



## Eco-tips January 2025

### Heating and home insulation

It's a cold month and following on from our energy saving tips in November we are focusing on reducing our impact on the environment by tips to conserve the heating in our homes.

Identify and seal draughts in the home especially loft openings windows and doors. Thick curtains can keep heat in. Draught proofing strips can be added to doors and windows. A door may have a brush at the bottom or you can use portable sausage shaped draught excluders!

Foil or radiator panels can reflect heat into the room

Getting professional help is the best advice when considering loft and wall insulation both of which considerably lower environmental impact. You can get a free survey with some companies.

Turning down the thermostat from 19C to 18 C can save over £100 annually. Your room must be at least 18C. If you are older, or ill, you may need it to be warmer. Use your timer so that heating is switched off when the house is empty. A smart device or hive can monitor room temperature and can be remotely controlled by your phone for efficient heating and energy conservation.

Turn down radiator valves (if indeed you have them!) in unused rooms to say 3 out of 5 and keep doors closed.

Have you considered an air source heat pump (sometimes called an air-to-water heat pump) which transfers heat from the outside air to the water in your central heating system? This heats rooms in your home via radiators or underfloor heating. It can also heat water stored in a hot water cylinder for your hot taps, showers, and baths. Unlike traditional boilers (which use fossil fuels), heat pumps use electricity. And heat pumps are more than three times more efficient than a gas or oil boiler, helping to lower your energy use.

Dress in warm clothes to keep the body feeling comfortable

Did you know that Energy saving week is from 17<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> January

See link: <https://www.gas-elec.co.uk/energy-saving-week/>



## Eco-tips March 2025 *Looking after Wildlife*

Who doesn't love a panda, an elephant, a penguin or a lion? And what about the bugs, snails, spiders, wasps and worms? Are they less important in their ecosystems? The answer is a decisive "No"!

Here are a few ecological functions of native animals, including the ones above: They are recyclers of organic matter (slugs & snails, some beetles, earth worms etc.), pollinators (wasps, beetles, hoverflies – not only bees!), predators, keeping populations in balance (wasps, hedgehogs, hoverflies, spiders, centipedes, bats etc.), tunnel builders in soil, improving drainage and soil structure (earth worms, moles, voles etc.), spreaders or planters of seeds (birds, squirrels, badgers etc) and even builders of dams creating new habitat (beavers). All of them have important roles and should be respected as God's creation.

Our way of life puts an increasing number of species under pressure by reducing and fragmenting their habitat, creating deadly hazards (like road traffic) or polluting air, water and soil with various chemicals and waste. The three categories of English wildlife that are most affected are: 1. Butterflies, 2. Birds, 3. Amphibians & Reptiles (according to the Red List Index for England by broad taxonomic group, published by DEFRA).

What could you do?

- Find out about threatened species and habitats – [www.surreywildlifetrust.org](http://www.surreywildlifetrust.org)
- Participate in citizen science projects, monitoring wildlife – Butterfly Conservation Trust; Surrey Amphibian & Reptile Group; Bird Surveying with BTO
- Create habitats on your property (if you have one) – heaps of sticks & leaves over winter; logs of decaying wood; mini ponds; mixed hedges with blossom, berries and nuts; leave long grass with wildflowers.
- Join campaigns for protection, creation and connection of habitats: wetlands; wildlife crossings; wildflower meadows; hedgerows etc.
- Avoid using potentially harmful chemicals in your garden

In May there will be an organised bat watch with a short presentation on one or two evenings in St Mary's church yard – join us watching the Serotine Bats leaving their shelter through the roof tiles at dusk! For more information check our Eco-Church web page in April.

P.S. The Eco-Team at St. Mary's would love to know how many church members actually read the Eco-Tips and how useful they are. If you read them, please drop us a note with a comment and any suggestions you may have: [stmarysecoteam@gmail.com](mailto:stmarysecoteam@gmail.com) Have you been able to act upon any of the previous articles?



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## **Eco tips April**

### **Grow your own**

I would love to encourage everyone to grow their own vegetables, herbs and flowers. Watching plants grow is really fascinating. The seed germinates and produces seed leaves, then true leaves and grows into the plant that you desire usually within 10 to 12 weeks. You can buy small plants at the garden centre where the process has been started for you. You can buy many herbs as plants then take cuttings. Summer herbs like basil, parsley, dill and coriander can be easily grown from seed.

