

Caring for Creation with a Green Advent and Christmas

Thanks for joining us as we enter the season of Advent and prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of God incarnate. This year we invite you to come alongside us as we add to our preparations green practices that will allow us to live more gently, gratefully, and sustainably on the earth. What might you do differently this season? We recommend you take a few minutes to read through the list and make a plan. Setting our intentions can help motivate us to follow through with our actions. Commit to starting one new practice each week during the season of Advent, and go from there!



Advent

Try a reverse Advent calendar this year. Start with an empty box, and place an item inside for donation each day during Advent. The box could contain non-perishable food items, gently used clothing, or children's toys.

Or, try a "Pay It Forward" Advent calendar. Examples: Leave money for the next rental in the Redbox slot or parking meter, shovel a neighbor's driveway. Lots of ideas can be found on [Pinterest](#).

Place change in an Advent Jar each day during Advent, and donate the money to a nonprofit.

Christmas Cards

If you send Christmas cards, consider plantable cards. When the biodegradable paper is planted in a pot of soil, the seeds will grow and eventually the paper will decompose. (Available on [Etsy](#).)

Other card possibilities? Make your own using the art from cards you received last year.

Remember to avoid cards with glitter (more plastic that can't be recycled).

And you can always email your holiday greetings!



Gifts and Gift Wrapping

Go paperless and use cloth wrappings. Use fabric scraps or old shirts. The wrapping helps with packing gifts for mailing and is completely reusable for years to come.

Make your wrapping paper part of your gift. Wrap gifts in 100% recycled Kraft paper, then decorate and write messages on the paper using crayons or colored pencils. You can also stamp the paper using [homemade potato stamps](#) and tempera paint.

Remember to shop locally, avoid items with excess packaging, and consolidate trips.

Rather than giving physical Christmas gifts that need to be wrapped and mailed, consider donating funds in the recipient's name to a cause or charity that they support. Check out [Episcopal Relief and Development's Gift for Life catalog](#).

Give gifts of your time or talent. For example, help an elderly friend or neighbor decorate for the holidays.

Give one of the many amazing books on the environment and stewardship of creation. Check out the [Denver Zoo's list of recommended reads](#). The creation care team recommends *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer; *The Overstory* by Richard Powers; *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert; and *Rooted and Rising*, edited by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt Jonas and the Rev. Leah Shade.



Christmas Trees and Decorations

Choosing Your Tree Option 1—Pot Grown Living Christmas Tree: Living trees can be replanted afterwards and are very environmentally friendly. Keep the 12 days of Christmas in mind as this is how long a tree should stay indoors before being placed back outside. (If it starts to wilt, give it some time outdoors.) Replant it in the spring and use again year after year (until it gets too big of course). No place to store your tree? Check with your city or town about where you might plant it so others can enjoy it.

Choosing Your Tree Option 2—Cut Christmas Tree: A cut tree is ten times less harmful than an artificial tree. Most artificial trees are not recyclable. It helps if you can choose a tree that is sustainably grown. And remember: Never take your tree to landfill—most towns offer recycling of cut trees.

Friends of the Earth also advises: Real trees may seem an obvious solution, but if you're only using it for one Christmas it can have a big impact when you think about the land used to grow it and the emissions from transport.

Or...you can go without the tree, and decorate a large houseplant instead!

For lighting, when it's time to replace your lights, switch to LED, as they use up to 80% less energy compared to traditional incandescent lights.

Christmas Ornaments: How long has it been since you strung popcorn and cranberries to decorate your tree? Or made dough ornaments? By all means, forego the tinsel and other plastic-based decorations, none of which can be recycled.

Instead of buying new ornaments, shop around at second-hand stores to see what someone else has let go of.



Trimming Your Home

Decorate with nature. What might you find in your own backyard? Pine cones and evergreen clippings make beautiful centerpieces and backdrops for nativity scenes.

Melt down old candles to create new ones. Canning jars make great containers, and wicks are readily available at craft stores.



Meals

Think about what you eat. The meat and dairy industry is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all the world's planes, trains, cars and boats put together. Why not try something new and have a meat-free Christmas by swapping turkey for a plant-based menu instead? If that's not possible, you could make just small changes to your Christmas dinner menu. Go for a festive spread with mainly plant-based ingredients and try to make sure any meat or dairy products you're keen to have don't come from intensive farms. When it comes to the vegetables, look out for products that have been grown nearby so you can cut down on the emissions from transportation.

Cut down on food waste. When you're food shopping, try and choose things that are light on packaging, or buy loose items. And if you end up cooking too much, don't just throw away what's left. Transforming leftovers can be a great way to create new meals, save money, and cut waste. Consider sharing leftovers with a neighbor, and don't forget that most items can be frozen as well for future use. Finally, remember to compost plant-based waste.

Make cloth your friend: Cloth napkins are pretty and can be washed again and again.



Clothing

Reuse your Christmas wardrobe. With fewer parties and holiday events this year, there's less need to purchase new clothes. And maybe we can even forgo the "Ugliest Sweater" exchanges, since most of these garments are made with non-recyclable acrylic fibers.

Websites with More Ideas

<https://www.newswise.eacom/articles/10-steps-to-a-more-sustainable-christmas>

<https://www.activesustainability.com/sustainable-life/sustainable-christmas/>

We hope this list will serve you well! We welcome your feedback and additional ideas. For more information about Honoring and Protecting Creation and the Episcopal Church in Colorado creation care team, visit our web page at <https://episcopalcolorado.org/honoring-and-protecting-creation/>