



SOMETHING GREEN



GETTY IMAGES; ALLISON WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHY

Tips for a sustainable wedding

BY MARY HELEN BERG

On a stormy, sticky, summer Chicago evening in 2016, Brittany

and Benjamin Drummond were joined in marriage. Their nuptials included a planting ceremony, and as rain fell on the Windy City, they watered a milkweed shrub, adding compost from their parents' gardens.

Later, a rumor circulated that the bride hugged a compost bin during the reception.

Not true — but almost.

“We try to live our lives as sustainably as possible,” says Brittany, a 29-year-old sustainability coordinator for North Central College in Naperville, Ill. “I devote my life to that — and my job. It’s who I am and it’s very important to me.” »

CLAUDIA + RYAN

chose Mignonette Bridal in Chicago, a member of the Green Wedding Alliance, to make her stunning green wedding dress.

Naturally, the couple designed their wedding to have “as little of an impact as possible” on the environment, she says.

They are in good company: In 2016, 31 percent of couples strived to plan an eco-conscious wedding, says Liene Stevens, president of Splendid Insights, a wedding market research firm. And green weddings continue as a top trend in 2017, according to The Knot’s annual wedding report.

That’s good news for the planet. Nearly 2.2 million U.S. weddings each year generate about 63 tons of carbon dioxide and up to 600 pounds of garbage per event, estimates Kate Harrison, green wedding expert and author of *The Green Bride Guide: How to Create an Earth-Friendly Wedding on Any Budget*.

The key to a green wedding is to think small — limiting guests means limiting waste, wedding planners say. But no matter the size of your event, there are dozens of creative ways to reuse, reduce and recycle to ensure that your once-in-a-lifetime event reflects enduring values. With a little research and thoughtful planning, your big day will express your love and respect for both your partner and the planet.

“I call it putting on a green lens,” says wedding planner Corina Beczner, founder of Vibrant Events in northern California’s Bay Area. “It can be different shades of green depending on what choice we’re making — whether it’s catering or flowers or dress or transportation.”

THE INVITATION

The wedding invitation often sparks friction between parents



NATALIE + KYLE

chose flowers from eco-friendly florist Fab Flora and used bicycle wheels as place card holders to showcase their love of cycling.

CRISS + CHRIS

used vintage picture frames to hold place cards. Their cake was made by Elysia Root Cakes, a Green Wedding Alliance member.

and eco-conscious couples, green wedding planners say. The older generation can sometimes insist that Aunt Gertrude will be offended if she receives anything less than a formal, engraved paper announcement consisting of multiple pieces of thick card stock separated by tissue.

Meanwhile, many couples prefer paperless email communication that’s waste-free and efficient. Indeed, online invitation sites like Paperless Post have scores of designs from which to choose.

But if a traditional invitation is non-negotiable, try a sustainable compromise. For example, you can send an electronic “save-the-date” announcement instead of a paper one. Later, mail out your one-page invitation on recycled paper stock with soy-based ink. Conserve further by using tree-free hemp, bamboo or cotton-based papers. If you print your invitation on seeded paper, (paper embedded with herb or flower seeds), your guests can plant it in honor of your event.

Additional event details, such as directions, accommodations and RSVPs, can be neatly handled on your wedding website.

One couple took the invite debate straight to their guests and conducted a survey regarding invitation preference, recalls Beczner. About one-third of guests strongly favored tradition and received a paper invitation; the rest received an electronic version.

“It definitely was more complicated,” Beczner says, but the hybrid approach persuaded the parents to allow the couple

to follow their values.

“The couple felt like they were satisfying their obligations around etiquette without offending people, which is typically why people wouldn’t send a wedding invitation by email,” she explains.

THE RINGS

The glitter of a diamond and gold engagement ring dims when you consider its human and environmental cost, green event planners say. Profits from the diamond industry have funded wars in Africa that have cost millions of lives, while mining gold and other precious metals destroys landscapes and contaminates soil and water supplies.

Vintage jewelry and family heirloom pieces offer an alternative now trending with eco-conscious couples, says Carlene Smith, owner of Naturally Yours Events in Chicago.

Brittany Drummond, for example, chose to wear her great-grandmother’s ring, and no other band, because two rings seemed wasteful.

Her husband, Benjamin, bought an inexpensive recycled metal ring online. Many green grooms now opt for non-precious metal rings, often made of tough tungsten, says Ellen Hockley Harrison, who plans “occasions with a conscience” as founder of Greater Goods Events in Jersey City.

You also can seek an ethically sourced diamond, but ultimately, Smith adds, “no one says you have to have a diamond for your wedding ring,” when emeralds, opals, rubies and sapphires offer gorgeous, more eco-friendly alternatives. And if you find >>

a vintage ring that isn't your style, you can always repurpose the stones or melt the metal to create a new setting.

THE DRESS

If you want a green wedding day, "don't go white," advises Smith.

White wedding dresses may look like they're out of a fairy tale, but they're sometimes processed with bleach and toxic chemicals that create an environmental nightmare, she warns. Don't worry — many gowns in other shades are both elegant and eco-friendly. Try blush, ivory and champagne as fairly traditional alternatives — or literally go green with a shamrock-colored dress. Seek out gowns made with sustainable fabrics such as organic linen and lace and hemp-satin or hemp-organza blends.

