



CHRISTMAS 2008 NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is written by Marion Wood with named articles and ideas and input from staff.

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ORGANICS



Seasons routines!

We're having a GE free Christmas!

But we're not having a fun-free or food-free Christmas! We have heaps of goodies for you – and ideas for a sustainable celebration.

- Have you seen our gorgeous calendar? The images come from trips to our producers. Our marketing policy is summed up in 3 words – truth in advertising. All the images we use are real - in photos in our stores, in newsletters, on our website and in our calendar – all produce pictured is genuinely organic and the people eat organic food.
- This year we have made our own Christmas puddings and Christmas cakes – small ones that you can take as a gift or just enjoy yourself.
- Try our beautiful gluten-free mince pies from Bakeworks – we also have gluten-free Christmas puddings from Bakeworks and gluten-free cakes from Elocin.
- We found last year that we've been so focussed on providing Christmas treats for our gluten-free customers that we ran out of mince pies containing gluten! So this year Eatright are providing us with wheat mince pies using organic ingredients.
- If you want a local gift what about Loukomi Christmas delight – it's Turkish delight made in Wellington.
- Check out our beautiful Kiwi diaries – another local gift. Get one for someone who's overseas – it's sure to make them want to come home.
- Serve up one of our Superchickens with our delicious cranberry sauce.
- Break open a crate this Christmas – buy one of our free range hams!
- Have you tried our organic chocolate thins – perfect for a wee gift to a Christmas party – they come in 4 flavours; roasted nuts with chilli, macadamia and manuka, orange and cardamom, cocoa nibs. They taste divine.
- Take home a few bags of our Christmas fruit and nuts – hang them on the tree for that unexpected guest.
- Include a few chocolate ladybirds in the children's stockings.
- As always we have a beautiful range of gift packs from Blue Earth, Living Nature, Dr Hauschka and Sukin. They come in a range of prices and if you use these products yourself it's well worth while giving yourself an early Christmas present as you make considerable savings buying the gift pack. Another great idea is a DIY gift pack from Antipodes. You choose the products and they have provided generic packaging to gift wrap them.
- We have 3 new standout beauty products available – Esse face oil, which feels and smells divine, and New Zealand's first 100% natural hair pomade – which is called Dollop. Both are Wellington-based companies and the products are gorgeously packaged and would make stunning gifts. And just in time for Christmas we now have a New Zealand made eau de toilette with certified organic fragrance. LatentialMe is a floral-spicy scent infused with native kowhai.



EAT TO LIVE ... LIVE TO EAT

And here's a recipe from our former Wellington manager, Silvia Zuur – it's a Swiss tradition to gift bread made into the shape of a Father Christmas.

Zopfbread

Mix:

1 tablespoon yeast
1 tablespoon sugar
300 ml warm milk

Add:

500 gms flour
50 gms melted butter
1 tablespoon salt

1. Knead well and let rise for 1–2 hours.
2. Knead again and shape, paint with egg yolk if desired.
3. Let rise again 1 hour and bake at 200°C.



ALLERGY FREE CHRISTMAS TREES

We always used to get a Christmas tree from Te Aro community centre until my daughter came home with a partner who's highly allergic to pine! What to do? I have friends who have the biggest, most stunning plastic Christmas tree which is literally groaning with baubles – one of their hobbies is to collect decorations from around the world – and the more over-the-top they are the better! So that's one fun option.

If you're not into plastic, how about a pohutukawa in a pot? You can keep growing it all year round – and it will sometimes even flower for you at Christmas. Another native alternative is the tangled muhlenbeckia – it looks fantastic with very delicate decorations, as the leaves are so tiny.

And for those of you who can't avoid Christmas trees – and wheeze and weep and block up every time you inhale the pollen, try Good Health Allergy – reported by some customers to give relief within an hour.



GIFTS THAT DON'T COST THE EARTH

Here are a few ideas for alternative Christmas presents that add to the fun but not to the stream of waste generated by the festive season.

- Vegetable gardening is booming in New Zealand. Give someone a copy of our most popular gardening guide – the Organic Gardening Calendar by Kath Irvine.
- Save the crossword or sudoku page of the newspaper and wrap up all your presents in that – hours of fun after they've opened their gift.