How do you start? Find the perfect spot. This can be a reasonably sunny area in your garden. You can have raised containers on a patio or balcony. Potatoes can be grown in pots as can tomatoes. I use seaweed feed to water plants in pots and containers. Organic is always better for the environment. You may want an allotment or try growing vegetables at Grace and Flavour to gain skills.

When can you start? Mid-April is a good time as frosts tend to finish by mid-May. Plant out plug and pot plants in mid-May. You can gradually harden them off by increasing the time outdoors before this. If you sow tender things before mid-May you can cover with fleece on cold nights

What can you start with? Sunflowers and potatoes are fun for children as they grow quickly. Home grown tomatoes have so much more flavour. Strawberries are bought as plants and are best in raised containers to avoid slugs and will need netting from birds. Easier things to grow are runner beans, courgettes, and cut and come again salad leaves. We have autumn raspberries as they produce a continuous crop from August through to mid-October and are delicious! If you grow carrots or brassicas, you will need enviromesh to deter pests.

Why grow your own? Simply your fruit and vegetables are fresher, tastier and grown without chemicals. Adding organic matter to the soil improves its structure. If you choose a no dig method the worms do the work of mixing and aerating the soil. There are no food miles so reducing pollution and carbon footprint. The garden is a peaceful place with wonderful sights, sounds and smells and a great place for worship. Gardening is really therapeutic and generally improves mental health. Having a go, even on the windowsill is worth a try! Go to the RHS website for more information.



## Eco-tips July 2025 *Plastic free July*

It's "Plastic Free July" again! This is a global movement where millions of us can be part of the solution to plastic pollution. See Eco Tips 2024 for the tips we sent last year!

Why is single-use plastic problematic?

It takes hundreds of years to disappear as it is difficult to break down

Single use plastic is produced from fossil fuels and creating them emits vast amounts of greenhouse gases

Plastic ends up in the ground, the waterways and the sea. Burning them releases harmful pollutants into the air. It is hard to see animals trapped by plastic wire or in containers, Large marine animals can ingest plastics or be trapped in fishing lines and nets leading to thousands of deaths.

Plastics eventually degrade to microplastics smaller than a grain of sand and are ingested by wildlife and humans alike potentially causing harm

Plastic also releases harmful chemicals into the soil and sea

It degrades habitats making them less suitable for wildlife

What can we do?

Bring a reusable cup to where you have coffee or tea

Buy loose products in markets, farm shops, or greengrocers

Have your own shopping bags

Use reusable water bottles! In this weather the keep cool water bottles are really good !

Avoid plastic packaged products where possible and take your own containers to shops

Buy natural fibres

Choose kitchen and bathroom products that don't have plastic

In the fridge use lids or beeswax wraps to preserve food

Join litter picks or pick up any litter when you see it

Pray for inspiration creativity and agreements / legislation to prevent single use plastics

For more information and to try the Pesky Plastics Quiz!



## August Eco Tip

Recently a friend showed me her, rather overgrown, allotment and said “I am working with nature, not against it!” These words are still stuck in my mind! I ask myself, “Where do I needlessly struggle against nature and cause more harm than benefit?”

Here are some examples:

- Removing dandelions, daisies, clover or bugleweed from the (short cut and well "fed"!) lawn and then planting bought wildflower seeds in a separate corner of the garden – or leaving the natural wildflowers where they already grow?
- Raking and blowing every fallen leaf away and burning or carrying off all hedge cuttings and deadwood – or leaving some piles as habitat for invertebrates and small mammals? (Dead hedges and compost heaps are even tidier and still very valuable ways of creating habitat while recycling organic waste.)
- Weeding and clearing bare soil meticulously – or covering it with grass clippings and fallen leaves?

A lot of time and money could be saved by being a bit more laid back about what a garden "should look like". And wouldn't earthworms, amphibians, insects, hedgehogs, voles etc. thank me by thriving more – if I do less?

