

The Sustainable Christmas Guide

With Christmas fast approaching, you have probably started looking at sourcing trees, lights, crackers, and other fun festive materials. With all of this comes expense, and potentially negative impacts on the environment. This factsheet will help you reduce costs to both your business and the environment this festive period.

Christmas Crackers

Crackers are fun to have at the Christmas dinner table, but how can we source them responsibly? Firstly, ensure that you recycle all leftover card. There are plenty of crackers available that are made from recycled materials. Furthermore, you can even buy crackers made out of seed paper, which you plant in the garden after use.

- Uniquely Crackers – these crackers are made from recycled card:
<http://www.nigelsecostore.com/acatalog/recycled-card-eco-crackers.html>
- A range of crackers made from recycled materials – they contain an ‘eco message’ inside:
<http://www.uniquelycrackers.co.uk/eco-crackers.html>
- These crackers are handmade from unique seed paper that has seeds within the paper. Once you have used the crackers, plant the outer layer in the garden and you’ll have beautiful wild flowers to remember your Christmas Day by:
<http://www.notonthehighstreet.com/biomelifestyle/product/biomelifestyle-eco-seed-crackers-box-of-six>
- Eco Exclusive crackers from [Cracker Tree](http://www.crackertree.co.uk/) provide the opportunity to reduce your carbon footprint. Aiming to promote ‘green thinking’ the crackers, trays and contents are made from recycled materials. <http://www.crackertree.co.uk/products.php?cat=1>

Christmas Trees

We all know that Christmas trees can have a large environmental footprint. Luckily, there are a number of options for sourcing them responsibly. This is great, although it can be difficult to know what the best option is. The information below may help you decide the right route for you.

- You can **rent** a real Christmas tree! One company offering this service is: [Forever Green Christmas Trees](http://www.forevergreenchristmastrees.com/). They are cared for all year and only removed from the ground in their special pots just before the delivery date to be brought to your premises. All trees are grown (complete with root balls) in special pots (in the ground) which allow them to be uplifted, rented in those pots and replanted after the Christmas season. FGCT is a member of the British Christmas Tree Growers Association and, as such, subscribes to a code of conduct which ensures that crops are sustainable and do not cause damage to the local wildlife.

- If you want to **buy** a real tree: The vast majority of Christmas trees from garden centres and garage forecourts are intensively farmed on an industrial scale, sometimes beyond UK shores. As with most monocrops, Christmas trees are typically sprayed with fertilisers and herbicides, such as glyphosate. To find out more about sourcing an organic Christmas tree, which are not sprayed with chemicals:
 - The [Soil Association](#) – for information on organic trees.
 - Look out for organic farms, such as [Swillington Organic Farm](#), close to you where you can buy organic Christmas trees.

- **Other sustainable real tree sources:**
 - The [Forestry Commission](#) has several real tree sales centres in England and Scotland. The trees are sustainably grown in Britain and at least one tree is planted for every tree felled.
 - Buy a local, [BCTGA approved](#) tree. The [British Christmas Tree Growers Association](#) provides an advisory and representational service to growers of real Christmas Trees within the UK. Members of the BCTGA are asked to comply with a [code of practice](#) so that trees are grown according to best environmental and sustainable practices.
 - Consider buying [potted trees](#). Tayside Forestry, for example, uses a new perforated pot technology to grow container trees in the ground. This requires less irrigation, limited fertilisers and the pots are reused for the next crop. You can choose from Norway spruce, Fraser fir or Nordmann fir. You can replant it after Christmas. 07939 929 0096; www.taysideforestry.co.uk.
 - [Tree collection services](#). According to WRAP research in 2008, 250 tonnes of Christmas trees are thrown away after Christmas. If you have a real tree, the most environmentally conscious way to dispose of it after Christmas is to compost it. If you cannot do this yourself, the council may help: Remove all decorations from the tree, remove it from the pot or stand and take it to a collection point. This is usually the boundary of your premises or a designated communal point. You may receive a leaflet from your council with more information on this service. If not, contact your council and ask if they are collecting in your area. Trees are usually shredded into chippings, which are then used locally in parks or woodland areas.

- **Plastic trees:** It's difficult to measure, but it's possible that plastic trees have a more negative environmental impact than real trees when all aspects of their life cycle are considered. Artificial trees are typically manufactured with metal and polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a petroleum-derived plastic. Artificial trees are therefore non-recyclable and non-biodegradable, meaning they will sit in landfill after disposal. Furthermore, many artificial trees are imported, which adds to their carbon footprint. Ideas for disposing of your artificial tree:
 - Instead of recycling it, if your tree is in good condition, you could ask friends and family if they want it, advertise it on an exchange website or donate it to charity.
 - You could get creative and make your own artificial tree using [recycled materials](#).

