



How to have a green, environmentally friendly Christmas ~

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Introduction

Christmas – a time of good will to all. But it can also be a time of stress and increased spending. People can spend hundreds of dollars on Christmas. Christmas cards, Christmas presents, wrapping and Christmas decorations – it all adds up. There is also increased wastage of products, decorations and unwanted gifts and this impacts on the environment.

However, there are many ways you can reduce the cost of Christmas for you and the environment - *and have a better Christmas*. This article shows how you can have an environmentally friendly Christmas – **and save money!** (For example, look around you at the amount you pay for the decorations, while at the same time many people are spending time (and money) cutting back the garden and throwing away the real thing.)

Firstly, you may be throwing away many useful items. Therefore, throughout the year save any:

- Ⓜ tissue and other wrapping from shops, including brown paper.
- Ⓜ butchers paper.
- Ⓜ white or coloured paper (including A3 or A4 paper that is only partially used).
- Ⓜ used foil or alfoil - silver, gold or other colours (from chocolates, Easter eggs, etc). (Clean it before you store it away).
- Ⓜ cardboard, including small boxes (e.g.cereal boxes).
- Ⓜ Christmas advertisements.
- Ⓜ used wrapping paper and ribbons.
- Ⓜ old Christmas cards (reuse pictures and use the cardboard for tags).
- Ⓜ pictures from magazines – from small pictures (for cards/tags) to full page pictures. Collect pretty pictures and pictures on anything that interests your family or friends, e.g. if someone likes bikes collect bike pictures.
- Ⓜ material, including scraps. These can become Christmas stockings or Christmas crackers. Even small pieces can be cut into shapes for cards or stockings, or bows for the tree. Any old material can be used. It can always be painted or dyed.

Christmas decoration ideas and colour schemes

The traditional way to decorate for Christmas was to "deck the halls with boughs of holly". This presently means buying plastic greenery and other ornaments. *However, at the same time* we also throw away the

real thing – branches and greenery that can become wreaths and garlands. Australian has Christmas in summer. Therefore, compared to a northern "white" Christmas, our Christmas happens right in the middle of the garden's time of plenty. Our gardens are bursting with greenery that usually has to be pruned back, and there is also a delicious variety of fruit in the shops.

So decorate the halls with boughs of greenery. Have arrangements of greenery and fruit, with bright red apples amongst the greenery. Using garden trimmings as decorations costs nothing and you have to prune them anyway. Hang greenery, twist into wreaths or garlands or make table arrangements, etc with greenery and bright fruit. Apples, oranges and other fruit can last for 2-3 weeks in decorations over summer, and can be eaten after that or used for cooking.

Hint: However, be careful when pruning and leave some greenery for last minute changes or replacements that will wilt, or as extra Christmas decorations closer to Christmas or for the Christmas table.

An environmentally friendly Christmas need not be only the traditional red and green.

Below are some suggestions to give you inspiration and ideas for your own individual decorations. (However, this is just a guide - see what you like, and mix and match to come up with your own unique, individual style.)

Traditional

Deck the halls (and tables, etc) with boughs of greenery with bright red apples, the occasional candle and candy canes. Dot the Christmas tree with red & white candy canes. These last and can make the dismantling an edible feast so even the finish is fun. Hang Christmas stockings, and add bows or other decorations to the tree if desired.

Red & Green

As *Traditional*, above, or for something different as a centrepiece make a "Christmas tree" pyramid of red apples. Dot this with green leaves.

Red & white/silver, red & white

Use apples and other red fruit with candles as decorations. For a highlight add the occasional green (or gold painted) leaf. Put candy canes and white bows and red bows on the tree or red, white and silver shapes, e.g. hearts, stars and moons. Hang red and white Christmas Stockings. **Romantic.** As above, or white paper angels or snowflakes on the tree with red hearts or baubles (paint eggs red and decorate with silver or gold crayons, glitter or sequins). Have red flowers and red fruit and white candles on the tables. Have a red stocking and just add a piece of white lace around the top as if it was a boot - this is your chance to use up scraps of lace.

