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HAVE A VERY SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS! HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS ECO- FRIENDLY AND ETHICAL IN 2019

December 9, 2019 | Aneta Pawlik

It is impossible to think about Christmas in other terms than the times of opulence – we sometimes spend exorbitant sums of money on gifts, cook plenty of food, which often goes to waste, decorate our houses or flats with strings of fairy lights and plastic decor. The world does not let us forget that to celebrate Christmas is to eat, drink and be merry (and don't hide your wallet). However, in the year 2019, can we ever

lose sight of the climate catastrophe playing out in the background?

Hey, it's me, the ghost of sensible Christmas! I came here to remind you that in 2019 eco-anxiety and ecological grief crept into people's lives as the news of the effects of anthropogenic activities on our planet tumble in every day mercilessly. At the Hub we will find ourselves huddling over lunch talking about our worries and potential solutions. New innovative ventures come to Impact Hub with ideas addressing renewable energy and energy efficiency, environmental and social impact in Vienna, biodiversity, and literally every other concept advancing the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals.

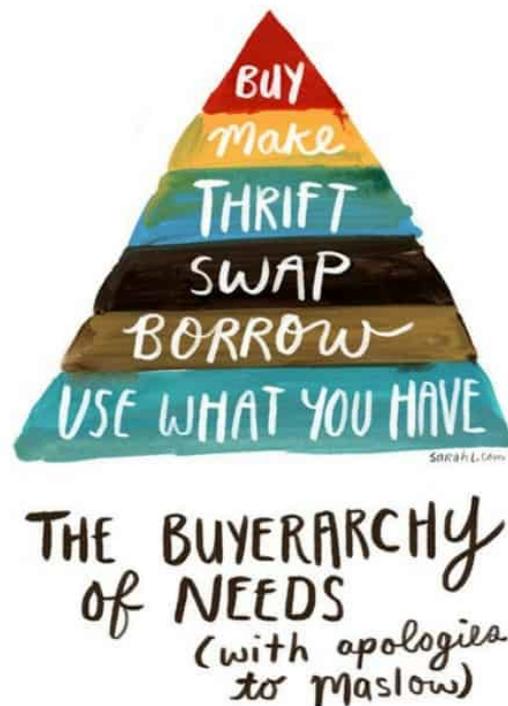
Yeah, the situation is dire. However, and I cannot stress this enough, you are **the change maker, the impact bringer**, the lovely Hubby creature, that knows that individual action means empowerment and that, in our community, individual action causes wide ripples.

PS. If I had inadvertently rained on your parade, here are some tips on how to manage climate anxiety from a very smart person, Gillian Caldwell, in her blog "Coming out of the closet: My climate trauma (and yours?)".

Back to the matter at hand – **Christmas!** This year we shall make that extra effort and bring back the true spirit of Christmas in face of unrolling climate crisis – the spirit of unity with all beings, empathy, kindness and ethical living. We not only speak of sharing, reflecting and purely enjoying this magical time, but also about minimizing your waste, giving back to the society, and letting your credit card have a break. I searched far and wide to bring you the best ideas for not only sustainable but also ethical and eco-friendly Christmas, that you can implement in 2019 straight away!

Opt-out of the Unnecessary Gift Shopping Frenzy

I am probably a little bit late with this call to arms as the smoke billows over the virtual field of the battle of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. However, repeating this never gets old: **buying should be the last resort**. As the famous Buyerarchy of Needs by Sarah Lazarovic nicely visualises, there are many other ways to satisfy your needs. So what sustainable gifts can you magic up?



