

# Celebrate Eco-friendly Festivals

The festival season has set in full swing. You may be ready for the Navaratri, Durgapooja, Dussehra, Diwali, Gurpurab, Christmas, New year ... Prayers and rituals, beautifully crafted idols and crafts, colours, light and sound, shopping and gifts characterise these festivals.

With festivals come environmental perils. Surveys by government and non-government agencies point out significant increase in water, air and noise pollution during and just after festivals. Though some environmentally conscious individuals and organisations now practise and promote eco-friendly celebrations, much more awareness and action is needed. The celebrations should not harm, hurt or disturb patients, children and our ecology.

**Water Pollution:** After festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Durgapooja, the immersion of idols made out of plaster of paris (PoP) and non-biodegradable material causes significant water pollution. PoP is a compound of gypsum, sulphur, phosphorus and magnesium. Chemical paints contain toxic compounds, including mercury, cadmium, lead and carbon. Immersion of idols with such poisonous and toxic elements raises the level of acidity, solid matter, organic matter and heavy metals in water bodies. These materials don't dissolve readily. On the contrary, they silt the water bodies and lower the oxygen level in water, adversely affecting the aquatic life.

In 2010, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) framed the guidelines for immersion of idols, offerings and other worship materials reaching in the water bodies during festival. The guidelines emphasise the use of natural materials in *pooja* as stated in the old religious scripts. The CPCB guidelines include immersion guidelines for local bodies/ authorities and also define the role of state pollution control boards.

**Noise and Air Pollution:** Noise-induced hearing loss is irreversible. Bursting firecrackers, especially during the Diwali week, and the use of loudspeakers at *pooja* and *garba* venues are the biggest sources of noise pollution during festival season. Besides, fireworks emit toxic fumes and particulate matters, which increase the level of air pollution. The Ministry of Environment and Forests and the CPCB have framed rules and regulations on the use of loudspeakers and have also banned the manufacture, sale and bursting of fireworks generating noise level exceeding 125 dB(AI) or 145 dB(C)pk at 4 metres distance from the point of bursting. In absence of public awareness and strict implementation of the rules, the desired result has yet to be achieved.

The environmental impact of festivals further increases if you add the carbon footprint of power generation, which is additionally needed to light up celebration venues, houses and commercial centres during these festivals.



## The Eco-friendly Ways

Following these simple, inexpensive yet beautiful steps can make our festivals eco friendly:

**Green Idols:** Metal, stone or unbaked clay idols are good for both environment and worship. Don't buy idols painted with chemical colours or those having non-biodegradable material like thermocol and plastic as decorations. You

can make symbolic idols yourself by using clay or mud from your home. For colouring them use natural colours like turmeric, chandan, kesar, kumkum, etc.

**Green Decoration:** Use paper flowers or natural flowers for decoration. Decorate the festival venue with reusable items or biodegradable materials like cloth, paper, decorative plants and leaves, bamboo, etc. Use natural colours such as turmeric, henna, rice powder and gulaal for making rangoli.

**Green Immersion:** Metal or stone idols can be worshipped every year and after *pooja*, you may sprinkle water on them as a symbolic immersion. You may immerse smaller clay idols in a big water vessel at home and when clay mixes with water give it to plants like *Tulsi*. Alternatively, place the clay idols in a potted plant. Gradually, the clay from the idol will mix with soil when the plant is watered. At community level, think of artificial immersion tank, instead of natural water bodies. Spread flowers and other biodegradable material used in worship on the topsoil around plants or trees. They can also be composted for your garden. If it is a must to immerse the stuff, wrap them in newspapers instead of polythene bags, as paper is biodegradable.

**Save Energy:** Switch on decorative lights when necessary. Use compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) and LED lamps to save electricity.

**Cut Noise Pollution:** Avoid playing loud music. Loudspeakers should be played between 6a.m. and 10p.m. only. Avoid bursting firecrackers or use fireworks that make low noise and low smoke.

**No Plastic:** Discourage the use of plastic bags for carrying *prasad* or disposing the offerings. Use natural plates like banana leaves instead of plastic plates for distributing *prasad*. Use recycled paper sheets and boxes for packing gifts.

**3Rs:** Practise the principle of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle to cut down on the amount of wastes produced during festivals.

Take care of Mother Earth and celebrate life.

Sources: [cpcb.nic.in](http://cpcb.nic.in), [westbengal.gov.in](http://westbengal.gov.in), [festivalsofindia.in](http://festivalsofindia.in), [slideshare.net](http://slideshare.net)

**dB(AI)** : A-weighted impulse Sound Pressure Level in decibel  
**dB(C)pk** : C-weighted Peak Sound Pressure Level in decibel

