

This Christmas, give a present to the Earth

We hear much talk of financial hangovers in January when we realise how much money has been spent over Christmas, but all this spending and wastage means a big hangover for the planet, and that's nothing to celebrate. Lightening the impact of this year's festive season relieves our strain on the planet without compromising the joy of celebration.

Top GreenHome Christmas Shopping Tips Gifts:

1. Buy a service, not a product - to reduce embodied greenhouse emissions and water, buy someone a voucher for a massage for example, rather than a massaging appliance. Tips: vouchers for services (such as gardening or housecleaning), tickets to entertainment (such as a film or the theatre), memberships to gyms, museums or sports clubs, or a term of dance or circus classes for youngsters.
2. Buy gifts that give twice - Give your friends and family membership to charities, overseas aid groups or environment groups. Tips: membership to ACF (www.acfonline.org.au/donate); calendars and diaries (www.barandiem.com.au) Oxfam Unwrapped Christmas gifts, or see Karma Currency for more charity gift voucher ideas.
3. Think 'green' when you buy - look for recycled and recyclable content, minimal packaging, certified organic chemical-free contents and buy products that are made to last.
4. Reduce the amount of gifts you need to buy by organising a Kris Kringle with family and friends, so that you can buy a small number good quality items, rather than buying lots of cheaper items.
5. Give your home and your family a Christmas present, like a solar hot water system. While there is an initial cost outlay for installation of solar hot water heating, this is one of the most significant ways that you can reduce your greenhouse pollution. Once your system is paid off, you and your family will enjoy free hot water and dramatically reduced electricity bills in the long term!

Decorations:

6. For wrapping paper, a great-looking and unique option is newspaper tied up with a colourful ribbon, or you can re-use paper from gifts that friends have given you, or buy recycled paper. Make Christmas cards yourself, from recycled paper and re-used magazine images. Alternatively, e-cards are a great way to cut down on your eco-impact.
7. Get a really green Christmas tree: go for an Australian native tree in a pot which you can use year after year, or can plant in the garden after Christmas. Tips: support the campaign to revive the native Wollemi Pine, an endangered Australian native which makes a great Christmas tree!
8. Eco-decorate your house for the festive season with sprigs of native plants, wreaths made from fresh herbs and flowers, and FairTrade decorations bought from charity shops - avoid buying single-use decorations which will only end up in landfill. Gum leaves always look great, and are much more Australian than holly and mistletoe!
9. For fairy lights, purchasing an LED set instead of mini-incandescents will save you money in power bills and will dramatically reduce the risk of a house-fire, as LEDs run cool.

In addition, the set will last at least twice as long (they never burn out), and the initial price is on average the same as for standard bulbs. Most stores will stock LED sets, or a quick internet search will turn up hundreds of online suppliers who can deliver to your home.

Home and Away:

10. Borrow or rent items that you need rather than buying them. This is perfect for items that you use infrequently such as lawnmowers, power tools and camping gear. It's also a great way to meet your neighbours!
11. If you're going away on holiday, try to reduce the distance travelled - go for a location closer to home and take the train rather than flying.
12. You don't need hot water at home when you aren't there, so if you're going away on a holiday, even for only a few days, and if you have an electric storage hot water system, just turn it off! Constantly heating hot water takes a lot of energy, and is a substantial part of your electricity bill!

At the Christmas table:

13. Avoid disposable crockery and cutlery – washing up might take you an hour, but plastic lasts forever in the environment.
14. If you need any extra plates, cups & glasses for larger numbers, purchase extras from local second-hand charity shops – usually only a small outlay, but going to a good cause. When the function is over, they can be washed up and re-donated so that they don't clutter your kitchen for the rest of the year!
15. See the October Climate Heroes kit for more tips on eco-friendly eating. Think organic, fresh and local, or FairTrade



Eco-friendly gift suppliers:

www.neco.com.au

"The Eco Syperstore", Neco stocks just about everything: eco-friendly lighting, clothing, gadgets, fuel cells, carbon offsets, bikes, books and DVDs, greywater systems, office supplies, and even an electric scooter!

www.biome.com.au

Biome has two stores in Brisbane, however will deliver anywhere in Australia for \$9.95, or free for orders over \$175. Beautiful and unique eco-friendly gift ideas.

www.thegreenpages.com.au

Whatever business you're looking for, you'll be able to find an eco-friendly version in The Green Pages, Australia's most comprehensive directory of eco-businesses.

www.sustainableinsight.com.au

"Sustainable Insight: Your Green Living Bookstore"

Giving a friend or family member an eco-conscious book for Christmas can help them to learn and understand the issues that you care so deeply about, and can open their eyes to the need for greater action.

www.gorman.ws

For the fashion conscious eco-conscious among us... Gorman is a ladies' fashion brand who are determined to do things differently while supplying beautiful, modern fashion. organic cotton, wool and bamboo textiles, eco-friendly dyes and prints, a 90% reduction in garment packaging, donations to environmental organisations, energy efficiency and 100% greenpower in-store, a hybrid-car and bicycle fleet, and online retailing. Now also includes a swimwear collection!

And many more...

Most mainstream stores will have a selection of environmentally and climate-friendly gifts – it's just a matter of going looking for them. Second-hand gifts, from local charity stores, are often quirky, unique and memorable, as well as being totally sustainable, affordable, and the money goes to charitable purposes.

But above all, remember that services are the most eco-friendly presents – theatre tickets, dance classes, gardening vouchers, massage, rock climbing, yoga classes, movie vouchers and so on. Be creative and see what great ideas you can come up with!