- Instead of going loco and worrying about gifting each person you know, collect a group of friends and family and organize **Secret Santa**. This way each person will give and receive one gift, which means everybody will be happy and you won't be paying off loans long after Christmas. You can use [this website](#) to organize the participants' list, set the budget and assign names.
- **Make the gifts yourself.** Have you been to Pinterest recently? Search DIY gifts and be amazed.
- **Give time.** Instead of buying presents, do something with people you care about. For example, go on a [Shades Tour](#) together.
- Why not combine a family outing with **volunteering at a local charity?**
- **Ask for donations.** If you have that family member, who will just not let go of the idea of giving you something (and the experience tells that you will not be happy about that something), ask them to donate to a charity of your choice.
- **Shop preloved goods.** Visit [Humana](#) or [MA48 Tandler store](#), peruse [Willhaben](#), [Shpock](#), [Facebook marketplace](#) or [ebay.at](#).
- **Organize a Christmas gift swap** for those, who prefer to not spend money. One man's trash is another man's treasure.
- **When you still want to buy a brand-new gift, support your local business.** Buy gifts from local artisan companies,

visit craft markets or support your creative friends' businesses. If you are part of the Impact Hub Vienna network, tap into the community and ask them what they offer. They are many valid reasons you should be supporting SMBs with your wallet – they pay back into the community and, in comparison to international corporations, are much better in supporting local economy and making social impact happen.

- **Give a gift that keeps on giving.** For example:
 - sponsor a meal for a child or seeds for a farmer through Caritas.at;
 - prepare a clothes repair kit with threads, needles, scissors and similar to keep clothes in a good condition for longer;
 - gift a voucher to a workshop from, for example, Zero Waste Austria or Bubbles and Kraut (co-owned by Impact Hub Vienna's recurring design magician, Jo);
 - gift a potted indoor plant;
 - gift a library card or a yearly museum entry ticket;
 - adopt an olive tree in Italy or a coffee tree (this one comes from Anna Arató from Impact Hub Global) – simply search online to find out how;
 - adopt an animal through Caritas.at;
 - or buy a wooden worm box for the green thumb in your circle.

- **Ran out of time and will have to hit the high-street?** Educate yourself beforehand – many of the popular brands we see daily are causing environmental harm and do not take care of the people powering their supply chain. Ethical Consumer and Konsument.at keep tabs on brands we should avoid and brands that do good things.
- **Opt for battery-free gifts if possible.** In the US the sales of batteries go up 40% in the holiday season. Batteries, made of toxic and non-degradable chemicals, often end up in landfill and pollute soil and water, not to mention poisoning animals.
- **Re-gifting is okay.** No, really. No, there isn't a special ring in Hell reserved for those of you, who dare to pass an unwanted gift on.
- **Ditch buying new rolls of wrapping paper.** Use your paper waste (calendars, posters, maps etc), pieces of fabric, scarves, or glass jars instead. Recently I was in Tokyo – instead of buying wrapping paper, I bought a daily newspaper and used it to wrap and decorate the gifts I bought for my family.
- **Save wrapping paper for the future!** Not only the wrapping paper from your gifts – ask everybody in your family to make a pile of wrapping paper and stash it in a cupboard for other gift-wrapping opportunities. To make it easy to reuse wrapping paper, avoid sticky tape and replace it with strings of paper, thread or ribbons.

Eco-friendly Christmas Cards

- **Go paperless!** Send a free Christmas e-card from websites such as [Some e-cards](#), [Blue Mountain](#) or [Jib Jab](#) or record a video of yourself wishing your family and friends merry times.
- Alternatively, if you feel creative, **design your own e-card in [Canva](#)**.
- Still prefer to send? If you are not convinced by electronic Christmas cards (you have to admit that [‘elfing yourself’](#) is pretty awesome) how about **making your own Christmas cards** from old magazines, wrapping paper, newspapers or... last year’s Christmas cards?
- Okay, you are dead set on sending Christmas cards. **Check out your local charities** to see if they sell Christmas cards. By purchasing cards from them you support social causes and give back to the community. In Austria there is for example [Unicef at](#), which offers a wide selection of Weihnachtskarten, as well as [SOS-Kinderdorf](#).

