

Arrange for the Future

Looking at ways to make church decorations
nature-friendly & seasonal by Beth Bruce-Gardner



“Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbour and to steward the gift of creation.”

Archbishop Justin Welby

But do church flower arrangements really have anything to do with caring for the environment and creation? Many Christians, members of other faith groups and well-respected secular organisations think they do.

- ✓ In 2019 the Sustainable Church Flower national network was launched in the diocese of Worcester.
- ✓ From 2020 the Royal Horticultural Society banned the use of Oasis at all its shows.
- ✓ In August 2022 the Church Times published an article ‘Not mourning Oasis glory: the environmental impact of church flowers.’
- ✓ All arrangements at Salisbury Cathedral are now free from Oasis and many other cathedrals and churches of all denominations are choosing to take this course of action.
- ✓ In Blue Planet 2, David Attenborough told of the harm caused by plastics, especially microplastics in the oceans.

“Industrial pollution and the discarding of plastic waste must be tackled for the sake of all life in the ocean.”

– David Attenborough, broadcaster and natural historian

Oasis is PLASTIC

Floral foam, under the tradename 'Oasis', was introduced in 1954. Many churches were slow to adopt the new product, being thrifty with church funds, however it soon became popular due to its ease of use and ability to hold water.

Like plastic straws and single use plastic bags, Oasis is a one-use product that is non-recyclable and must be disposed of in landfill. It contains known carcinogens, is not compostable, does not burn, and breaks down into microscopic particles (microplastics) which contaminate rivers, lakes and seas, whilst harming aquatic life.

The advent of 'Bio Foam Oasis' coincides with raised awareness of the damage caused by microplastics but it would appear that the newer, supposedly environmentally friendly product is a prime example of 'greenwashing'. An article from the Good Housekeeping Institute warns to 'Be cautious of "biodegradable" floral foam (*also called Bio Foam*), it doesn't entirely decompose and can leak more toxic compounds into water than regular floral foam'. The manufacturers themselves, Smithers Oasis, claim that it is around 51% biodegradable (under ideal landfill conditions). This leaves almost half the product, 49%, to contaminate soil and waterways in the form of microplastics for hundreds of years. Not quite as eco as the manufacturers might like us to believe.

What are the Alternatives?

Alternatives could be older tried and tested methods or newer ideas:

- ✓ chicken wire
- ✓ floral frogs/Kenzan/pinholders
- ✓ marbles, pea shingle, sand
- ✓ wooden, metal or bamboo grids
- ✓ taped vases
- ✓ hand tied arrangements in water, jam jars of water in a container
- ✓ mossages
- ✓ or the very simplest method of stems in a vase of water

If this feels a bit daunting, it might be helpful to watch someone demonstrate or work alongside a friend. Watching YouTube videos such as those by royal florist Shane Connolly on the Sustainable Church Flowers website, or referring to a book such as 'A Guide to Floral Mechanics' may be useful.

The vision of Sustainable Church Flowers is to reduce pollution in our floral decorations by using carbon neutral flowers and less plastic.

Glorifying God Sustainably....”

Choosing Flowers

This might appear to be an easy ecological choice. Flowers are a natural product, so surely, they are environmentally sound? Sadly, imported and hot house flowers carry a surprisingly hefty environmental footprint.

- ✓ Heavy use of pesticides
- ✓ Often poor working conditions for vulnerable workers
- ✓ Plastic wrapping
- ✓ Fossil fuels used to heat greenhouses and in transportation
- ✓ Scent bred out of roses in favour of longer shelf life

According to the RHS, some imported flowers have up to 10 x the carbon footprint of home or UK-grown bouquets.

British flowers or flowers from the garden are ideal, but at times of year when these are scarce, house plants or bowls of flowering bulbs can be used instead of cut flowers. Dried flowers, seedpods and grasses can supplement evergreen foliage or can make interesting winter displays on their own.

Fairtrade flowers could be considered. Whilst these still carry a heavy carbon footprint due to the thousands of miles travelled, they do guarantee improved conditions for workers and use fewer chemicals in the growing process. The Fairtrade symbol is displayed on these products.



The fifth Mark of Mission of the Church of England is:

“To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”

Three things to consider when arranging flowers:

- ✓ What we choose to arrange flowers in can make a difference between causing lasting damage to the natural world or safeguarding the environment for future generations.
- ✓ Choosing seasonal and local flowers and foliage over imported or hot house flowers can reduce harm to people and planet.
- ✓ **Supporting each other as we make informed choices – like stems in a vase providing support for each other to create an arrangement – we can foster a supportive network by working together to make our church flowers ethical, nature-friendly and sustainable.**

‘Our vision is for churches of all denominations to care for creation as an integral part of loving their neighbours and following God faithfully.

Help us bring that vision to reality by participating in Eco Church.’ – A Rocha



Where to source local flowers:

- ✓ Flowers from the Farm www.flowersfromthefarm.co.uk website lists local growers. It might be helpful to have a chat with a local grower in person and explain that you'd like to use local flowers for your church.
- ✓ Garden flowers and foliage and from churchyards and hedgerows.

References and places to find further information:

Sustainable Church Flowers – Bringing Creation into the Church

<https://suschurchflowers.com>

Eco Church – an A Rocha Project www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

Sustainable Floristry Network www.sustainablefloristry.org

Church Times article 'Not mourning Oasis glory: the environmental impact of church flowers' <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/5-august/features/features/not-mourning-oasis-glory-the-environmental-impact-of-church-flowers>

Good Housekeeping Institute <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/uk/house-and-home/household-advice/a31130584/floral-foam-alternatives/>

Florist Shane Connolly, The Ambassador for Sustainable Flowers

<https://www.instagram.com/shaneconnollyandco>

Book – A Guide to Floral Mechanics by Sarah Diligent and William Mazuch