- Give the gift of your time – offer to:

- Do a day's gardening

- Cook a sumptuous organic meal

- clean their house

- mind their kids for a day

- give a massage or give them a voucher for one

- do odd jobs round their house for a day

- take them on a picnic

- Choose an assortment of our fair trade food – how about a basket with Palestinian olive oil (1st prize winner), any of our coffee (it's all fair trade), some bars of chocolate from Kaoka or Rapunzel, a few chocolate hearts and a beautiful tea from Hampstead or Scarborough Fair.

- Give them a gift that goes to people in need – many of the major charities now offer this option including Oxfam and Christian World Service.

- Give your garden a gift – buy a bokashi bin and compost all your Christmas food waste.



WHAT ARE WE DOING FOR CHRISTMAS?

At Commonsense Organics we give 5% of the net takings in each of our stores to a cause that is helping to advance our values. Often these are environmental groups – in October it was spring planting time so we gave the money to Operation Green Thumb. They help to organise the community gardens in the region. In November we gave to Transition Towns – a community organisation that is discussing and supporting ways to live within our ecological footprint.

And we're also committed to social sustainability. As December is Christmas we will be giving our 5% donation to the local food-banks. And in January we will be supporting Women's Refuge. We welcome your ideas for groups who could use an 'out of the blue' cheque for the good work they are doing.

And whatever you are doing over the summer break, have a good time and a good rest and thank you for being such helpful and appreciative customers.



COMMONSENSE GARDENING

Kia ora

We have waited all winter and finally things are warming up enough to start planting out in the garden, I have most of my veggies in now, with just tomatoes and zucconi to go.

And ofcourse I can never stress how important it is to get a good layer of mulch on before the soil dries out, mulch helps to keep the soil alive and brimming with life. Some soils can be hard to deal with if you have too much clay or too much sand, but a good layer of the appropriate mulch will help to improve soil quality.

If you live in Eastbourne, Petone or Kapiti coast you will have sandy soil that can dry out in summer and any water is filtered out quickly.

You can improve your sandy soil by adding large amounts of humus/compost either from your own compost or buy bags of it from Commonsense Organics. We have certified organic bags of compost and adding peat will help also, along with this you can add some top soil which has a good clay content that will release its nutrients when mixed in with the compost as sand alone is very mineral poor.

Adding a good layer of seaweed to the above mix will improve your sandy soil no end. You can take the no-dig option and layer all this over the top or dig it in but in the case of a sandy soil I would advise layering it as nature will insure the layers sink into the sand. I find the best place to collect seaweed is from the beach next to Bishop Park in Eastbourne after a good storm, there is a large garden of lettuce type seaweed just off the beach and plenty washes up there, and not just after a storm. If you're up the coast Te Horo is a good place as the storm brings down leaf mould and detritus from the Otaki river.

If you collect coarse or thick seaweed, it will break down more quickly if you soak it or run it over with the mower just to break it up, any type of seaweed is good, some people like to wash it but I don't, the salt content is not enough to harm your garden. And best of all it's free.

If you live in the hills like me you will have clay soil which will be wet and heavy in winter, dry and hard as rock in the summer. Clay, unlike sand, has plenty of minerals and nutrients for the garden, but the clay is packed in so tightly that all the goodness is stuck in there and needs releasing.

To start correcting the balance, add a good layer of gypsum (1kg per square metre) and dig it in as best you can. As this sinks in repeat after a few days and use a fork to break up the clay to a depth of around 15cm. The best time to do this is about now when the clay is still a bit damp from winter and before it dries out for summer. Then your patch will be ready to add the same ingredients as for the above sandy soil, minus the clay of course, for clay soil you can add sand. Gypsum is better because it has a more neutral form of calcium, rather than lime that can result in your soil getting overly alkaline.

And if you live on the valley floor in the Hutt you will probably have lovely soil as this was a large market garden once upon a time, thankfully before the onslaught of the chemical age, so just keep it fed with compost and it will be hard to go wrong. The same is true of the river loam away from the coast in Kapiti.

It's also time for many garden bugs to be breeding and the best way I have found of keeping the population down is a regular but weak spray of liquid fish, (this really works a treat on roses, never fails me) and a spray with the garden hose, both need to be regular as clockwork, I hose spray the plants every 2nd day and fish spray once a week, its better to be preventive rather than trying to kill off a massive population. All that fuss will pay off in the end, but it can take up to three years to really interrupt the breeding pattern of some pests so keep at it.

Happy gardening

Catherine Collins

ps. I am selling my personalised plate "ORGN1C" – I'm asking for offers over \$800. Ring me on 027 631 0045 – great Christmas present.