Preventing Food Waste & Sustainable Christmas

In Europe alone around 88 million tonnes of food is wasted annually, which has an associated cost estimated at 143 billion euros (data from 2016, [read the report here](#)). According to a [2019 IPCC land use report](#), between 25 and 30 % of the food produced worldwide is wasted. Food production is actively contributing to the changes in our climate. **That pestering thought that Christmas cannot be enjoyed until the table is overflowing with food? Kill it.** “*Perhaps one of the most important reasons for food waste at the consumption level in rich countries is that people simply can afford to waste food,*” reads FAO’s 2011 “[Global food losses and food waste: Extent, causes and prevention](#)” publication. In countries such as Austria, we are spoiled for choice and it makes us equally relaxed about the food we waste. It’s time to change our thinking!

(Pst! I have written another article on [the food waste in Austria](#), which you should check out.)

- **Go meatless and/or dairy-free.** Even [a small change in your menu](#), which incorporates more plant food and fewer calories from animal products, could significantly contribute to agriculture’s pressure on the environment. There are plenty of delicious [meat-free and dairy-free recipes](#) for you to try

out!

- **Plan your menu in advance and make a shopping list.** Planning what exactly you need to buy will prevent over-buying as shopping behaviour and retail environment have direct links to food waste. While you are in a planning mode, search for versatile recipes for food leftovers too. Love Food Hate Waste has plenty useful tools and tips on how to prevent food waste.
- **Do not overbuy on products**, which can go to waste quickly and make sure you **store perishables correctly**. This fantastic infographic will turn you into the next Martha Stewart.
- **Cut down on packaged food.** Here in Vienna, we have many fresh markets, where you can get plastic-free meat, fruit and vegetables.
- **If you make too much food**, freeze it or organize a potluck dinner with your neighbors. You can also ask your guests to bring food containers to take leftover food home.
- Prepare big portions of **mulled wine, punsch, hot chocolate or eggnog** instead of buying cans or bottles of soft drinks.
- **Be creative with your organic waste.** Keep carrot and parsnip tops, broccoli stalks, potato peels, onion and garlic skins, bones, mix them in a bag, freeze and use as a basis for meat/vegetable stock. Add orange and lemon skins to white vinegar to create a naturally scented cleaning product. Compost the rest. Questions? Ask Pinterest.

The Christmas Tree Debate: Plastic vs. Real.

Even though plastic trees can be reused each year, their production, storage and transport use up non-renewable resources. Also, an artificial Christmas tree would need to be used for around 10 years for its environmental impact to be lower than real trees, says the Carbon Trust. Let's be honest: it isn't rare for plastic Christmas trees to be discarded due to repeated dismantling making them look unattractive, which results in more plastic polluting landfill because, how do I put it, plastic never degrades.

- **If you can, buy a living tree.** You can either get one small enough to be kept in a pot for a long time or get one you can replant in your garden. If you do not want to keep your tree after the Christmas season, drop it off at one of the recycling spots in Vienna. Make sure you read up on how to take care of your new green friend!
- **Think of other alternatives.** Does it have to be an actual

tree? How about a tall pile of books wrapped in fairy lights or a wall decoration made with nails and a string? How about that overgrown house plant?

Green Christmas Decorations

- **Skip on the excessive outdoor light installations this year.** You will pay less (whether in electricity bill or batteries purchases) and use less of the non-renewable energy.
- **Buy LED fairy lights**, which use 90% less energy than the traditional holiday bulbs.
- **Decorate your garden trees with bird feed decorations.** How cute are these?!
- **Candles are much more sustainable sources of a warm glow indoors.** Not to mention the atmosphere.
- **Turn off the Christmas lights at night.** Honestly, if everybody is sleeping, who will be admiring this magical show?
- **Make your own Christmas tree and house decorations.** Use dried plants, cinnamon sticks, pinecones, straw, branches of pine trees, paper and ribbons. How about dried orange slices with cloves hanging around the house? Beautiful aroma and pretty ornaments – checked!
- **Gingerbread** makes for awesome Christmas tree ornaments. Check out this recipe.

I hope that this list will give you some tips on how to make the 2019 Christmas season not only festive and filled with kindness, but also greener, eco-friendlier and not harmful to our beautiful planet. Do you have more ideas on how to make Christmas more sustainable? Tell us in the comment section on Facebook!



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