Star light, star bright

Make stars from cardboard covered with foil or painted with silver or gold. Have silver stars and gold stars. Or try blue and gold. Have big and small ones so it looks like the tree is covered with a constellation of stars. Hang stars from the windows at different levels, and using different size stars. For decorations also use candles, or candles and a few stars with soft greenery. Try different colour and texture combinations, such as having a variety of golds with textures, or those with ruby, deep blue and green finishes, or stars with a bit of a pastel tone. Another idea is to cut out the centre of the stars so that they are only silhouettes. Have them in gold, cream, silver, or any other colour schemes. These will look more delicate on your tree. *Hint: Paint old sandpaper or textured cardboard for textured stars, etc. Even torn and damaged cardboard creates an interesting textured effect when painted.*

Gold & bronze/Gold, copper & bronze

On the tree hang cardboard stars and suns, eggs or bows painted gold, bronze, or copper. Put one or two with garlands of greenery and arrangements of greenery, pears, apricots and other gold fruit on the table, or around candles. Hang stockings and for trim on the stockings use scraps of lace, painted gold.

Gold & red / gold & blue / deep red, blue & gold / silver & gold

Make variations of *Gold & bronze*, or *Starlight*, or *White & gold*. For *Deep red, blue & gold* add red plums, purple grapes and apricots, etc. Decorate the tree as previously described, and hang stockings. For something different as a tree arrangement spray a pruned branch gold and decorate with red wrapped sweets or gold leaves, etc. Or make a pyramid of red apples and add gold leaves to it as decoration.

White & gold / All is light

Have a number of candles grouped together. Put them on a bed of greenery or on a silver tray or mirror. Decorate the tree with stars, suns, and moons. Or white (paper) angels or snowflakes. Try a fine garland of white, such as linked snowflakes, angels or peace doves cut from paper. If you want something brighter and bolder perhaps add lemons or oranges with greenery (see *Green & gold* for ideas). Find a branch from your garden and paint it white, gold, or silver or leave it unpainted. Stick on the occasional leaf in the same colours. **For a fairylike effect**, if you have mosquito nets or other netting try garlands of net and paper angels or snowflakes. Or paper angel wreaths. **Chrome & silver/ chrome & glass**. As above, and have silver and glass everywhere. Or for some colour add red liquor cherries in foil as a highlight.

Gingerbread Christmas

This will delight children, and give you unique heirloom decorations. Decorate the tree with gingerbread ornaments made from cardboard. Add individual touches to the tree using gingerbread designs of your favourite items. E.g. gingerbread footballs, golf balls, tennis balls & tennis rackets, a bird, cat or dog, etc - you name it - what is their favourite toy/game. Turn it into gingerbread decorations. Cut the shapes out of cardboard and paint with thick paint so they look like gingerbread. Have gingerbread Santa's, stockings, snowmen, birds, etc. Have a gingerbread Christmas Tree on the table or mantelpiece. *However*, children may want to eat the cardboard decorations, *so also provide some cooked gingerbread baubles* (with icing) that can be pulled out when guests arrive or on Christmas day.

Green & gold

Have greenery with oranges, lemons and mandarins. Put lemon and orange and gold painted eggs, stars etc, on the tree. Add the occasional gold trim if desired.

Tropical

Have lemons or oranges with bright pink flowers and bright greenery. If you have broad leaved plants use large leaves as the base for other arrangements and fruit. (have some orange and yellow sprinkled amongst the red and green for a brighter tropical colour scheme)

Natural / Creams & browns

Decorate with fruit, nuts and pinecones. Or just nuts, candles and pinecones with the occasional gold leaf or gold foil covered nut as a highlight. Paint a branch gold and add nuts and pinecones. Tie smaller pinecones on the tree with wide gold ribbons.

Soft pastels

Dye eggs and bows with pastel food dye. (Also dye popcorn wreaths if desired). Try pale pink, green and blue, pink and blue or pink and white. Add to soft pastel greenery and candles on the table and add marshmallows as (edible) decorations when having guests over.

Bright / Psychedelic

Use crayons to draw bright designs on the eggs. You can get kids crayons that are non-toxic and harmless.

Rich

Use cherries, plums, purple grapes and peaches in arrangements with gold trim. For the tree use rich red, blue and gold painted eggs, perhaps decorated with gold and silver crayons or sequins. For a truly rich effect put table arrangements on some draped cloth such as velvet or satin (– even a scarf or shirt).

