



# This Green Life

A Journal of Sorts



## CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

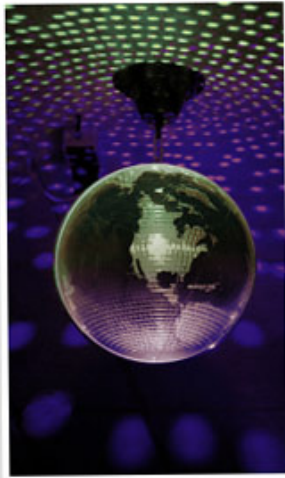
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I recently attended a beautiful wedding -- my niece's. The outward display, from the dresses to the flowers, was lovely, but what made the event truly special was the way it reflected the values of the bride and groom. Not only did the ceremony include their personal takes

on traditional rituals, the food at the party was strictly vegetarian in keeping with the way they live.

Years ago, my mother explained to me that hosting a wedding was like having people to your home, even if you staged it in a catering hall.

Therefore, you shouldn't do anything in the hall that wouldn't be kosher at home. She meant it literally, as she kept kosher, but also figuratively, and I got the point. A party to celebrate a major life event that violated my beliefs would be a sad affair indeed. Conversely, a party that embodied those beliefs would be the most meaningful kind I could give.



I've been mulling this over as I plan my son's bar mitzvah for the fall. Even on a modest scale, the party could consume a huge amount of resources, which wouldn't be exactly kosher for an environmentalist like me.

Think about it. At the celebration, small by most people's standards with under a hundred guests, we'll spend four hours eating and drinking. Four hours! And

there will be printed invitations prior to the party, flowers and decorations at it, travel by out-of-towners and, oh yes, a chocolate fountain for the kids. Just imagine if it were a big affair. The total impact could equal weeks of daily living, possibly months.

Of course, it would be easy enough to eliminate the impact by eliminating the party, but that would prevent us from sharing our happiness with the people we love best. And that's certainly not the point.

No, it's to celebrate, joyfully, without being unnecessarily wasteful. There are, I've discovered, many ways to do that. Here are some that apply not just to our bar mitzvah, but to any kind of bash, including a wedding:

### Food

Find a caterer or restaurant that will prepare your food with local, seasonal ingredients. Ideally, the food should be organic as well. Serve free-range, grass-fed meat if you can afford it or one plant-based entree, made special by the addition of an extravagant ingredient, such as morels. Lastly, arrange to have all the leftovers delivered to a food bank after the event. (You get double stars for that good deed.)

### Beverages

Serve organic beer and wine and organic, fair-trade coffee and tea.



**Sheryl Eisenberg**, a long-time advisor to NRDC, posts a new *This Green Life* every month. Sheryl makes her home in Tribeca (NYC), where—along with her children, Sophie and Gabby, and husband, Peter—she tries to put her environmental principles into practice. No fooling.

**Make it easy on yourself.** The process of planning a green event will go more smoothly if you hire a caterer or party planner who shares your goals, such as [The Cleaver Co.](#), a high-end catering firm in New York dedicated to "ingredient inspired cuisine."



Owner Mary Cleaver (above), a fabulous chef and old friend, explains that not only is local, sustainably grown produce better for the environment, but better-tasting, since it typically gets from farm to table in 24 hours with its natural fluids and flavors intact. When asked about her menus, she says they change in color and taste with the seasons. "That's the joy of it."

## Flowers

Follow the same rule as for food: local and organic if possible. You can also rent live decorative plants. (At our daughter's bat mitzvah a few years back, we leased potted palms for a clubby Copacabana effect.)

## Invitations

For informal events, try electronic invitations. There are a number of great services out there, such as [evite.com](http://evite.com). When sending printed invitations, use post-consumer recycled or tree-free paper. And skip the tissue paper and internal envelopes that serve no purpose.

## Rings

If the event is a wedding and you're in the market for wedding rings, shop for previously owned rings or a new one made from recycled gold.

## Favors

Kids, of course, always expect something, and who wants to disappoint them? But try not to give them throwaways. Stick to something they'll really love, like an iTunes gift certificate or organic, fair-trade chocolates. When it comes to favors for adults, well, I don't see the need, though planting trees in their names at your local park is an awfully nice idea.

## Gifts

If you're a person who already has everything, say "no gifts" on the invitation or suggest a donation to one of the charities you support. (My niece and her fiancé suggested NRDC.)

## Location and Travel

Have your event in your hometown where most of your guests live, rather than picking an exotic locale that everyone has to travel to. To compensate for whatever travel does occur, buy carbon offsets.

## Clothes

For weddings, avoid a bridesmaid uniform. Let bridesmaids choose dresses that they can wear again. (You know they'll love you for it.) Give your bridal gown a second life by donating it to a thrift shop or the Making Memories Breast Cancer Foundation. This group uses the money raised from selling donated gowns to grant wishes to people with terminal breast cancer. You can even buy your own gown from them or from a vintage shop. And there's always your mother's, if she happened to save it properly.

Admittedly, it takes extra effort to plan a green party -- or do anything the unconventional way. But when the day comes, you'll enjoy it more because you'll know it's been done the right way for you.

—Sheryl Eisenberg

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**Sheryl Eisenberg** is a web developer and writer. With her firm, Mixit Productions (<http://www.mixitproductions.com>), she brought NRDC online in 1996, designed NRDC's first websites, and continues to develop special web features for NRDC. She created and, for several years, wrote the Union of Concerned Scientists' green living column, *Greentips*, and has designed and contributed content to many non-profit sites.  
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## ONLINE RESOURCES

CO-OP AMERICA: Green Weddings (and More) - <http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/realmoney/articles/celebrations.cfm>  
GRIST: Nice Day for a Green Wedding - <http://www.grist.org/advice/possessions/2003/05/08/>  
ORGANIC WEDDINGS: Resource Directory - <http://organicweddings.com/resources/index.html>  
EVITE.COM: Send Free Invitations - <http://www.evite.com/pages/invitations/invite.jsp>  
I DO FOUNDATION: Your Charity Registry - <http://www.idofoundation.org/welcome/registries/donationregistry.html>  
GREEN KARAT: Responsible Jewelry - <http://greenkarat.com/>  
ORGANIC BOUQUET: Organic Flowers - <http://www.organicbouquet.com/>  
MAKING MEMORIES: Brides Against Breast Cancer Gowns - [http://www.makingmemories.org/brides\\_against\\_breast\\_cancer.html](http://www.makingmemories.org/brides_against_breast_cancer.html)



A Cleaver Co. "napoleon" and outdoor buffet.

## Why...

Local, organic [food](#) and [flowers](#)? To limit global warming pollution from transporting these items, keep toxic chemicals out of the environment and support local farmers and farms.

A [plant-based](#) entrée? To protect land, water and animals from the abuses of industrialized animal farming.

Organic, fair-trade [coffee](#) and [chocolate](#)? To protect rainforest and songbird habitat.

Old or recycled [gold](#)? To avoid the devastation to land, water, health and local communities from gold mining.

Tree-free or recycled [paper](#)? To save trees, of course!

No [unnecessary gifts](#) or [clothes](#)? To protect resources from overconsumption.

Minimize [travel](#)? To limit global warming pollution.

Buy [carbon offsets](#)? To make up for the global warming pollution you can't avoid.

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