

DREAMING OF A GREEN CHRISTMAS

We chop down thousands of trees, cover our houses with millions of lights and buy heaps of cheap battery powered plastic toys which last a week if we're lucky. Then we wrap them up using mountains of paper and send sackfuls of cards. Christmas is a time when it seems OK to drop all those good habits through the year. Planet Ark's Brad Gray says that "a lack of time (leads to) higher contamination of recycling" at this time of year. "Our consumption of everything goes up....there is more garden waste sent to landfill, and people have less time to sort everything" While we don't have to be Scrooges, there are a few simple things we can do to reduce our consumption. Fiona has some great ideas and we also cover some other seasonal issues in this edition of Strobos. Jackson

SANTA'S FOOTPRINT

Here are a few last minute ideas to reduce Santa's footprint or if it's too late there's always next year:

1. If you're buying a present that requires batteries, give a recharger as well, since it takes 50 times more energy to make a battery than you get out of it;
2. Try a "no-plastic" rule when buying presents or at least cut down on the packaging;
3. Set up a family system where one person buys for one other so each only gets one gift;
4. Wrap gifts in recycled or reused paper and use old cards as gift tags;
5. Buy gifts at local markets where they are more likely to be unpackaged or not transported from miles away;
6. Give presents that cost time, not money such as babysitting or donate on someone's behalf to charity;
7. LED lights are much more energy efficient than traditional incandescent fairy lights and use just 10 per cent of the power. Turn them off when you're not at home;
8. Be careful with your rubbish. If you travel



outside your usual council area, check what can and can't be recycled; 9. Use cups, plates and cutlery made from bamboo or some other sustainable material; 10. Eat an organic turkey bred without antibiotics on sustainable farms if you must eat meat. I'm told they taste better. Fiona

CHRISTMAS INVASION

This time of year wouldn't be the same without Christmas beetles invading our barbeques. Favourable weather conditions such as the rains we just had will increase beetle numbers by enhancing survival of larvae and triggering adult emergence. They are not the harmless insects we may imagine. CSIRO report that swarms of adult beetles can defoliate whole eucalyptus trees in a few days leading to dieback and death. Gill



REAL OR FAKE?

Have you ever wondered which the better alternative is: a real Christmas tree or an artificial one? Maybe you have always purchased a real tree in the past, but they are getting to be more and more expensive. I know that I will save money with an artificial tree in the long run, but they seem very tacky to most people. There is no clear environmental favourite when it comes to picking a cut tree over an artificial one. On one hand, Christmas tree farms are effective carbon sinks. On the other, cutting down a growing tree for three weeks' of use is wasteful, even though it was grown sustainably. Christmas tree farms are often grown on land that crops can't grow on and in the process they stabilise the soil. But is manufacturing a plastic tree in China and shipping it here any better? Trees absorb CO₂





from the atmosphere while growing, so buying locally grown real trees helps remove CO2. If you have allergies/asthma, be aware that real trees may carry mould which could aggravate your situation. If you are going to get an artificial tree, get a quality one you'll use for 10 years rather than one you'll throw away. Even better, hire a live tree this year, which is something people do a lot in Europe. Another option is the potted live tree that you can store in the garden and use again. Better still is a potted native, like a Wollemi pine. I think it is really a personal preference. But financially, you might spend \$50 for a top quality tree that will last decades. Marc

COOL DRIVING

On your way to the beach this holidays, should you drive with the windows down or with the air conditioning on? Calculating the fuel consumption of a car needs a controlled experiment so I consulted the NRMA, the Environment Department and the Mythbusters from SBS TV. The NRMA website estimates a car's air-conditioner can increase consumption by 10 per cent and that in city traffic, with a lot of idling time, a car's petrol use may double. Roughly, for every litre of petrol used, 2.5 kilograms of carbon dioxide is emitted. On the freeway, at higher speeds, though, use of air-conditioning is better for fuel consumption than driving with open windows, according to the federal Department of the Environment. Open windows create drag on your car, and also the air-conditioner is more efficient at high speed. Overall the Mythbusters found no significant difference in their test, but the petrol use was based on how quickly a tank of fuel was used up rather than under stop-start driving. If you have an old car, though, (before 1995 say), which may still use a (photo: snuzzy.com) CFC refrigerant in its air conditioning system you may be damaging the Earth's ozone layer. Get your mechanic to recycle these chemicals and replace the system with a better one. If your car has been parked in the sun, drive a short distance with the windows down to let the hot air out, rather than switching on the air-conditioner immediately. Alastair



RETURN TO SENDER

Everyone enjoys receiving greeting cards from relatives and friends during the festive season. Last year we urged you to send e-cards but if you must post one, check out the latest service from Australia Post. You now can go to the post office from Boxing Day until the end of January and pick up a free reply-paid recycling envelope from participating Australia outlets. "This is such a simple way to be involved in recycling for our customers and it is very easy to do" said an Australia Post spokesperson. Each envelope fits approximately 60 cards. Since the Planet Ark campaign began 14 years ago, over 600 million greeting cards have been recycled - saving over 120,000 trees. Their site, festiverecycling.planetark.org, tells you what can be recycled and where. Stacey



PINING FOR THE FIORD

Finally, a story about another endangered species. Many of us like a real tree (see Marc's story), but are pines good for our environment? You may be surprised to learn that in some parts of Australia, one of our fairly common local birds and the subject of our society logo, the yellow tailed black cockatoo is threatened. In South Australia, with the loss of native vegetation, the introduced Aleppo Pine *Pinus halepensis* has become a major source of food for the cockatoos. With the control of invasive pines now under way, scientists have noticed a drop in populations. Research has found a need to retain some pines until revegetated areas can feed current populations. The chance of this happening in the Blue Mountains is remote because of the protection of native trees, particularly hakea which the cockatoos love. Still, this story illustrates the complex nature of our ecosystems when we introduce weeds such as the Radiata pine found throughout our region. Chris



Photo: J van Weenen