

WEDDING ESSENTIALS

Go ahead and go green

Eco-friendly options abound in all areas of your wedding planning.

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CTW Features

Forget black sashes, red roses or blue-embroidered handkerchiefs, today's chic, new wedding trend is spending your green on going green. From food to make-up, not only is including the Earth on your guest list possible, it's easier and more affordable than you might think.

Here are four concepts to consider when going green, and creative ways to get there.



Support Sustainability

According to Danielle Venokur, founder and principle planner at the sustainable event design company dvGreen in New York City, the most straightforward way to green a wedding is with the flowers and the food. The goal is to use either local or organic products, or ideally both (sometimes you have to weigh the benefit of going organic against the carbon footprint of having materials shipped if they aren't available locally).

Organic flowers can be more expensive, but you can cut costs by designing your floral arrangements based on local, seasonal availability, or by filling out your centerpieces with greenery and herbs.

Creating the menu for the reception based on abundant, seasonal options, such as fruit in the summer or root vegetables in the winter, also is the way to save if you are using product from smaller, organic farms that are typically a little more expensive. It's a timely and costly process for farms to become certified organic, which contributes to the added expense on our end, but it's such a growing trend that there is increased availability for organic products of all kinds, literally from soup to nuts.

And if you're really feeling adventurous, you can even serve the food with plates made from sugar cane and utensils made from potato starch or corn plastic, which simply ends up in the compost.

Think Both Usability and Re-usability

When it comes to the décor, consider either renting it or use props or handmade items offered by friends or from your own home, suggests Angelica Weihs, founder of two eco-conscious wedding companies, Angelique

Events and Green Weddings & Events, both based in Los Angeles, and author of “Green Weddings” (Ignite Publishing, 2008). One of her brides brought her own Moroccan lamps and silver tea pots on huge silver trays for Moroccan mint tea, but rented 200 colorful tea glasses (or you could purchase the glasses from a Fair Trade company and use them as favors). Another one of Weihs’ couples used gnarly, found tree branches to display the 200 colorful handmade origami birds that served as place cards. One of Venokur’s couples even did a beautiful wedding table with all paper, including handmade tissue paper flowers and paper vases, all made from recycled content.

“The colors were pink and white and silver, and the table was accented by votive candles with tissue paper candle holders and garlands of white rock candy that gave the illusion of crystals,” says Venokur. “It was truly elegant, and guests couldn’t believe that it was all paper.”

In regards to attire, vintage is a great route to take for wedding dresses with tons of personality, or find a newer designer dress in an upscale consignment store – you can always sell it yourself afterward, or even donate it to Brides Against Breast Cancer, which raises money for breast cancer research by offering brides-to-be the opportunity to purchase donated gowns at a discount.

And yet another usability favorite is buying favors that your guests can actually use, says Weihs, from romantic soy candles, to flasks filled with a favorite organic liquor, to organic truffles. Or consider making the centerpieces entirely from fresh herbs, fruits or vegetables arranged in jars, and then offer them to guests as party favors and use the leftovers the next day for the post wedding brunch.

“One of my brides had her mother sew organic linens and napkins for 240 guests, then had them dry cleaned afterwards and gave sets of them to her bridal party as her gifts,” says Weihs.

Reduce Pollution

Provide energy with solar or bio-diesel fueled generators, or party in the day time or on a warm summer night with romantic candles and acoustic musicians, suggests Weihs. Have all the events take place in or near one location so that travel is limited, or shuttle your guests in hybrid or biodiesel vehicles. You can then off-set the remaining carbon footprint of your wedding with a company like TerraPass or Native Energy.

“You can really off-set anything,” says Venokur, “including your guests’ travel, your lighting, the cleaning involved, food production and preparation – literally every aspect of the wedding.”

Think Ethically

There are numerous ways a bride can make sure her attire doesn’t harm anyone else in the process. When it comes to engagement rings, avoid “conflict diamonds” by sticking to the cultured or vintage variety, or branch out and use other gorgeous gems and wedding bands made of recycled gold or titanium, suggests Weihs. Stunning wedding dresses can be made with sustainable, Fair Trade fabrics, such as organic cotton or hemp silk, and the cost will be the same as having any wedding dress made. And when planning your hair and make-up, look for products that are paraffin free, that use natural elements and that don’t test on animals, adds Venokur.

“There are lots of shades of green and creativity is one of them,” says Weihs.