a shrub in a pot and trolley it in and out each Christmas.

34. **Scout it out**

Failing that, buy a locally grown tree, preferably from a community group, and then recycle it afterwards.

Decoration

35. **Lighting the Tree**

Choose LED fairy lights - LED (Light Emitting Diode) holiday lights use up to 95% less energy than larger, traditional holiday bulbs and last up to 100,000 hours when used indoors. LED holiday lights use .04 watts per bulb, 10 times less than mini bulbs and 100 times less than traditional holiday bulbs. As an added bonus, if one of the LED lights burns out the rest of the strand will stay lit.

36. **Cut the cards**

Look over your Christmas card list and trim off anybody you can't remember at all. Make your own Christmas cards, or have the children do it.

Give a Green Christmas Giving Card, with a guaranteed dollar going to the community group or school of your choice.

37. **Deck the halls with real holly**

Instead of spending money on artificial Christmas decorations that won't biodegrade, make house decorations out of recycled and scrap materials. Try popcorn, dough, cinnamon sticks, bows, gingerbread, holly, pinecones, eucalyptus leaves, seasonal berries, ivy, dried flowers, and evergreen branches – and once you've finished with them, you can put them in the composter.

Eating

38. **Enough, not too much**

Most people buy too much food at Christmas, much of which goes to waste and much of which goes straight to the hips. This year plan your meals and only buy what you need to make the guests feel satisfied without actually being bloated.

39. **Hang loose**

Buy loose rather than pre-packed vegetables—it'll help cut down on waste packaging. Better still; grow your own next year.

40. **Eat sustainables**

If you eat meat, think about buying organic and free range. (But don't forget that many believe that the vegetarian diet is greenest of all.) If you eat fish, check out the Sustainable Seafood Guide.

41. **Be a local yokel**

Remember to buy local food (check the label – watch out for those grapes from California!) – it helps the local economy and is better for the environment because the produce hasn't needed to be transported long distances in carbon-emitting planes, ships or trucks to get to you. Support local shops. Even better, get to know your local food co-op.

42. **And afterwards, Frisbees**

If you really have to use disposable plates, choose the sturdy paper variety, not plastic, and reuse them. Even better, serve your food on a bread base.

43. **Take a taxi home**

Taxis count as public transport. And drinking and driving wastes valuable lives.

The 26th – and after

44. **Washing up**

When you're doing the *enormous* amounts of post-Christmas washing up (paper plates or no paper plates), do it in a tub and pour that water onto the garden. Use green detergents that won't kill the plants.

45. **Put it away**

Save the present wrapping to use next year (see #27 above). Bubble wrap can be stored for reuse, or recycled (foam packing chips are not as easily recycled). Cardboard boxes should be opened flat and set out for recycling; storing and reusing them is even better, as no additional energy is used in remanufacturing.

46. **What remains**

Recycle your bottles and cans and plastics. Save the corks, too. Give them to a community group to use in their fundraising.

47. **Two by Two**

Recycle your Christmas cards with Planet Ark. From Boxing Day till the end of January, simply take your unwanted Christmas, birthday and other greeting cards and envelopes into any Australia Post outlet, pick up a free reply paid envelope, put your cards inside and drop it into your nearest street posting box.

48. **Feed the earth**

The worms need their Christmas blowout too; compost your leftovers.

49. **Better to give**

If you got things that you didn't want, give them to an op shop, pass them to a friend, or put them away to give next year.

50. **Look ahead**

A jar of your home-grown olives would make a nice present. Olive trees don't bear fruit for eight years, though, so you'd better buy one and plant it today.

**Reduce, re-use, recycle and recover:
Have a very sustainable Christmas**

With thanks to Environment Victoria's Festive Season Guide, the Australian Conservation Foundation's The Hidden Cost of Christmas, Australian Ecosystems, EcoDriving USA, Go Greener! Australia, the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network, Penrith City Council, The Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand, eartheasy, GreenPower, The Australian Marine Conservation Society, and Planet Ark.