



**GREENGRRL
FEATURE**

Green party grrl

Turn your next event into an Earth-friendly good time

by Kelly Westhoff

What does it take to "green" a party? Will email invites do? What if you cut out bottled H2O and serve chilled pitchers of tap water instead? Then is your party green?

SARAH WHITING

"You can take nearly any aspect of an event and make it sustainable," said Laura Fryberger, owner of Flings Event Design, an event-planning company that specializes in green party practices. "There is a lot of confusion when it comes to the words organic, green, eco-conscious and sustainable. I prefer the word 'sustainable.' Sustainable takes into account both the environmental and social impact of what we do. It could mean working with fair-trade vendors or supporting your local business people. I think it's important we think about all events with sustainability in mind. Events use so many resources and because of that, they make a big footprint."

Kate & Annie go green

Long before they ever set a date for their commitment ceremony, Annie Pennola and Kate Pearson knew they wanted the event to be eco-friendly. Now that their actual June date is fast approaching, Pennola talked with the Minnesota Women's Press about the various ways they have found to put an earth-friendly spin on their big day. "I do want my ceremony and reception to be classy and beautiful, but I also want it to be mindful of the earth," Pennola said. "Our goal in planning an eco-event wasn't to go overboard, but it was about finding a balance and being conscious of our choices."

Location matters

What could be greener than an outdoor event? "We're having an outdoor ceremony and an indoor reception at the pavilion on Harriet Island," Pennola said. By holding both events in the same place, guests only have to make one car trip. "We booked a block of rooms at the hotel right across the river so out-of-town guests can walk," Pennola said. "We're encouraging carpooling and trying to team up out-of-towners with family and friends so they don't have to rent a car."

If you're planning an event during the cold or rainy season, considering the geographic location of your site is a good way to start. If you and most of your guests live in the same area, look in your own backyard, either literally or figuratively. If guests come from all over the metro, think central location. Brownie points: Make sure the bash is on the busline, and send your guests bus tokens and a schedule (or to save paper, point them to the online bus schedule).

Send an email, save a tree

Are your guests online as much as you are? Using an emailed invitation saves time and paper. Advertisement-

supported services like Socializr, skOOchie and Evite are free. If you want the convenience of e-vites but are looking for a little more class, check out sites like Sendomatic. While they're not free, they cost a fraction of what you'd pay for the least expensive paper invite.

You can take your event online even further: Register a domain name for your event and build a basic web page to post directions, gift registry information, hotel accommodations, menu choices, etc.

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Kate Pearson and Annie Pennola are planning now for their green commitment ceremony this summer.

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COURTESY OF LAURA FRYBERGER



"I prefer the word 'sustainable.' Sustainable takes into account both the environmental and social impact of what we do."

— Laura Fryberger

Recycled paper is a no-brainer. What about the ink? Think soy. While water-based inks may sound good, they also include petroleum products. The trade association Printers in Minnesota (PIM) certifies printers who go above and beyond the regulations. If the printer you choose isn't certified, that doesn't mean it's not green; it does mean that you should consider asking questions about how it minimizes waste and recycles or reuses materials.

If you do go the paper route, consider minimalizing how much you use. "Emily Post would say we need an envelope inside an envelope inside an envelope with little pieces of tissue paper in between," Pennola said. "We thought that was wasteful. Our invitation was printed on recycled paper and it was just one page. We included a postcard as the RSVP and we set up a website with all the other information a guest might need."

Pennola's thought ahead to thank you notes, too, and has a solution that's both stylish and sustainable. "For our thank-you notes we are using cards with blank insides and different designs that we picked up at estate sales ... it's economical and saves on waste. The bonus is that some are vintage and have super cute '60s or '70s designs," she said.

The spirit(s) of the thing

If it's not a party without a bit of imbibing, consider ... beer. A keg is a more sustainable choice than individual bottles. There is less packaging involved, and kegs are, of course, reused.

If wine's more your speed, Minnesota has more than 15 vineyards to choose from. Want a harder edge? Pick up a bottle of Shaker's Vodka, distilled right here in Minnesota.

Chowing down

Depending on the venue, you may be tied to the house caterer or one it contracts with. If this is the case, you still may be able to ask for locally grown foods, and to make it clear you'd prefer china or stoneware to plastic.

If you choose the caterer yourself, it's much easier to control where the food comes from and how it is grown or raised. These are good questions to ask caterers you're interviewing. One model we like: Create Catering and Consulting, whose owners are so committed to serving locally, organically and sustainably grown food that they purchased their own farm in Wadena where they grow food they use in their business.

Leave no trace...

"One thing a lot of people don't think about when planning an event is the back end. What happens to the trash?" Fryberger said. At the end of a long,

celebratory day, she pointed out, no one wants to think about recycling or composting, not even the hostess.

All events, big or small, she said, should have a trash and recycling plan in place before the first guest ever arrives. She recommended recycling bins be clearly labeled and placed alongside garbage bins. Composting party food scraps, on the other hand, is harder to pull off, as none of the metro garbage services are set up to handle mass composting, Fryberger explained. Want to compost your party leftovers? Be prepared to take on the task yourself.

"If you want to plan a sustainable event, the key is to integrate the practices into the event," Fryberger said. "You have to find a balance between being eco-friendly and celebrating what your event is about."

We'll drink to that. With a glass of locally produced wine, of course.

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Tip: Ax party favors.

Not only will you ease your budget, but you'll also be keeping glass, paper, plastic and metal products out of landfills.

Spread the word by email:

- Socializr www.socializr.com
- SkOOchie www.skoochie.com
- Evite www.evite.com
- Sendomatic www.sendomatic.com

Invitations the old-fashioned (but green) way:

- PIM Printers in Minnesota A list of printers who have voluntarily complied with their green standards. www.pimn.org/environment/greatprinter.htm 651-789-5500

Eco-friendly blooms:

- Artemisia Flower Studio www.artemisialowers.com 612-822-8890
- Urban Earth Flower and Garden Co-op www.urbanearthcoop.org 612-824-0066

Eat, drink & be merry (or married):

- Finnegan's Irish Ale www.finnegans.org 1-763-315-6442
- Shaker's vodka www.shakersvodka.com
- Minnesota wines For a list of most Minnesota vineyards, go to www.minnesotagrown.com. Click on "Minnesota Grown Directory" and select "Wine."
- Imported wines:
 - Etica Fair Trade wines www.eticafairtrade.com 612-823-7609
- Locally grown party eats:
 - Create Catering & Consulting www.createcaters.com 612-331-3310

Your green party
A clip-and-save resource guide