Other decoration ideas

Silver with pale blue or aqua or silver with metallic lime green and aqua. Purple and gold, or burgundy with gold. Tie chocolates in their foil onto a small branch as a decoration. Leave the branch as it is or paint it white, gold or silver.

Environmentally friendly Christmas decorations

The Christmas tree

Grow your own *local native* tree and decorate it. Or for a temporary cut tree indoors use an unwanted tree. Whilst not exactly a pest, Pine trees (*Pinus radiata*) can self-seed in nearby areas. If a friend's land has any self-seeded pines they don't want ask if you can remove one.

Christmas tree decorations

Use eggs, or stars, moons, suns and other shapes (see below on how to make these).

To make stars and other shapes

Draw a simple shape, or cut a shape from a magazine or card and use this as a silhouette to trace around. Cut the shape out of cardboard and paint it or cover with foil. Shapes can include: suns, moons, stars, hearts, snowmen, angels, Santas, candles, bells, bauble shapes, gingerbread house, animal shapes, teddy bears, birds, candy canes, etc. (Check the ads or Christmas cards for ideas, or even the craft books in the library.) Cut angels, peace doves or snowflakes out of scrap white paper (e.g. envelopes).

To make baubles

Use eggs. Have hard-boiled eggs for breakfast. Neatly slice off the top either close to the top or half way, depending upon your design. Do not crack the eggshells. Clean out the egg shells of all remnant egg and very carefully wash the shells in soapy water. Allow them to dry. Once the egg is dry stick the shell together with a strip of tape (such as, masking tape - the tape needs to be also able to be painted over).

Alternatively, pierce an uncooked egg at the top and bottom to remove the contents (use this for cooking) and rinse the shell in soapy hot water to clean it.

Then either paint the egg with craft paint or glue on pictures, etc (this will also help harden the eggshell). Thread wire from the bottom to the top of the egg, leaving 4cm at both ends. At the bottom tie the wire through a bead to anchor it and cut off any extra wire. At the top thread the wire through a bead, tie it, and then make a loop of the wire. Add decorations if desired, using paint or crayons, or even sequins or beads, etc. (*Hint: if you want long lasting, heirloom eggs, check out the "Faberge" eggs in some jewelry shops – and then see the price! You can easily make versions for yourself!*) To store eggs use an egg carton.

Hint: for unique, small eggs use quail eggs.

Origami decorations

Make origami decorations out of scrap paper, either white or coloured. Note: if this sounds difficult, just stick to only making one shape (such as birds), and have a tree full of them – either in the same colour or in different colours. There are many craft books on origami available, including at the local libraries, so just choose a simple design and make it out of the paper you have collected.

Bows

Make bows out of old material, ribbon, anything. Do you have an old formal dress or shiny shirt that would make lovely bows? (Even a petticoat, or old curtains?) Otherwise check the remnant tables at fabric shops, including those that make formal outfits or wedding dresses - sometimes there are some intricate or spectacular pieces of fabric left over when a roll of material is sold.

Christmas Stockings

Make stockings out of spare material, or your old and wearing out clothes. An old top can have a new life as a Christmas stocking, as can old cushion covers - or any old scraps of material. (Material can be painted if it's the wrong colour). Sew the stockings with bright, thick cotton or wool (e.g. from an old jumper). To decorate the stocking cut out a shape or design from material and sew or staple it to the stocking. Add buttons, scraps of material or ribbon, etc, to make a design. (e.g. cut a Christmas tree shape from green material and put sequins or coloured small buttons on it for baubles; or some green material and two red buttons can become holly. Or a square of material with ribbons and a bow is a gift. *Hint: plain white buttons can be coloured with indelible markers.*)

Stocking ideas: Red and green stockings; patchwork stockings made from scraps of material (including made from scraps of rich material such as velvet or satins, etc); lace painted gold and put on a white or any other coloured stocking; plain white stockings sewn around the edges with thick red wool from an old jumper, etc, and with a simple decoration added to the front (even a picture from a card). Get ideas from the shops – and you can always paint the material to suit.

