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How Green is my Wedding?

CATERING CURRENTS: Eco-Friendly Weddings and Receptions

by Clint Brownfield



Approximately two million couples are married in the United States each year. And even though there isn't a tote board on Times Square counting them, it's safe to say, "green" weddings are growing in popularity. Patricia Canole, editor-in-chief of *For the Bride* magazine, has this to say: "During the last few years, I've noticed a greater emphasis on weddings that are mindful of the environment. Various bridal fairs that I've attended feature more and more products that are eco-friendly—from invitations to cakes and everything in between." Enter: savvy caterers, event planners and venues with attractive and delicious alternatives to a conspicuous consumption that could help wreck the planet.

Planners agree that the priority is to arrive at a time, date and venue for the wedding and reception. Once this is accomplished, the rest can begin to fall into place. It's not uncommon for popular places to be booked a year in advance, including venues like parks, botanical gardens and arboretums that have a built-in green vibe. The fees charged go into sustaining those eco-friendly places and very little needs to be added in the way of decorations.

GREAT PERFORMANCES, an environmentally conscious caterer in New York City, has come up with its own "100-mile" menu—using as much food as possible that is grown and produced within that radius. It also owns Katchkie Farm in upstate New York which produces naturally grown



GREAT PERFORMANCES uses centerpieces made of wheat grass and sunflowers, with nametags made from plantable wildflower seed paper, all atop recycled / reclaimed farm tables. Vibrant cucumber and watermelon waters add a Technicolor touch.

Photo credit: Bride photo by Michael Diehl

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produce and fruit for the operation. And, as founder and CEO Liz Neumark points out: "You don't have to go all-organic to serve natural, eco-friendly food at your wedding. Local farmers can be a good choice even if they aren't 'organic': some companies practice sustainable farming but haven't gone through the process to get the necessary certification."

Stella Rank, senior event and wedding director at GREAT PERFORMANCES, says, "It's very gratifying to work with couples who want to begin their lives together in an environmentally conscious way and to help them achieve their goals." One of GREAT PERFORMANCE'S signatures is to create beautiful centerpieces out of fresh fruits and vegetables that are given away to the guests in biodegradable/reusable bags.

Many of the most successful caterers and venues are able to provide a growing list of eco/green practices that reduce energy use, including an array of tips for weddings and receptions, starting with the invitation. Many couples are not sending out traditional heavy-stock, five-piece extravaganzas and are instead using e-mail, which would probably not thrill Emily Post but definitely cuts down on the carbon footprint. Couples can also create their own custom-designed web sites to provide directions, keep track of RSVP's, inform guests about eco-friendly gifts they would like to receive or skip presents entirely and ask that donations be made to environmental causes. If paper invitations are used, they is a variety of products using biodegradable papers and

inks, with or without seeds that can be planted after the wedding.

The selection of wedding gowns also comes into play. Brides are electing to wear dresses worn by their mothers or grandmothers or buying recycled dresses from resale shops. Even top designers such as Vera Wang are offering dresses made from eco-friendly fabrics. Before this, the brides' only alternatives were dresses made of cotton or hemp, sometimes giving them the appearance of a cross between Ophelia and a Druid high priestess.

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GREAT PERFORMANCES
Senior Event and Wedding Director

Whether using soy candles and biodegradable invitations will save the planet, or not, is anybody's guess, although every little bit helps. But these successful leaders in the field have found that they can do well by doing good whether or not they're 100 percent pure.

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