

PRACTICAL GUIDE

Recycling at Christmas

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1.0 Introduction

What do I do with Christmas trees and all the “stuff” that Christmas generates?

Christmas is the season of giving and receiving and a time when we indulge just a little too much on eating, drinking and spending. Our bodies pay the price, as do our homes, our pocket and our environment. There is so much one-use packaging used over the Christmas period, that the amount of waste produced for just one day, is staggering. There is the wrapping paper, bows, boxes, plastic bags, product packaging and so on. Then there is all the food packaging: turkeys in vacuum-packed plastic, mince pies in individual foil cases, polystyrene, plastic bags for fruit and vegetables, sweet wrappers, canned and bottled drinks, the list goes on. Almost everything to do with Christmas Day has packaging.

The good news is that most of this packaging can be recycled. If we take an active part, it means less waste going to landfill sites, it reduces the demand for virgin materials worldwide and helps to protect our environment. When we recycle, we reduce water and air pollution as there is no need to extract, refine or process raw materials. We also save energy which in turn reduces greenhouse gases and helps to fight climate change. If we increase our recycling and reduce our waste, we can give the planet the greatest gift at Christmas, and beyond.

Here is everything you need to help you Recycle, Re-use and Reduce your waste over Christmas.

2.0 Wrapping paper – recycle and reuse

Some councils accept wrapping paper in their kerbside recycling scheme, but not all unfortunately. This is because of the materials that are in some brands of wrapping paper. For example, they can be dyed, laminated, contain non-paper additives such as gold and silver-coloured shapes, glitter and plastics and the thin paper cannot be recycled because of the poor quality of the fibres.

Have you heard of the “**scrunch test**”? If your local authority does collect wrapping paper for recycling, only non-foil paper will be accepted. To check, scrunch up the paper and if it does not spring back, it is non-foil and can be recycled. Make sure to remove bows and ribbons and sticky tape before you recycle.

Here are some ideas to help you re-use or re-purpose wrapping paper:

- Obvious one, you could re-use the paper next year.
- Shred the paper and use it for filler in your other packages.
- Re-use gift bags you received last year and trade them around every year with family and friends.
- Buy recycled paper: www.re-wrapped.co.uk, www.rspb.org.uk, www.etsy.com Children could cut out the penguin shapes, birds, snowmen, stars and so on to make pictures or collages/Christmas themed decorations or cards for next year.
- Cut into strips, wind it around old toilet paper or paper towel tubes and fill with sweets.
- It could make a book cover, or cover a shoebox to put presents in.
- Use it to make gift tags.
- Clean windows with crumpled up wrapping paper (or newspaper) avoid using the shiny plastic type.
- Cut it to fit a drawer and use it as a liner.

3.0 Christmas cards and cardboard – recycle and reuse

Christmas cards add a festive touch to any home or business, but recycling is so important once the season is over. Here are a few fascinating facts to show the need for the recycling of Christmas cards:

- **30,000 tons of Christmas cards** are thrown away every year in the UK.
- All the Christmas cards thrown out is equivalent to **£2.8 million worth of landfill**.
- Currently, just **one in four** Christmas cards are **recycled**.
- It is estimated that around **8 billion Christmas cards are sent** annually in the UK.
- The average UK household sends 50 Christmas cards each year.
- **One tree** can be turned into **3,000 Christmas cards**.
- Around **500 million Christmas e-cards** are also delivered every holiday season.

Cardboard is widely recycled around the country and most greeting cards are paper based so can be recycled, along with their envelopes, in your kerbside recycling collection and at local household waste recycling centres. You will need to remove the extras on cards such as ribbons, glitter, bows, or plastics as they cannot be recycled and need to be removed from that part of the card. Batteries should be removed from musical cards (see below for how to dispose of batteries).

Some supermarkets have collection banks in their stores or car parks and various shops around town may collect Christmas cards for 2 or 3 weeks after Christmas too. Alternatively, donate them to a playgroup, nursery, toddler group or school so they can be used in creative learning.

Then of course, there are many craft and up-cycling ideas that can be done, such as;

- Cutting up Christmas cards and turning into gift tags for next year.
- Use the back of cards for shopping lists or plant labels.
- Here are a couple of sites that have some great ideas for crafting from old Christmas cards and paper: www.pillarboxblue.com www.twinkl.co.uk
- [More suggestions for reusing and recycling Christmas cards](#)

4.0 Batteries

To dispose of batteries responsibly do not throw them in the general waste. There are various [battery recycling points](#) more readily available these days, such as your local household waste centre and you will find that more and more shops and supermarkets have drop off points in their stores now. The type of batteries that can be recycled are:

- All household batteries including 'button' batteries from watches.
- Battery packs from laptops, mobile phones, power tools and remote-control units.
- Car batteries should be recycled at designated collection points.

You could avoid using one-time batteries by buying rechargeable batteries or plug your electrical equipment into the mains electricity instead. Alternatively, you could buy items that use renewable energy - a wind-up radio or torch, dynamo bicycle lights or a solar powered calculator for example.

