Greening your Christmas

A carbon-free Christmas for one and all

Just when the leftover turkey from Thanksgiving has finally been consumed and the dry ice-induced Halloween fog has subsided, it's time to start planning for the silly season. This year, we would like to encourage you to think about the carbon footprint of your Christmas festivities. There is, indeed, much to think about. When you consider the carbon footprint of the turkey, which travels up to 1500 km to reach your table, the planting, harvesting, transporting and disposal of your Christmas tree, the energy consumed by your legendary lighting display in addition to the traveling of loved ones as they fly, drive and train to you and your homemade eggnog, it's enough to give you indigestion.

A study by the [Stockholm Environmental Institute](http://sei-international.org/about-sei) found that the average Briton binges a whopping 650kg of carbon over the three-day Christmas period. This is 5.5% of their average annual carbon footprint per capita. Here's a breakdown:

* 26 kg of CO₂ from Christmas food
* 96 kg of CO₂ from car travel
* 218 kg of CO₂ from lighting displays
* 310 kg of CO₂ on Christmas shopping

The Grinch was green for a very good reason after all. His rejection of Christmas cheer seems the only environmentally responsible choice. Not so. You can be Santa's little helpers, let's call you subordinate Clauses, and you can still have yourself a merry time without blackening the sky with merry pollution.

Fir sure

Let's start with that pesky tree. A study by the [American Christmas tree Association](http://www.christmastreeassociation.org/) showed that an artificial tree had a 'significantly smaller' carbon footprint than cut trees over a ten year period. The carbon footprint of your cut tree is huge; commercial farming and harvesting alone offset any positive contribution the growing tree makes throughout its life. Then there's transportation to the retail outlet, transportation to your home and disposal to consider. Driving to a farm to cut your own tree was described by the study as being "... the worst environmental choice you can make when buying a Christmas tree." The solution? Live trees. In many countries, unpopulated by lumberjacks, the felling of so many trees is frowned upon. People buy live, potted trees which they replant in the spring. If you don't want your yard to end up looking like a plantation, you can donate the tree to a local school, park or environmental organization. If you find the higher cost of live trees prohibitive, [rent one](https://evergrowchristmastrees.ca/). (Oh, yes you can!)

It's a wrap

There's nothing quite like the anticipation that gift wrap creates and unwrapped gifts would lack the chutzpa of a well presented present. Use hemp paper (90% recycled with veggie dyes), old maps, children's art, old comic books or recycle last year's paper. Wrap gifts Japanese style in fabric. If you use bandannas and scarves, they can second as extra gifts.

Your annual Christmas-light-show-spectacular does not need to be diminished in glory, simply switch to LED lights or, even better, use [solar powered lights](http://www.solarlinepower.com/why-santa-loves-solar-power) instead.

Send e-cards this Christmas to avoid the carbon footprint that billions of Christmas cards rack up each year. If you must send a card, use recycled ones.

Actually consider decking your halls with holly. Natural decorations don't have carbon footprints and are biodegradable, unlike their plastic Chinese counterparts. Use holly, ivy and firs for greenery. Popcorn and cranberry are better than tinsel and edible decorations such as gingerbread men and chocolates are far more delicious than plastic balls (trust me on this one).

Traveling home for the holidays is perhaps your greatest carbon contribution to the Yuletide. Stay away from planes, but if you must, travel [during the day](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/reduce-your-carbon-footprint/travel-sustainably/) and take the most direct route possible. Driving with friends is far more fun. Now you can sign up to [goCarShare](http://gocarshare.com/) which is Facebook-based and helps people to connect with others who may be heading in the same direction.

Buy locally. This goes for the turkey and the trimmings. Organic is better than not and local food doesn't have to travel as far.

This year, look forward to your festive season with the warm, fuzzy knowledge that you will be reducing the carbon footprint of your Christmas.