



2009
Christmas
Greening
Resource

The Environmental Cost of Christmas

Christmas can be expensive. Not just financially, but for the environment as well. In 2004, clothing purchased for Christmas produced 720,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas pollution and used 38,000 megalitres of water. Australia's most polluting power station would take more than two weeks to produce that much greenhouse gas pollution, and to use that much water you would have to leave the garden hose running for 324 years.

Gifts of popular electronic devices such as DVD players, i-pods and air-conditioners created 780,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas pollution before they were even switched on! Meanwhile the production of the alcoholic beverages consumed in December 2004 used enough water for 42,000 Olympic sized swimming pools. Every dollar spent on lollies, chips and chocolates creates half a kilogram of greenhouse gas, uses 30 litres of water and 0.7kg of material and disturbs a meter square of land. In 2004, \$123 million was spent on confectionary. So if you have bought only \$30 of confectionary for Christmas, you will be using 20kg of materials, 940 litres of water and creating 16kg of greenhouse gas.

Books and magazines have a large impact also, with 40,000 hectares or 5,000 MCGs worth of land being disturbed in their production in 2004, along with greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to 85,000 cars being on the road for a year, a total of 430,000 tonnes [1].

Around 10 million turkeys are killed to provide meat for Christmas each year [2] and researchers at the Stockholm Environment Institute have calculated that three days of Christmas celebrations (Christmas Day, Boxing Day and) can create as much as 650kg of carbon dioxide emissions per person – around the weight of 1,000 Christmas puddings. This includes 26kg of CO₂ from Christmas food consumed, 96kg from Christmas car travel, 218kg of CO₂ from Christmas light displays and 310kg from Christmas shopping [3].

As you can see, Christmas can be bad news for the environment; but it doesn't have to be. There are many things we can do to reduce the environmental impact of our Christmas celebrations; see one of the challenges below for ideas. After all, Christmas is not really about the trappings; it is about a single gift – Jesus Christ. The Son of God, born in a borrowed manger, who came to save all creation.

Question for thought: How would Jesus want you to celebrate Christmas?

References:

[1] Australian Conservation Foundation (14/12/2005) The Hidden Cost of Christmas: The Environmental Impact of Australian Christmas Spending, ACF online, http://www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res/res_xmascost.pdf

[2] Prime, Gilly, The True Cost of Christmas: A Special Report by the Vegetarian Society Highlighting the Plight of Animals at this Time of Year, www.vegsoc.org, <http://www.vegsoc.org/animals/VegSoc-TrueCostOfChristmas-2.pdf>

[3] The University of York (7/12) Calculating the Carbon cost of Christmas – In Puddings! Communications Office, The University of York <http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/presspr/pressreleases/carbonpuddings.htm>

Christmas Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Help us to celebrate your birth in a meaningful way this Christmas. Make this Christmas about love and kindness, family and faith. Deliver us from the temptations of consumerism, envy and gluttony. Help us to think of those who are less fortunate, or for whom Christmas is not a happy time.

We also pray at this time for people in impoverished countries, especially those being forced out of their homes and countries by the rising sea levels caused by Climate Change. We pray for those who will suffer in the natural disasters exacerbated by Climate Change and we ask for your help in making the tough decisions and taking the actions needed to slow this crisis.

In the lead up to this time of hope and joy, which can so often become stressful with preparations, help our souls to draw near to you and find peace. Slow our hands as we buy food for the day, and help us to remember that our satisfaction comes from you. Please give us wisdom in choosing the presents for our friends and family and bring our families closer during the season's celebrations.

We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen

Christmas Prayer for Creation

Creator God,

Help us also to remember our wider family; not only that of humanity, but all your creatures with whom we share this earth. Help us to reduce the suffering our celebration of Christmas causes them.

Lord God, at Christmas you gave the world hope through your Son; help us to remember this hope for all your creatures at this time and help us to act as your hands and body in bringing this hope to all. Help us to end the groaning of creation, and to reveal ourselves as your children by bringing love and hope as beacons in the darkness.

