

## We need to talk about Christmas...

Are you someone who loves everything about Christmas and is busy planning for it as soon as the kids are back at school in September? Or are you someone like me, who loves getting together with family, giving and receiving gifts but really struggles with all the consumption and excess of the season? It seems to me that everywhere you look there's unnecessary packaging, and people getting stuff they don't really need and, don't even get me started on the number of unwanted presents that end up at charity shops or worse still, in the bin come Boxing Day.

But it doesn't have to be like that so, here are some ideas to help you enjoy a more low-waste and plastic-free Christmas.

Gift something reusable like a water bottle or a coffee cup. I used to think that if someone had one of these, then they would never need another one, because by nature they are made to last! However, I have since realised that I need a couple, of differing sizes depending where I'm going. Also, a surprising number of people lose their reusables while out and about. So, never assume your friend or family member will not appreciate another one to add to their collection, and they really are one of the best ways to avoid buying single use plastics. It might just encourage that habitual bottled-water buyer to change their habit. And one day, we'll be able to refill our coffee cups at our local cafes again!

Avoid the excessively packaged beauty gift sets available on the high street by putting together your own with a bar of handmade soap (or a nice bottle refilled with shower gel or bubble bath from a refill store like Cupboard Love) and a crocheted soap bag or shower puff. These will be kinder on the skin, plastic-free, cruelty-free, palm oil free, and you'll be supporting small businesses.

Remember the excitement of receiving a book token back in the day, and heading off down to the local bookshop, spending ages choosing the 'right' book and handing over the paper voucher instead of having to spend actual money? What a treat! Well, in Suffolk we have many independent book shops that accept book tokens and would be really happy for your support. The main thing to remember here is to go for the email or print at home option rather than the plastic (often single-use, argh!) gift card. Choose this option too, when buying gift 'cards' for other outlets. These are a great present as the receiver can choose what they'd like, so hopefully no re-gifting required!

Food is another element of Christmas that can lead to a ton of waste.

On the one hand, giving food, snacks and treats are a great present idea as you can be fairly sure that they will be used and enjoyed by the recipient. Even better if these gifts are homemade or bought from a local seller – check out your local town markets and virtual Christmas Fairs online. Jams, chutneys and dare I say it, wines and gins will come in glass, or you could fill your own jar with pick and mix sweets, chocolate buttons or even Bombay mix from your local refill shop, and create your own lovely gift without any plastic packaging.

On the other hand, there's always too much food at this time of year, most often smothered in packaging. Could you buy all your Christmas vegetables for example from your local market or greengrocers? Yes it takes a bit more effort than a home delivery from the supermarket but it is actually quite satisfying to make that extra effort to try and be more of a conscious shopper, and I

often find the produce is fresher and more local. Take your own bags and know that your money is going back into the local community. And if you are buying tubs of chocolates (why did they switch from tins?) you could reuse the tub for organizing kids' craft items, spare batteries, cake decorating paraphernalia or even your leftover mince pies!

And finally, how will you wrap your presents this Christmas? In the UK alone, we use 227,000 MILES of wrapping paper each year. Some of this may be recycled but any foiled or glittery paper is only good for the bin. When you add this to the 40 million rolls of plastic sticky-tape and 1 billion Christmas cards being thrown away, this is so wasteful! So what's the alternative? Well, gift bags are slightly better as they can usually be reused, brown Kraft paper and paper sticky-tape or twine can look really stylish but for truly waste-free wrapping you could use a reusable fabric bag or a piece of festive fabric. Knotted or tied with ribbon, these can look really pretty!

So that's a wrap! My Christmas message is simply that small changes add up, and anything you can do to change your habits might just help to bring others along with you for a Merry 'low waste' Christmas!