- **No tree:** As an alternative to buying a tree, you could use the money to help conserve the world's forests. You could donate to the [Woodland Trust](#) and help preserve ancient woodland habitats. Further afield, [Rainforest Concern](#) works in countries including Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Sri Lanka to protect rainforest ecosystems and the indigenous people that rely on them. You can contribute to its work by sponsoring an acre of forest at a cost of £25.

Regardless of which option you go for, communicating to customers why you have decided to source a Christmas tree responsibly, or indeed not purchase one at all, could be an effective way of demonstrating the business' commitment to sustainability.

Christmas Cards & Wrapping Paper

Over Christmas in the UK we send 1 billion Christmas cards, and use 80 km² of wrapping paper, much of which ends up in landfill. To reduce the negative environmental impacts of using all of this paper, perhaps look into the options below:

- Choose 100% recycled Christmas cards, such as these designer ones by Lisa Jones: http://www.nigelsecostore.com/acatalog/Christmas_Cards.html.
- This year FoodCycle are launching their own Christmas cards – featuring fantastic festive food designs and using 100% recycled card: <http://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/131348747462>. All proceeds from card sales will help FoodCycle provide more meals for vulnerable people in communities up and down the UK. To find out more, volunteer or donate please visit www.foodcycle.org.uk.
- [Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) cards and gift wrap are available from many high street retailers including Co-op, Marks and Spencer, John Lewis and Sainsbury's.
- 'Cards for Good Causes' is the UK's largest multi-charity Christmas card organisation. You can choose from a wide range of designs and support more than one charity by buying cards from CGC. Choose designs from 34 charities and search the online shop by charity or by design: <http://www.cardsforcharity.co.uk/>.
- Of course, the best way to ensure that no paper is sent to landfill is by sending **e-cards**.
- Ditch rolls of wrapping paper and avoid glossy or metallic gift wrap. Instead, use **fabric, newspaper, an old map or any other interesting paper** you can find and re-use. You could use greeting cards received last year, or other recycled material, to make gift tags. For gift bags that come with tags attached, write 'Reuse this bag!' on it instead of the recipient's name.

Christmas Decorations

There's nothing like putting the Christmas decorations up to get everyone in a festive mood. Take a look at these tips on how to source your decorations responsibly, and ensure that you minimise unnecessary costs!

- **Ornaments:**
 - Go **natural**: Avoid plastic and opt for wood, burlap, or organic cotton instead. Bring in elements from the outdoors to incorporate into your premises, such as a wreath of pine boughs or an abandoned nest to place a candle in.
 - **Handmade** and **homemade**: Whether made by yourself or a local artisan, handmade items will bring a simple, beautiful energy to the place. Create your own ornaments, or cut and hang snowflakes from scrap paper saved throughout the year.

- Choose **durable** and meaningful ornaments. Wood, metal, or cloth will all last longer than plastic or thin glass. And an ornament that symbolises an important event from the year will mean it is kept and treasured for a lifetime.
- **Lights:**
 - Energy-efficient **LED** lighting: If your lights are more than ten years old it will be more efficient to replace them with newer, [LED](#) ones. They can save you up to 90% on power costs and last longer than traditional bulbs.
 - **Replace** blown bulbs: Many perfectly good lights are thrown away when a single bulb bursts. Spend the time to find and replace the culprit or invest in a bulb tester.
 - **Timers:** All your Christmas lights should be on timers. It means you don't need to remember to turn the lights off at the end of the day because the lights plug into the [timer](#), which 'remembers' for you.
 - **Solar:** You can purchase outdoor [solar-powered lights](#), which don't require an electrical power source and use LED bulbs.

Good Practices in the Workplace

- **Staff refresher training:** Simply reminding staff of good energy-saving practices, such as turning off lights when not in use and setting the thermostat to an optimum level, can help the business avoid unnecessary costs. Likewise, saving water by turning off taps and only switching on the dishwasher when it's full are easy ways to be more sustainable.
- **Set menus:** Having a set menu helps prevent customers from over-ordering, cutting down on plate waste. There is also the advantage of being able to pre-order ingredients more accurately, since you can be sure of what customers will be having.
- **Leftover inventory and ingredients:** Waste can be cut down by inventively using excess ingredients and inventory for daily specials and new dishes.
- **Tackling food waste:** By efficiently forecasting the number of covers, giving appropriate portion sizes and steering the menu to use up all cuts of meat, etc, you can effectively cut down on food waste. Less waste means you'll be charged less by your waste contractor and reduce the amount of food being sent to landfill. Preparing for a wide range of dietary requirements, and preparing for these in advance at the booking stage, prevents ordering too much of the wrong ingredients that might go to waste.
- **Suppliers:** Many suppliers offer orders in appropriate portion sizes to reduce wastage. It is useful to get to know your supplier and visit the farms, etc, so that you know exactly where your produce comes from. Welfare meat is a little more expensive but can add value to your business in the long run and usually has a shorter supply chain.
- **Saving energy when cooking:** Slow cooking meat saves energy, as does using induction hobs.