Help us also to appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of our country on this day. So many of our Christmas traditions are based around the idea of a 'White Christmas' that we can become disappointed with this land in which we are privileged to live. Let us, instead, take joy in the hot summer sun, the smell of eucalypt trees and the cool refreshment of a pool or ocean. Let us give thanks for our bountiful beaches, our rugged bushland and our old, dry and majestic country.

Finally, Lord, help us to choose one of the greening Christmas challenges (in this resource) and to stick to it, that our celebration of Christmas might bring more joy to all.

We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen

Prayer for the Church Greening Movement in Australia

Lord of Heaven and Earth,

We ask your blessing on the church greening movement in Australia. We thank you for all those churches who have already taken actions to reduce the impact of their churches and congregations on your creation. We thank you for the ministers in these churches, for their green groups, for those who have led their greening and for all the individuals who took part in these changes. We ask you to bless and strengthen them that they might do even more for your glory. We thank you also for those who give their time to help churches become greener, and to help those beginning in this area to find the way forward.

We ask you Lord to speak to other churches through the power of the Holy Spirit and tell them also of Your love and concern for creation. Let the churches of Australia stand up and proclaim their love for you through their actions for the earth. Bless and grow your movement, as you have in the US and Europe, and raise up churches to lead the fight against climate change. Help us to show that by following your teachings we can create a greener and more sustainable world, one that has hope for the future. Let us be salt and light in your world,

We ask this in Jesus' name,

Amen

Christmas Challenges for your family

Zero waste Christmas

-Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice

When you are doing your Christmas shopping this year remember the five R's: rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle, and rejoice. Before you buy anything, rethink whether you really need that item or if you can use a substitute or something you have already.

If you need to buy something, try to reduce the amount you purchase. Supermarket deals often offer bargain prices for larger amounts of products. Avoid the temptation to buy more than you need. You probably won't use it and it will just go to waste and increase the carbon footprint of your Christmas celebrations.

Where possible reuse everything. Excess food from Christmas can be reused and revitalised in bubble and squeak, a stir fry, sandwiches or trifle. If you have more than you can eat, share it with others. Boxes and containers can be used for storage. Be careful with this year's wrapping paper and you can reuse it next year. If you have a real pine as a Christmas tree, put it through a chipper at the end of the season to make mulch for your garden.

If you can't reuse it, recycle it. Especially make sure all aluminium, glass and plastic products find their way into the recycling as this saves large amounts of energy and reduces carbon emissions.

Lastly, rejoice. Thank God for the gifts he has provided and enjoy God's blessings so nothing will go to waste.

Green Decorations Challenges

Things to avoid: petroleum based candles, try beeswax instead.

Buy Nothing Challenge

This year, instead of heading to the shops to find new and exciting decorations for Christmas, why not see what you can do with what you already have? Rustle up those old boxes of decorations and use them. Enjoy the memories they bring back and the small gifts you'll find from when your children were young.

Once the tree is decorated, rustle up some serviettes etc from previous parties or Christmases. It doesn't matter if they don't match- it will just add to the colour of the occasion.

No need for plastic plates - just use your normal plates and cutlery, or the fancy set you have put aside. You aren't going to see much of the plates under all that food anyway.

For more ideas visit the Buy Nothing Day website <http://www.buynothingday.org/>

Native Tree Challenge

Why not buy a native plant and decorate it for Christmas? Then when Christmas is over, you can plant it in your garden and watch it grow. Soon you will have a host of plants to remind you of Christmases past and to provide food for native birds.

Greenery Challenge

Instead of using bought decorations this Christmas, raid your garden for some greenery. Use flowers, leaves, vines and pot plants to decorate your house. Place gum nuts, roses and fruit on the Christmas tree.

After Christmas, simply gather up the decorations and compost them – no storage hassles this year.

