

HAVE YOURSELF A SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS

As the holiday season approaches, many of us, even the more sustainable-minded, tend to get caught up in a frenzy of consumption. Food, drink, gifts and decorations – all this makes up our picture of a perfect Christmas. How can we celebrate without punishing our planet? We asked three researchers at Jönköping University to give us some tips for a merry and sustainable Christmas.

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LET THERE BE LIGHT?



Johan Röklander
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“ Nasa satellite imagery has shown how patterns in night-time light intensity change during major holiday seasons. Parts of the Earth are up to 50 percent brighter during these weeks.

Here in Sweden, we love to light up our winter nights, and who can blame us? Candles, candelabras and advent stars make us happy, and if we are happy, we are healthier and more productive. But we use up a huge amount of energy doing this and it's time we lit up our winters in a more responsible way.

TURN OFF BEFORE YOU TURN ON

Before you light up, think about the effect you want, what surface do you want to illuminate? We often waste a lot of reflected light into the atmosphere for no reason. Sometimes the smallest of Christmas lights can have a big effect if you turn off or dim down the surrounding lights. We are quite good at this in our homes, but in urban society we need to think about this more – for example, dimming street lights when other Christmas lights are up in the city would be a good start.

BUY LESS AND BUY BETTER

Most Christmas lights are powered by tiny LED lamps. These can cut energy consumption by over 80% when compared to conventional light bulbs and can last up to 25% longer. However, LED lamps are complicated to manufacture and use up precious mineral resources from the earth, usually mined from parts of Asia and Africa. It's important for consumers to start asking companies if their LED lamps are sourced and recycled responsibly. We also need to buy less and buy better. Don't buy the cheapest lights, make sure they are good quality so that you can re-use them year after year. ”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“ Swedish julbord (Christmas table) is a lavish spread that has evolved from a variety of traditions and typically features dishes that are incredibly energy-dense and not always sustainably sourced. No one is suggesting that we give up our julsinka (Christmas ham) or cured salmon but eating less and eating organic would help the planet a lot.



Mikael Gustafsson
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LESS MEAT MORE VEG

Meat will always be less sustainable than plant-based food. Animals need to consume a lot of vegetation in order to build up muscle. Transportation of meat also impacts the environment, not just in the fuel that is consumed, but also the energy used for refrigeration of meat products. There are three ways you can eat meat more sustainably – eat less, eat organic and eat local. It's against the law in Sweden to use antibiotics in meat production, other than for medical purposes, so eating locally means you don't contribute to the overuse and acquired resistance of antibiotics. Organic meat is more expensive, but why not buy less and supplement with vegetarian alternatives, for example Swedish-grown beans that are nitrogen-fixing and protein rich.

PICK THE RIGHT FISH

Fish is a staple dish of a Swedish julbord, but the kind of fish you eat can make a difference to the environment. The traditional herring is a better choice than salmon as it is found in large numbers and so can be fished sustainably. It is also further down the food chain and feeds on plankton, so less likely to be contaminated with pollutants that can build up in larger organisms that are eaten by the bigger fish such as salmon. Farmed salmon should definitely be avoided as it is fed with large quantities of small fish taken from the sea, which can disrupt the natural ecosystem. ”

CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM

“ Christmas gifts – our children ask for them, our family expects them, and we spend hours online or pounding the streets searching for the them. We believe that Christmas is not complete without gifts, all beautifully wrapped under the tree. The pictures and music of Christmas and traditions reinforce these perceptions. It takes time, effort and money - sometimes more money than is prudent, but we do it anyway.

Gift-giving is a complicated process. There is a perceived obligation to give gifts, which results in a desperate search for anything. The outcome is that we buy items that are often not needed, wanted or used, so we have more stuff. It's not about having a boring Christmas without gifts, it's about finding strategies that can help us make Christmas more sustainable.

BUY LESS AND BUYING CONSCIOUSLY

Buy less and buy consciously. Sheth et al.,

(2011) suggest that we need to think and consider our purchases more actively and with more thought. Buy alternative gifts such as donations to charity (though this may not be popular with children), which will provide benefits to a wider group of people and not fill up our cupboards.

REPLENISH AND RECYCLE

One alternative is to adopt a “One in, one out” strategy. This means for every new item purchased, one item is disposed of - donated to Human Bridge, for example. Every year, millions of rolls of wrapping paper are used to wrap gifts at a huge environmental cost as they are not easy to recycle, so try out some sustainable wrapping using recycled material. ”

Sheth, J. N., Sethia, N. K., & Srinivas, S. (2011). Mindful consumption: a customer-centric approach to sustainability. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(1), 21-39.



Foto: Patrik Svedberg

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SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS TOP TIPS

- ▲ Dim or turn off surrounding lights when decorating with Christmas lights
- ▲ Buy good quality LED lights
- ▲ Eat more plant-based food
- ▲ Buy locally produced meat
- ▲ Avoid farmed salmon
- ▲ Adopt a 'one out, one in' strategy for children's gifts
- ▲ Wrap gifts with recycled material

Remember – buy less and buy responsibly!