

10 Ways to "Green" Your Party

By Monica Emerich

Throw a great party that's also a green party. Our eco-event planning experts' tips for reducing, reusing, recycling and rethinking will become your go-to party planning checklist for saving both money and precious natural resources.

1. **Slash Your Tree Toll.** Green Weddings that Don't Cost the Earth author Carol Reed-Jones says using tree-free and recycled papers for invitations and thank-you notes is one of the easiest ways to reduce the environmental toll of a celebration. According to EcoCycle and the Worldwatch Institute, making paper from recycled content rather than virgin fiber creates 74 percent less air pollution and 35 percent less water pollution. Look for alternative papers handmade from plants such as hemp, which can be harvested in a few months as opposed to a few decades. Use recycled, unbleached napkins and paper towels, and make your own creative gift wrap using brown paper bags with a personal sentiment or two written right on the wrap.
2. **Show You're Aware on Partyware.** It's a positive step to buy products made from recycled vs. virgin materials — but when those recycled plastic plates and cups end up in the landfill (especially after only one use), you're a step back again. Green event planners Sylvia Tawse and Lyle Davis recommend china (it's easy to rent; see tip #3) to clients hosting gatherings at their organic farm in Longmont, Colo. "Styrofoam is a real no-no," Tawse cautions. Another eco-friendly alternative: the new tree- and petroleum-free compostable plasticlike partyware made from corn, potatoes and sugar cane plant parts not used in making sugar.
3. **Reduce & Reuse by Renting.** Renting creates practical, planet-conscious alternatives to chewing through trees and buying new products. Rent place settings, tablecloths, cloth napkins, decorations, coolers and more. Rent gowns and costumes, or shop second-hand shops, rather than buying party garb new.
4. **Transport En Masse.** "When we have more than 30 people coming to a party, we encourage the party hosts to hire a bus that will board the party guests in town and then transport them to our farm," Tawse says. Group transportation reduces pollution, saves drivers from finding parking spaces, and gives your guests a designated driver. Inside the party invitations, include web addresses for bus schedules and bike paths to encourage guests to use petroleum-free modes of transportation to the party. If you can, provide a room where guests who choose to walk or bike can change clothes and wash up.

5. **Serve Green Food.** Serve organic food and spirits that support sustainable farming practices. And don't throw away those table scraps — collect them in a separate bin and then compost them. It's easier than you think — check out [Got Compost? Top 5 FAQs on Making Compost in Your Yard](#). You don't need to have a garden or even use the compost (just let it biodegrade into the soil).
6. **Whittle Your Waste.** Buy in bulk to minimize excess packaging, and opt for products packaged in recycled and recyclable containers. Provide recycling bins at your event for glass, aluminum, plastics, cardboard, and other recyclable containers.
7. **Buy local.** Reed-Jones adds that using flowers and food that are locally grown and in season cuts down on the use of fuel to transport such goods over long distances. "You certainly can buy lilacs in the winter, but know that they are flown in from the Netherlands — what a waste of fuel," she says. By highlighting local products at your party, you'll support the environment while exposing your guests to information and resources that better enable them to buy local themselves.
8. **Do the earth a favor.** Reed-Jones' favorite earth-friendly party favors include flower, tree or vegetable seeds; organic chocolates; hemp/silk blend handkerchiefs; and poetry printed on handmade recycled paper. Also think about potted plants such as violets — they make beautiful centerpieces and great thank-you gifts for party helpers.
9. **Power down your energy toll.** Solar powered lighting around patios and walkways saves energy and looks beautiful at a nighttime party — or try natural soy or beeswax candles in fireproof containers to create ambience without the soot and toxins emitted when burning standard candles. For a daytime event, a portable solar generator or power pack can keep tunes and blenders going strong anywhere with free power from the sun.
10. **Check out organic cut flowers,** says Tawse. And don't toss them when the last dance is over. "Your flowers can be dried for beautiful winter arrangements," Tawse points out. It's another way to support organic farmers and reduce the use of synthetic chemical pesticides and herbicides.