Make it together challenge

Give yourself another excuse to get the family together before the big day. Make your decorations yourselves. Teach your kids to sew with scraps of fabric cut into Christmassy shapes and hung on the tree. Plait corn or make clay or plaster decorations. Cook biscuits in Christmas shapes for the tree. Make decorations out of old newspapers or catalogues. Play with scrap booking and collages. Make beeswax candles by hand and decorate the house with them. The possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

Energy efficient challenge

This Christmas don't let your decorations suck the life out of the planet. Switch your Christmas lights to LED's (they use 90% less energy than standard lights), or better yet, install Solar Christmas Lights to light up your home. Switch to GreenPower or install a solar panel on your roof as a gift to the planet.

Present Challenges:

Things to avoid: excess packaging, sweat shop production, gifts that are not going to last long, and never buy someone a pet unless you know they want it and can care for it properly.

Ethical Present Challenge

It's not really fair if the presents that give our family and friends so much joy cause others to suffer is it? So this Christmas, make sure all the presents you buy are ethical. Look for the Fairtrade label on chocolate, coffee, tea, nut and sports ball products. Buy fair trade arts and crafts from places like the Oxfam Shop and look for No Sweat labels on clothing.

Gifts that Give Twice

Give your friends and family the gift of a donation to their favourite charity on their behalf.

2009/2010 Everything in Common Gifts Catalogue

The UnitingWorld 2009/2010 Everything in Common Gifts Catalogue and website provides unique gift ideas which connect communities for life just in time for gift giving occasions such as Christmas. The catalogue also provides a range of project ideas for Churches, Mission groups and Adult Fellowships groups within the Uniting Church. Gifts can be purchased online at www.everythingincommon.com.au

Christmas Bowl 2009

Help the Christmas Bowl provide assistance to over 1 million people living in war-torn communities. Visit:

http://www.actforpeace.org.au/Ways_To_Give/The_Christmas_Bowl.aspx

Sustainable Presents

Buy sustainable presents for the environmentally aware in your family. There are a variety of portable solar chargers for mobile phones and lap tops available, various gifts made from recycled products, shower timers, books, eco stationary and gadgets available from your local environment shop, Neco or Todae. If you want to be more traditional, why not buy some indulgence or cosmetic products from The Body Shop; or if you have kids, teach them about renewable energy by buying them a solar powered car or a solar or wind power electronics kit to put together.

Handmade Gifts

In our busy world, few things are more touching than handmade gifts. Bags of slices or biscuits for school teachers and friends, hand sewn tea-towels or clothes, pictures or framed photos and collages; all make great gifts to show you care.

Experiences

A great gift for someone who has everything is to give them an experience. Offer to book them into an eco-resort, a behind the scenes tour of the local zoo, a massage, scuba diving lessons or climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge; or buy them a ticket to a concert or play, or buy a book of movie tickets.

Gifts of time

This Christmas season, give a local charity a hand by donating your time. By being a shop assistant, fund raiser, serving soup at a soup kitchen, planting trees or helping out in another way, you can help charities to make it through this busy time and bring hope and joy to those less fortunate.

Gifts to the world

As well as friends and family, don't forget to give the world a present this Christmas. Volunteering, donating to a charity or even praying for the world will all help to promote peace and joy for all.

Christmas Food Challenges:

Everything from within 100 miles

Heard of the 100 Mile Cafe? Sadly it is closed now, but it is still a great idea. Stemming from concerns about food miles (the impact of transporting food from where it is produced to where it is consumed), the 100 mile idea is that we can reduce our carbon footprint by eating only food produced within a 100 mile radius of where we are. This is a great idea because it challenges us to learn more about what is grown in our local area and to think about its production, as well as lowering our environmental impact.

Sustainable Seafood

Seafood products are popular additions to many Christmas menus, but our fish are facing a crisis as overfishing pushes many species towards extinction. Don't contribute to unsustainable fishing practices this Christmas; use a sustainable seafood guide to choose the best fish for your meal. For an example see:

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/features/fish/default.htm>

In particular, remember to avoid prawns, flake and Orange Roughy – they may taste nice, but these fisheries are not sustainable.

Vegetarian

This tip won't be for everyone on Christmas, but our consumption of meat, particularly red meat, uses a lot of resources and has a large impact on the earth. Choosing to switch to a vegetarian meal for Christmas is a courageous step towards emphasising that Christmas is about celebrating Jesus, so it should not involve hurting the creation he loves.