5.0 Stamps

Donate the stamps – You can donate the used stamps on the envelopes from Christmas cards to charity. Stamps are sold by weight, so the charities can turn old ones into funds to help their ongoing work. Just cut the stamp off the envelope, leaving 1cm of envelope around the stamp, and post to the desired charity. To get you started, here is a list of [charities that accept stamps as donations](#).

6.0 Christmas decorations

6.1 Baubles:

Glass baubles are not recyclable. Broken glass baubles should be disposed of by wrapping and putting in with general waste. Plastic baubles are usually made from types of plastic that is not widely collected yet in the UK and are likely to be covered with glitter which renders it unrecyclable.

Up-Cycling: Try up-cycling your old baubles. You could paint them, then decorate them with coloured markers or stick on some ribbon, bows, or Christmas characters. You could change the old hanging thread for ribbon or coloured string.

6.2 Tinsel:

This cannot be recycled and will have to go into your general waste.

Up-Cycling: You could twist or plait different tinsels together or make a bow to decorate a present or use it to tie the present with instead of ribbon. Or use it in craft work.

6.3 Wreaths:

Natural materials on wreaths, like ivy, fir cones, mistletoe and holly, can be composted in your garden, added to your garden waste collection, or dropped off at the local household waste recycling centre, as long as they are not heavily covered in glitter. Artificial decorations such as ribbons and plastic flowers must be removed as they can't be recycled.

Up-Cycling: Any ribbons, bows and plastic flowers that are removed from the wreath could also be up-cycled to make Christmas table decorations or to embellish Christmas presents.

DONATING: Of course, if any of the above are suitable to reuse, you could pass them on to friends or family to use again, or even charity shops where they can be sold on and re-used.

7.0 Plastic bags, trays and packaging

Plastic bags, trays and packaging are a very current topic right now and is a major problem to the environment. Most plastic carrier bags can now be recycled at some of the larger stores like Morrisons, Aldi and Tesco, at a designated collection point, usually near the main entrance. Manufacturers are now starting to state on their packaging whether it can be recycled or not, so it is worth reading the information printed on items. If there is a symbol saying that it can be recycled, it is usually only accepted at the carrier bags recycling points. Unfortunately, some of the other plastics that is used for packaging is still not widely accepted for recycling and most of it will end up in the household waste. However, for more information follow these links; [Plastic bags & wrapping \(soft plastic\) | Recycle Now](#). [Where Can I Recycle My Plastic? \(bpf.co.uk\)](#) [A very easy guide to recycling plastic - Energy Saving Trust](#)

8.0 Christmas tree lights

There are several reasons why you should recycle your Christmas lights;

1. The most obvious one is so that they do not end up in our landfills.
2. There are several recyclable materials used in Christmas lights including metals, plastics, and glass. These can be stripped out and recycled at certain places.
3. Many lights contain small amounts of lead, a toxin, that would be leaked into our environment.

Any items that have a plug, use batteries, need charging, or have a picture of a crossed-out wheellie bin on are known as Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE). These items, including Christmas lights or fairy lights, should not go in any of your kerbside bins, but can be recycled at a

household waste recycling centre. Also, on social media sites like Facebook, there are all sorts of companies and people that take small electrical items, so it is worth checking out. Check out this website for more ideas of how to recycle. [The 6 Best Ways to Recycle Christmas Lights - Bob Vila](#)

9.0 Christmas trees – real ones

Once the festive season is over, millions of households and businesses will be taking down their Christmas decorations – and in total dispose of over eight million Christmas trees. If not reused or recycled, trees can end up in landfill which is costly to both the environment and the taxpayer. A two-metre-tall tree will release around 16kg of methane gas as it decomposes. Unfortunately, this happens to around three-quarters of the UK's Christmas trees and while the numbers are slowly coming down, it still equates to the best part of 100,000 tons of greenhouse gases needlessly being released into the atmosphere each year.

Fortunately, because real Christmas trees are recyclable there are plenty of ways you can put your Christmas tree to good use or dispose of them more easily.

1. Most local authorities arrange drop-off points or special collections of 'real' trees in early January. Check your local authority website for more information. You can find out details of your local authority, by entering your postcode into [Recycling Locator tool](#). (Remember to remove all tinsel and decorations etc.) Local councils shred the trees and then turn this into compost, mulch and chippings which are used in parks and woodland areas.
2. Look for an organisation or charity that offers a 'treecycling' service. They collect unwanted trees, recycle them, and raise funds for local causes. For example:
[Just Helping https://just-helping.org.uk/](https://just-helping.org.uk/)
www.gardenersworld.com/plants/six-ways-to-recycle-your-christmas-tree/
www.christmastrees.co.uk/charity-collection/
3. Your local fishery may take in your old Christmas tree. In man-made lakes there is a lack of natural nooks and crannies for fish to hide away from predators, so hatchlings often struggle to reach maturity. Dead trees are a great habitat for them to keep out of harm's way.
4. Some zoos take in used trees. One zoo said their elephants love them and Linton Zoo in Cambridgeshire said their big cats [love Christmas trees](#). The keepers suspect that the needles have a catnip-like effect on them! The trees that are "beyond their best" are used for the zoo's bio-burner, which provides additional heating and hot water to help run the zoo.
5. If you would rather recycle or reuse the tree yourself, try these ideas out:
 - Chop the trunks up for firewood and save the branches for future bonfires.
 - Trees with roots can be replanted and is a great way to reduce your carbon footprint.
 - Break it up and compost it.
 - Use the needles to make pot pourri.
 - Hang out holly and other berried greenery in the garden for the birds to eat.
 - Use the bigger branches to make garden features, like [reindeer decorations](#) for next Christmas.
 - Collect small branches and make a bug hotel. Or use chopped up trunk to stack and make a mini refuge for wildlife. Learn [three ways to build a deadwood habitat](#).
 - [More suggestions for reusing or recycling Christmas trees and their needles in particular.](#) <https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/six-ways-to-recycle-your-christmas-tree/>

