

# Dreaming of an Ethical Christmas

Contributed by Bernie

Bernie-woman helps you counter Christmas excess yet still enjoy the pleasures of the season.

Christmas! A time of goodwill and celebration, often accompanied by seasonal increases in eating, drinking and spending. If all goes well this combination should result in a lot of fun, but unfortunately preparing for Christmas can throw up numerous ethical dilemmas e.g. should I buy Christmas cards, should I buy a real tree etc? You can save money, the planet and your conscience by taking a different approach to the festive season. It doesn't necessarily need to involve cutting up credit cards and donning sackcloth – it's simply about paying a little attention to how and what you consume. Feasting. When you shop use a canvas bag from home so you do not need a plastic bag for each purchase. Buy your Christmas food from farmers markets, small local shops or local box delivery schemes that source goods locally. Buying local produce is good for farmers and small shops that are struggling to compete with cheap imports and the stronghold of the supermarket. The Soil Association's website has a searchable database of suppliers ([www.whyorganic.org](http://www.whyorganic.org)). The National Farmers' Retail & Markets Association (FARMA) also has a database of farm shops at [www.farma.org.uk](http://www.farma.org.uk). Get an allotment and grow as much of your Christmas dinner as possible. Eat and buy seasonal food – it is much more likely to have been grown in the UK. Reduce the food miles on your plate – if you don't pick and choose, your Christmas dinner could have circumnavigated the globe on the way to your table. One estimate is that the ingredients for a typical Christmas dinner may have travelled up to 30,000 miles from producers and growers to the UK dinner table (Guardian, 22/12/04). Buying local food means fewer miles, less pollution, reduced packaging and it is likely to be fresher and taste better too. Ask before you buy – find out from food producers/suppliers how the food has been grown and/or cared for. Where possible buy free range, organic or Fair Trade products – discuss with your meat suppliers to find out if the animals have been cared for humanely. Try to buy food with minimal or at least recyclable packaging to help reduce waste at Christmas. According to Defra over 3m tonnes of extra rubbish is thrown away over Christmas – enough to fill 120m wheelie bins - the majority of which goes into landfill. Compost those food leftovers that can be composted such as vegetable peelings etc... Lobby your supermarket to supply local produce. Christmas Cards. More than a billion Christmas cards are sent in the UK each year many of which end up in the bin. Instead of sending a card why not send an e.card to friends and family. Alternatively if you normally send cards to multiple recipients such as in the workplace, why not place just one card in a communal area and pledge the money you have saved to charity - see this Downsizer.net article by Cab for more details. If you still wish to send cards, buy recycled cards from charity shops where some of your money will go towards a good cause. Make your own cards from recycled paper. Recycle any Christmas & New Year cards you receive. The Woodland Trust in 2009 collected and recycled 59 million cards (1,171 tonnes of rubbish). In the 12 years that the scheme has been running The Woodland Trust has been able to plant 141,00 trees, save over 12,000 tonnes of paper from landfill and stop over 16,000 tonnes of CO2 from going into the atmosphere. Individuals can take their cards to WHSmith, TKMaxx and Marks and Spencer from 2nd – 31st January 2010. Christmas Tree & Decorations. If you want to buy a Christmas tree, make sure it is one from a sustainable source. [www.christmastree.org.uk](http://www.christmastree.org.uk) has a list of suppliers of UK grown sustainable Christmas trees. Recycle your tree – most local authorities now have a scheme for chipping and composting trees. According to Friends of the Earth over 6m trees will have been bought by Christmas in the UK. Many are not from a sustainable source and most are later thrown away and end up in landfill creating 9,000 tonnes of rubbish. Buy a UK grown real tree with roots that can be planted in your garden or kept in a pot for next year. Artificial trees are a good alternative as they can be used many times. However, they tend to be difficult to recycle once they are no longer required as they are usually made of a number of different materials. Do without a tree altogether – decorate a favourite houseplant. Use energy saving LED lights on your tree – they emit less heat and last much longer than conventional Christmas lights. Try to buy decorations that can be used time and time again. Make your own decorations – make paper chains from waste paper, tie bundles of spices such as cinnamon sticks onto the tree or alternatively go traditional and bring in some holly, ivy and other evergreens into the home from the garden. Presents & Gifts. As for food buying, when you go shopping use a canvas bag so that you do not need a plastic bag for each purchase. Instead of buying a gift – why not make one? Homemade preserves, wines, beers sweets, cakes etc. Consider buying presents that are environmentally friendly or ones that have been produced in a sustainable way. This can be achieved in a number of ways – look for 'greener' alternatives e.g. a coffee maker with a washable filter rather than paper ones, wind-up/solar powered radio or torch etc. Support your local charity shop and/or look for Fair Trade alternatives. The British Association for Fair Trade Shops ([www.bafts.org.uk](http://www.bafts.org.uk)) has a list of approved fair trade shops on its website. Can't think what to buy the person who has everything? – Why not give a virtual Christmas present? This involves buying gifts for people in need either in the UK or in developing countries on behalf of your friends and relatives. If you are interested in buying for example, A hive of bees, ducks for peace or buying the training for a master soap maker then visit one of the following sites: Good Gifts ([www.goodgifts.org](http://www.goodgifts.org)), Traidcraft ([www.giftsforlife.org](http://www.giftsforlife.org)), Oxfam Unwrapped ([www.oxfamunwrapped.com](http://www.oxfamunwrapped.com)), FARMAfrica ([www.farmfriends.org.uk](http://www.farmfriends.org.uk)). Alternatively adopt a wild animal and help tackle some of the biggest conservation challenges facing our world today with World Wildlife Fund [www.wwf.org.uk](http://www.wwf.org.uk) or closer to home adopt a donkey at [www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk). An online database provided by The Ethical Company Organisation [www.gooshing.co.uk](http://www.gooshing.co.uk) rates companies on a number of ethical criteria such as animal testing, fair trade, environmental policies etc... helping you to buy gifts from ethically sound companies. Spread a bit of goodwill at Christmas – give your time as a gift. Pledge your time at [www.timebank.org.uk](http://www.timebank.org.uk) where you can find ideas for everything from visiting an elderly neighbour to singing carols in a hospital. If you are buying something that requires batteries, try to buy rechargeable batteries. Buy recycled wrapping paper or make your own and use string, ribbon or wool for tying up gifts that can be reused rather than using sticky tape. If you do buy your wrapping paper try not to buy the foil wrapping paper which is difficult to recycle or use with ribbon so it can be re-used at a later date. Use re-usable

wrapping bags for presents to cut down on the amount of wrapping paper used. In the UK, people throw away 83sq km of wrapping paper each Christmas – enough to cover Hyde Park 33 times (Guardian 22/12/04). Remember to give any unwanted presents to a charity shop where they can make someone else happy. If you've been inspired by any of the suggestions in this article do visit the Downsizer.net forums to get more help and ideas from other members who are interested in what you have to say!