Fairtrade

Make your Christmas free of slave labour and unfair payments to farmers. Fill your Christmas trolley with items carrying the Fairtrade label. Supermarkets now carry a great range of these products, so make use of the variety. For more information see

www.fairtrade.com.au

Organic and free range

If a vegetarian Christmas isn't for you, try looking for free range meats; these are kinder to the animal. Also, look for organic vegetables to roast and free range eggs for your cakes.

In season

A great way to reduce the environmental impact of the food you eat is by eating only fruit and vegetables that are in season. They are more nutritious, fresher, often cheaper and they haven't used large amount of energy being kept in cool storage for months.

Some vegetables in season in December include:

- Asparagus
- Broccoli
- Bean shoots
- Beetroot
- Cabbage
- Capsicum
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Cucumber
- Leek
- Lettuce
- Mushrooms
- Spinach
- Spring Onion
- Zucchini

Fruits:

- Banana
- Cherries
- Honeydew
- Orange
- Raspberries
- Rhubarb
- Strawberries

Source:

<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcrecipes.nsf/InSeasonView/InSeason?OpenDocument>

Cook everything from scratch challenge

Cooking things from scratch can take longer, but it is better for the environment and often tastes better and is healthier. Gather the family together and make cooking a fun, family activity and then you won't even notice the extra work.

Greener Christmas Recipes

to get you started:

Seasonal recipe ideas:

Baked Stuffed Capsicums

Beetroot Dip

Asparagus Soup

Zucchini Pasta Bake

Mushroom Pot Pies

Asparagus Pie

Snake Beans stir-fried with Thai basil, garlic and chilli

Green Christmas Dessert:

Chocolate, Caramel & Peanut slice

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time : 40 minutes

Ingredients (serves 16)

- Melted **organic** butter, to grease
- 190g (1 1/4 cups) **organic** self-raising flour
- 70g (1/3 cup, firmly packed) **Fairtrade Certified** brown sugar
- 120g **organic** butter, melted
- **Caramel filling**
- 1 x 395g can sweetened condensed milk
- 70g (1/3 cup, firmly packed) **Fairtrade Certified** brown sugar
- 60g **organic** butter
- **Chocolate & peanut topping**
- 150g (1 cup) unsalted **Fairtrade Certified** roasted peanuts
- 300g of **any Fairtrade Certified** dark chocolate, chopped
- 80ml (1/3 cup) thickened **organic** cream



Note: If you need help finding any of the Fairtrade labelled products in this recipe visit <http://locator.fairtrade.org.nz/locator>

Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C. Brush a 13 x 30cm (base measurement) loaf pan with melted butter to lightly grease. Line the base and 2 opposite sides with non-stick baking paper, allowing the sides to overhang.
2. To make the biscuit base, combine the flour and sugar in a medium bowl. Add the melted butter and stir until just combined. Spoon mixture into the prepared pan and press firmly over the base. Bake in preheated oven for 20 minutes or until golden. Remove from oven.
3. Meanwhile: to make the caramel filling, combine the condensed milk, sugar and butter in a medium saucepan over low heat. Cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, for 8 minutes or until caramel thickens (do not boil).
4. Pour the hot caramel over the biscuit base. Bake in oven for 15 minutes or until caramel begins to bubble. Remove from oven and set aside for 1 hour to cool slightly.
5. To make the chocolate & peanut topping: sprinkle the caramel evenly with peanuts. Place the chocolate and cream in a medium saucepan over low heat and stir with a metal spoon for 3-4 minutes or until chocolate melts and mixture is smooth. Pour the chocolate mixture evenly over the peanuts and use a round-bladed knife to smooth the surface. Place in the fridge for 1-2 hours to set. Cut into 16 pieces to serve.

This recipe is an edited version of Michelle Southan's Chocolate, Caramel and Peanut Slice found at <http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/2349/chocolate+caramel+peanut+slice>

Written by Jessica Morthorpe for the Justice and International Mission Unit, Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, 2009.