

ECO-WISE

Throw a Green Party

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Special events are often times for celebration. But not every aspect of these festive get-togethers is so worthy of our cheer. Big events typically mean big carbon emissions from travel, vast amounts of waste and reliance on businesses with unsustainable practices.

The good news is that today's party hosts and their guests have greener options for just about everything from transportation to decoration. Some of these alternatives come at a premium; others save money. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Choose a place in line with your environmental values, perhaps a park facility or a nonprofit organization. Hold your event in the daytime to take advantage of natural light and conserve electricity.
- Pick a venue in a central location that's accessible by mass transit. Otherwise, encourage carpooling, hire buses or suggest hybrid taxis.
- Fancy invitations take a toll on trees. "If it's appropriate, send out a beautiful e-mail instead," says Danielle Venokur, founder of the Manhattan-based sustainable events company dvGreen.
- For food and drink, think local, organic and -- in the case of seafood -- sustainably caught. Try to skip individually packaged drinks, particularly water, which can be filtered from the tap and served in pitchers.
- Go with reusable tableware and cloth napkins. If you can't, look into plant-based disposable plates and cups. Jettison unnecessary extras such as plastic straws and coffee stirrers.
- Once you've trimmed your waste, emissions and energy expenditure as much as possible, you can make up the remaining balance by buying carbon offsets -- "a last resort," Venokur says.

-- Jenny Mayo

