

HAVE A GREEN CHRISTMAS (and new year)

Spare a thought for the environment over the festive season and follow **Graham Readfearn's** tips to help make the planet a better place for us all

Christmas might be a time for giving but it's also a time when the consumption of the environment's resources reaches its zenith. So this festive season, why not give something back to the environment? Here are 10 ideas that might just kick-start some eco-friendlier habits for 2011 too.

1 Plant something edible

More and more people are giving over space at home to grow food, whether it's a layout of vegetable patches or a few herbs and tomatoes in pots on balconies. Growing some food yourself means less produce needs to be shipped by road and, if you choose organic methods, there are less harmful chemicals in the environment. If growing your own isn't for you, then try buying from one of several farmer's markets running in Brisbane. Try www.janpowersfarmersmarkets.com.au or www.northeaststreetcityfarm.org.au.

2 Sustainable seafood

As a coastal city, Brisbane consumes its fair share of beautiful fresh fish and seafood thanks to the ocean. To make sure that what you tuck into this Christmas is coming from a well-managed and sustainable source, the Brisbane-based Australian Marine Conservation Society has just published a new guide assessing more than 100 popular species. Go to www.marineconservation.org.au to order the guide, priced \$9.95.

3 Green lights

If you're looking to replace a broken set of "fairy lights", one option is to go for strings which use LED technology. They

are commonly available and while they cost a little more, they use a fraction of the electricity than other types of bulbs and last longer, which saves you money. Because most electricity comes from burning fossil fuels, anything that uses less energy is a positive step.

4 Greener power

The biggest contributor to Queensland's emissions of greenhouse gases comes from the stationary energy sector – that's the electricity generated at power stations. About 88 per cent of all this electricity comes from burning coal, a fossil fuel which releases greenhouse gases when burned. One way to reduce your reliance on fossil fuels is to ask your electricity retailer to source some or all of your electricity from less polluting sources, such as solar, wind, biomass or hydro. You will pay a little extra (starting at about \$1 per week) but more than 240,000 Queensland homes are currently doing this. For more information see www.greenpower.gov.au, or call your electricity retailer.

5 Get out there

Brisbane is almost surrounded by glorious national parks, conservation areas and World Heritage sites both on land and off the coast. Even better, they are free to visit. Getting closer to nature during the summer break helps us all appreciate our environment and might keep us away from the shops! For a full list of parks and walking trails for people of all abilities, visit the Queensland Government's Environment and Resource Management website at www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks.

6 On your bike

Cycling is good for your health, great for the environment and is one of the cheapest ways to get around locally (second only to your own two feet). Yet less than five per cent of adults in Brisbane use a bike or walk for their daily commute, even though 20 per cent of us live less than five kilometres from our place of work or study.

New bike racks, bikeways and end-of-ride facilities are being created around the city all the time and the Queensland Government wants 20 per cent of all our trips to be on bikes or walking by 2031. You can download bikeway maps from www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/cycling.

7 Reverse the effect

Most of us have a vehicle that relies on liquid fossil fuel, such as petrol or diesel, to make it go. But burning that fuel also releases the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Now the Queensland Government will cough-up half the cost of offsetting those emissions with a scheme called Reverse the Effect, which pays to plant trees and create native forests in Queensland which can absorb carbon dioxide. Costs vary, depending on the size of your vehicle, but neutralising the emissions from a scooter for one year costs \$16. A medium-sized car costs \$59. Find out more online at www.reversetheeffect.com.au.

8 Bottled water

Brisbane summers are hot and sticky, so we need to stay hydrated. To get a drink of water from the tap costs \$0.02 per litre in Brisbane, yet every day

many of us pay to buy bottled water costing 1000 times more. Plastic drink bottles are among Keep Australia Beautiful's "dirty dozen" of the most common pieces of litter. According to figures from campaign group Do Something!'s Go Tap campaign, in 2009/10 more than 52 million litres of oil was used just to make plastic water bottles for Australian consumers. Solution? Carry a refillable bottle and use public bubblers.

9 Buy less new stuff

One of the most sustainable steps anyone can make is to simply resist the temptation to buy things that we don't really need. One alternative is to buy a gift in the form of a donation for someone who really does need it. Oxfam has a range of quirky gift options, including manure for food growers in Sri Lanka, ducks for families in Mozambique, seeds for communities in East Timor or cash to help maintain support groups for indigenous Australian women. Go to www.oxfamunwrapped.com.au or visit one of Oxfam's three Brisbane stores.

10 Three Rs

There's an old environmental maxim which says we should all try to reduce, re-use and recycle. There's a lot of packaging and wrapping that comes with all those Christmas purchases as well as the things that we might discard to make room for new stuff. One tip is to look for products that use recycled content. Check out www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/recycling for more help on recycling or see www.recyclingnearyou.com.au for recycling locations. Good quality unwanted goods always find happy homes at op-shops. Don't forget to recycle your copy of *bmag*.

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