Environmentally friendly Christmas cards and tags

Save trees. Many trees will be chopped down to make cards that will be used only once. So buy cards made from recycled paper or make your own, reusing what you have at home. Here are a few ideas:

- ④ Save the Christmas advertisements. Cut out the pictures and paste them onto paper or card to make cards or tags
- ④ Use pieces of coloured foil, paper or material cut into shapes as a decoration for a card. Tree, star or stocking shapes look great pasted onto card for a Christmas card or tag (e.g. any material or paper can become a Christmas stocking, a Christmas decoration or a gift box. A square of blue cloth or denim can become the background for some gold stars or a silhouette of Santa's sleigh).
- ④ Cut pictures from old Christmas cards or Christmas wrapping paper and paste them onto paper for a new card.
- ④ Use your computer to make cards. Here's a chance to *reuse any paper with only a few lines on it*. Cut the used part off and you will still have a good sized card.
- ④ Photocopy a design onto coloured card, or colour in a photocopied picture with marker pens. And again use slightly used paper or recycled paper.

Check the shops for ideas **and** always buy recycled paper if you need to use paper.

Environmentally friendly gift wrapping

A lot of wrapping paper is thrown away after it is used – Yet we still buy paper - and every time paper is bought more trees have to be cut down unless you buy recycled paper. However, there are many ways to wrap presents so they look great without buying wrapping paper. For example:

- ④ Use coloured pictures out of magazines to wrap a small gift. Use pictures of flowers, animals, scenes (even food if the present is for a gourmet). Or tape two pictures together as an envelope for a gift.
- ④ Use brown paper, tissue paper, butchers paper or A3 or A4 paper that has only been slightly used (cut out the used part). Plain paper decorated with ribbons, etc, looks great For colour tie with a bright material and add a leaf or flower from your garden, or for a natural look use string or raffia and add small pinecones and leaves as decorations
- ④ To have decorated paper draw on it or write messages such as "Merry Christmas" across the paper with large coloured markers. Or stamp a design on it using a potato cut (e.g. of a tree or holly). Backing paper can be plain or can be newspaper.

Newspaper can be a good background if you then cover it with messages such as “Seasons greetings” written across the paper with a large red marker. Or use a potato print on it to repeat a design on it. For example:

- ◆ For the car enthusiast, use the car section of the paper as a background.
 - ◆ For **children** use the colour cartoons section of the paper.
 - ◆ This also applies for adults - know a Dilbert or Phantom enthusiast - wrap their present with the cartoon uppermost.
- ☉ Christmas Stockings make good gift-wrapping and decoration.

Also reuse any wrapping paper you have. If you need to wrap something up that needs padding NEVER use foam beads. These are not recyclable. Instead use popcorn as a filler, or scrunched up newspaper.

To decorate gifts

Tie ribbons of bright material and add two or three leaves or a flower from your garden, or for a natural look use string or raffia and add small pinecones and leaves as decorations.

Environmentally friendly gifts

Each year unnecessary and often useless products are given by people as Christmas presents, and these products usually involve pollution in their manufacture and disposal. Therefore, try and give people something they want and will cherish. *Don't be afraid to ask people what they want* – it's better than giving them something they don't like or have no use for! Alternatively, if you don't know what to give them, here are some good ideas that will help the environment:

- ☉ Plants. The environment needs trees and shrubs. So find out what is native to your area and give them as gifts.
- ☉ Refillable fountain pens. To replace disposable pens (e.g. mine has been used since 1993 – that's a lot of disposable pens!) There is currently a huge variety of designs available, and if pens around you always go missing you can engrave your name on a fountain pen.
- ☉ Bird nesting boxes. As more trees are cut down a huge variety of birds are having trouble finding nest sites. Bird nesting boxes are easily made from scrap (unpainted) timber. Or buy them from environment shops.
- ☉ Coffee mugs. Particularly for workmates, so they stop using disposable mugs.
- ☉ Photo albums. Buy recycled or handmade paper photo albums.
- ☉ Vouchers. Make a card saying – 1 mown lawn, or 1 cooked favourite meal. Or a small carpentry job or sewing (new curtains or a shirt), or cleaning the windows or washing the car. Most people need something done.
- ☉ Food. Most of us have little time to cook luxuries, so food can always be a great present. Whether its cakes, sweets or frozen (favourite) meals for when needed.

After Christmas

Compost any greenery or put it back into the garden as mulch. If you used fruit or vegetables you should be able to cook these. After the richness of Christmas some home made fruit juice or a plain fruit pie can go down very well.