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Since food is such a large component of celebrations, it's a great aspect to "green." Talk to your caterer about using local, organic food and beverages.

A White (and Green) Wedding

Making your festivities eco-friendly

By *Gabriana Marks*

With the rising awareness of our impact on the environment comes the desire to be eco-friendly in more aspects of our lives — including weddings. Read on for 10 ways you can make your wedding greener and possibly save some green in the process.

1. Hold the reception at an eco-friendly venue. Also, choosing a location with natural decorations, such as a garden or winery, will cut down on decoration costs (as well as waste). "Many decor items are able to be used over and over again, and in many environments non-floral decor is a creative way to deck out your wedding," suggests Kim Stevens of Living Room Events, a full-service caterer and event planner in San Francisco. These options are especially great for outdoor summer weddings.

2. Choose one location for the ceremony and reception that is close to where you and the majority of your guests live. This will cut down on travel expenses as well as gas emissions. If you have some friends traveling a distance, help to arrange a carpool for them.

3. Hire an organic, eco-friendly local caterer and then talk with him or her about your desire to feature local foods. Serve organic wine and non-alcoholic beverages. "Sourcing local and organic reduces pesticide use in the long run by supporting the organics market," explains Stevens. "Buying local cuts down on the air emissions from transportation of the food and produce to your event. We also believe in sourcing Fair Trade." You can also donate leftover food to a local homeless shelter and flowers to a resting home or hospital.

4. Non-compostable disposable products are wasteful so talk to your caterer about using real linens, dishes, glasses and silverware, or request compostables.

5. Used recycled paper for all of your paper needs, including save-the-date cards, table name cards, invitations, thank you cards, menus, other signage, etc. Also, whatever you do have printed, do so using soy-based inks.

6. Use a Web site for RSVPs. There are some great sites that help you organize your guest list and even create seating charts. Using a Web site for RSVPs also saves paper and postage. But do still send RSVP cards to guests who aren't comfortable with the Internet.

7. Wear a vintage wedding gown — whether it's been passed down through your family or you found it in a cute boutique, re-using is a great way to help the environment. Plus, it's a lot cheaper to have a dress altered and/or updated than to purchase a new gown. You

could also purchase a gown made of natural fabrics, such as cotton, hemp or organic blends. Renting wedding attire is also another option that will help cut down on the environmental impact. Another way to green your attire is to use conflict-free diamonds in your wedding rings, adds Stevens. "Re-purpose grandma's ring or work with a jeweler that specializes in this," she says.

8. Purchase your flowers for the big day from a local grower who doesn't use pesticides. Certified organic growers can be found at your local farmers' market or online. "A lot of growers now carry organic lines. It's becoming more and more popular, especially in the Bay Area," explains floral and event designer Laura Little of San Francisco-based Floramor Studios. "For a natural garden style, some slight irregularities, which can be found in flowers grown without any chemicals, will give your wedding a more organic feel."

9. Give eco-friendly party favors, such as cute packets of seeds tied up with a ribbon or a gift tree. The National Arbor Day Foundation sells redwood, pine or spruce trees in tiny recyclable tubes for \$3 each (<http://www.arborday.org>), and you can customize the label to match your wedding. Or, you can plant trees in honor of your guests. There are various options online for planting trees in honor of a special occasion. Organic chocolates and soy candles also make nice eco-friendly favors.

10. Another great eco-friendly idea is to select organic and local items for your bridal and wedding registries. Many online and Bay Area retailers sell certified organic items. One site offering some truly unique gifts made from recycled materials is www.GreatGreenGifts.com. You could also ask guests to plant trees in your honor or donate to your favorite charity. Another way to give back is to gather your wedding party together for a volunteer day at your local soup kitchen.

With eco-consciousness on the rise, many wedding planners are now very familiar with green weddings and might be able to offer further advice and contacts. Web sites, such as www.GreenEleganceWeddings.com, are also a good place to turn to for green wedding advice. And, of course, purchase as much as you can locally. It helps support local businesses and will reduce your carbon footprint.

A few books are now also available to help you along your planet-friendly road. Our favorite book for planning environmentally friendly, yet stylish weddings is *Eco-Chic Weddings* by Emily Elizabeth Anderson. Similar books on the market include *Green Weddings That Don't Cost the Earth* by Carol Reed-Jones and *Organic Weddings* by Michelle Kozin.