Sometimes it's worth radically questioning our usual ways of doing things. Especially in times of climate change and loss of biodiversity. We might be surprised by the fascinating effects of non-intervention where we resist the urge to "tidy up" nature – just watch it!

Here is an example: Last week I discovered delicious Oyster mushrooms that had grown on a beech log left to rot in Hatchlands' woodland. **Beware:** You should only eat fungi you are absolutely sure about! (I double-checked with a fungus expert before cooking the delicacy.)

Enjoy nature on the bit of land under your care!



## Eco Tips September

### Embrace Fairtrade Fortnight!

This September, we are dedicating our efforts to promoting Fairtrade during Fairtrade Fortnight, which takes place from 22 September to 5 October 2025. Over these fourteen days, we encourage everyone to embrace the theme: "Do it Fair."

The concept of Fairtrade was founded in 1992, following appeals from small-scale coffee farmers in Mexico. Over the years, significant progress has been made. The first Fairtrade Foundation was established by several organizations including CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Tradedcraft, the World Development Movement, and the National Federation of Women's Institutes. This collective effort highlights the recognition that global trade is not always fair.

Fairtrade is the most recognized and trusted sustainability label working towards making trade fairer for the farmers and workers who grow our food. In a world fraught with challenges, fairness is not a given; however, we have the power to make a difference. Our collective actions can positively impact real people's lives. Fairer pay, fairer treatment, and fairer futures—this is the essence of Fairtrade. It's not just a label; it's a movement. So, whatever you do and however you do it: Do it Fair.

While we celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight, let's extend our commitment to 365 days a year. Here are some ways we can support Fairtrade:

1. Purchase products with the Fairtrade Mark, ensuring fairer prices and better conditions for farmers and workers in developing countries. Common items include coffee, tea, fruit, and chocolate.
2. Support businesses that back Fairtrade by encouraging your local shops, cafes, and schools to increase their use of Fairtrade products.
3. Engage your friends, family, and workplace, motivating them to buy products with the Fairtrade Mark.
4. Explore beyond common items and consider options such as flowers, wine, gold, and cotton, especially clothing.
5. Host a coffee or tea morning featuring Fairtrade products to spread awareness.

**Remember, every small action helps support small farmers and producers in developing countries. Together, let's make a difference.**



**Eco-tips October 2025**  
**Healthy and sustainable food**

How do we make good choices about choosing, consuming and enjoying food as God's representatives?

Food is an important part of celebration and hospitality as well as a daily essential and a good diet keeps our bodies healthy and improves our sense of well-being. At harvest time we celebrate the gifts of food and drink.

A healthy diet is essentially varied and the more plant products you eat the better for you and for the environment. It takes much less natural resources and agro-chemicals to produce plant protein than to produce meat using plant proteins. Beside this, ruminants like cattle and sheep emit substantial quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas several times more harmful than CO<sub>2</sub>. A recommended choice to start with would be to cut down on meat in the diet.

Cooking by grilling, steaming, poaching or boiling is better than frying unless air frying. Pressure and steam cookers can conserve energy. Salads and fresh produce avoids nutrients lost in cooking. Measuring the water needed to cook or make drinks conserves energy. Using lids traps heat.

The organisation Green Christian devised a handy acronym to highlight some of the aspects of food we should consider as 'L.O.A.F.' :

L = Locally produced, O = Organic, A = Animal Friendly, F = Fairly traded.

You can grow your own food locally and organically in your garden or on an allotment. Alternatively, you can choose an organic veggie box. You can choose an 'Oddbox' which stops food going to waste but may not be organic. Grace and Flavour sell organic veg and fruit midday on Saturdays and there is a local monthly farmers market in Ripley. Organically grown food is better for wildlife and biodiversity as well as the health of the soil, so it is more sustainable!

Animal friendly products are always free range. You can ask your butcher questions as to how the meat is sourced.

For fish and seafood eaters we recommend looking out for the blue label of the Marine Stewardship Council, which certifies sustainable seafood production.

Fair Trade products are now available in church but can be found in supermarkets, too. See last month's Eco-tips.

It is important to seek God over the food we eat and the choices we make, but most of all to thank Him for the wonderful array of food we can all enjoy!