Further Information

- [How to recycle | National Christmas Tree Association](#)
- [British Christmas Tree Growers Association](#)
- The Royal Horticultural Society www.rhs.org.uk/search?query=recycle+christmas+trees, encourages us to buy locally grown trees, or from the UK at least, rather than abroad, which helps to reduce our carbon footprint.

10.0 Christmas trees – artificial ones

Because artificial trees are made from a combination of materials they are not easily recycled. At the end of its useful life your local waste recycling centre is the best place to take them to. However, re-using your tree again and again is better still, but if you are looking for a change and they are good enough to be re-used or up cycled then there are options to choose from.

- Gift them to friends or family.
- Donate to charity shops for re-sale and re-use.
- Give to local organisations, businesses, a hospital, school, library, may be grateful for a gifted tree.
- Sell them on.

Re-use: The materials that artificial trees are usually made of make them great for repurposing into new projects. Branches can be cut to make new wreaths, garlands, mini trees, table arrangements for example. Click on the following link for some ideas: www.marthastewart.com/2223202/how-recycle-reuse-artificial-christmas-tree

11.0 Renting a Christmas tree

Did you know, you can now **rent** a Christmas tree? People are increasingly thinking about the environmental impact real Christmas trees pose and renting a tree is always the better and greener option, as opposed to buying artificial trees.

The environmental benefits of renting a Christmas tree, locally:

Recycling: The tree is getting re-used next year, which is greener than buying and disposing of a new one every Christmas.

Zero waste: There will be no tree waste to dispose of.

Better carbon footprint: Trees transported locally means much less travel pollution.

Less greenhouse gases: Discarded trees left to rot release harmful greenhouse gases into the environment.

Less Carbon Dioxide: When the tree is replanted, it will help to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere.

Less labour intensive: Because the tree is grown in a pot, less fertiliser and pesticide are used. The right amount can go straight in the pot and does not get wasted by spreading it all over a field. No heavy machinery is required.

Supports eco-systems: The tree will also provide a home for various wildlife between Christmases.

Supports local businesses: Renting is often organised by small farms and businesses and they will replant and care for the tree, ready for use again next year.

Less hassle: You get to enjoy a real Christmas tree and the suppliers will deliver and collect your tree, meaning you do not have to.

Some suggestions of where to rent a Christmas tree from in the UK

- Ask your local Christmas tree farm for advice and do some research in your local area.
- [Cotswold Fir – Gloucestershire](#)
- [Love A Christmas Tree – Kirkby Mallory, Leicestershire](#)
- [London Christmas Tree rental – London](#)
- [Rental Christmas Tree – Stroud](#)
- [Rent a real Christmas tree - Good Elf](#)
- [Rent a Christmas Tree | Buy a Living Tree Online | Love a Christmas Tree](#)
- [www.goodto.com/search?searchTerm=christmas+tree+rental](#)
- [simplyplantsuk.com](#)

12.0 More recycling at Christmas and beyond

The site [www.recyclethis.co.uk](#) has loads of ideas:

- [Recycled Christmas decorations – our favourite ideas](#)
- [How can I make Christmas decorations reusing or recycling stuff?](#)
- [Recycled Christmas – how to turn trash into upcycled presents](#)
- [Reducing waste after Christmas – our top tips](#)
- [How can I reuse or recycle tinsel and Christmas decorations, broken Christmas fairy lights, advent calendars, broken Christmas baubles?, novelty Christmas jumpers, shiny chocolate wrappers, beer and wine bottles ... and all sorts of other Christmas stuff?](#)
- [And how to reuse and recycle 1000+ other things from around the home and garden?](#)
- [The Recycle This Guide to Recycling at Christmas | How can I recycle this?](#)

And beyond:

- [Recycling for Charity: video tapes and boxes](#)
- [Recycling for Charity: old mobile or cell phones](#)
- [Recycling for Charity: old and unwanted books](#)
- [How can I reuse or recycle pen lids?](#)
- [How can I reuse or recycle tea light candle containers?](#)
- [How can I reuse or recycle walnut shells?](#)
- [How can I “repair” too runny/too solid homemade jam/jelly?](#)
- [What can I reuse or recycle to make a draft excluder?](#)
- [Recycling for Charity: audio cassette tapes](#)
- [Five fantastic reuses for expanded Polystyrene foam packaging](#)