Claudia Mattison opted for an emerald green wedding dress, made by Mignonette Bridal in Chicago, a member of the Green Wedding Alliance. "Green has always been my favorite color, and I wanted something unique," she says.

And if the idea of wearing a new dress only once offends your commitment to recycling, try on your mom's gown or repurpose pieces of it. Check consignment stores for used gowns at discount prices; or find a new one that you can revamp after your ceremony to wear again as a cocktail or casual dress.

FLOWERS

Cascades of perfect roses and exotic orchids make lush wedding bouquets and dramatic centerpieces for your reception.



MATUSHEK PHOTOGRAPHY

TARA + MITCH
opted to use fresh blooms from Fab Flora, an eco-friendly florist in Chicago.

But flowers that are out of season or travel long distances create a huge carbon footprint, says green guru Hockley Harrison. In addition, most U.S. florists use imported blooms that have been sprayed with pesticides and preservatives that pollute air and water and will contaminate compost with the same toxins.

Luckily, you have plenty of alternatives. The "slow flower movement," a twist on the slow food movement, emphasizes bouquets featuring locally grown flowers and foraged materials.

Foraging is what's "hip and happening right now in flowers," Beczner says. "It's all about low toxins, local, seasonal and 'foraging,' which utilizes found natural objects, like branches, leaves, stones and shells."

Drummond's bouquet contained wildflower blooms grown locally by a flower farmer and florist who uses seasonal flowers. She repurposed the bouquets that decorated the wedding aisle to use as table centerpieces for the reception and composted them afterward.

Another idea is a "no-kill" wedding that bans cut flowers, like the event Smith planned for a vegan couple. Instead, they chose centerpieces of succulents in terrariums that guests could take home as favors, leaving no wilted flowers behind.

Or, if you're a do-it-yourself type, invite your bridal party on a field trip to a local flower farm to pick your bouquets and corsages.

When the party's over, either compost your flowers or donate them through a company like Repeat Roses, which uses a

nationwide network of service providers to collect the bouquets and distribute them to nursing homes, hospitals or other local nonprofits.

THE VENUE

A backyard garden? A rolling ranch? A forest? The great outdoors automatically connects your wedding to the earth and reminds guests about the importance of preserving natural resources.

You also can go green by booking a LEED-certified building. Or, look for a venue that already has natural light, greenery and unusual architectural features so you don't need to add décor that will end up in the landfill afterward.

If compost and recycling aren't available on-site, ask if you can bring in a service to handle all those food scraps and champagne bottles. Finally, hold your ceremony and reception in the same location to save fuel emissions from your guests' cars.

THE MENU

Think organic, seasonal and local. With these in mind, your menu will be slightly more restricted, particularly in winter, but you'll serve a meal that's deliciously healthy for your guests and easy on the planet. If vegetarian choices won't please your crowd, do your bit to reduce greenhouse gases and try to keep beef off the menu. Cattle produce about 65 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions created by livestock, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Serve your seasonal feast as a plated meal. Buffet service often means wasted food, »

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I CALL IT PUTTING ON A GREEN LENS.”

— Corina Beczner, founder of Vibrant Events



wedding planners say. If you have leftovers, don't let the kitchen toss them. Share them with a homeless shelter or other nonprofit, says Hockley Harrison.

“Most cities have organizations that do food rescue,” she adds. “Prearranging food rescue for after your wedding is huge, because at eleven o'clock on the night of your wedding you don't want to say, ‘Oh no! I have all this food!’”

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

No matter how thoughtfully you planned, you'll probably have stacks of stuff that you'll never use again. Fortunately, you can recycle almost everything at events like the Chicago Green Wedding Alliance's annual Wedding Recyclery. If there's no local program, try consignment shops and online marketplaces where you can sell everything from flower girl baskets to your gently used wedding dress. ●



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BRITTANY + BENJAMIN are devoted to living sustainably and that sentiment translated to different aspects of their wedding.

GREEN GIFTS

A traditional wedding registry is designed to help newlyweds set up a household together. Here's an eco-friendly gift list for couples who want their registry to reflect their sustainable values:



Every meal will be elegant with the striking **Bolo flatware**, made from 100 percent recycled steel. \$28 for a five-piece set, bambeco.com



These 400-thread-count **Morgan banded bed sheets** contain no irritating chemicals. Bedding sets start at \$368, potterybarn.com



Mexican artisans handcraft unique **Web stemless wine glasses** from broken and recycled bottles and jars. \$85 for a set of six, uncommongoods.com



BottleCloth's woven cloth place mats, made from recycled plastic bottles, come in four styles and a variety of colors. \$56 for a set of four, bottlecloth.com



Farmstead Stoneware **rectangular bakers** are made from all-natural clay, reclaimed water and scrap materials from other Farmstead products. \$40, bambeco.com



This 10-piece stainless steel **Greenpan nonstick cookware** set is crafted from recycled post-manufacturing content. \$250, westelm.com

— Mary Helen Berg and Antoinette D'Addario