

# How Green Was My Wedding

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KATE Harrison's idea of a fairy tale wedding goes something like this:



C. M. Glover for The New York Times

Organic wedding bells will ring out in a scenic trail area for Kate Harrison and Barry Muchnick.



Allen Brisson-Smith for The New York Times

Joshua Houdek and Kristi Papenfuss.

Gather more than 150 friends and relatives at an organic farm for a prewedding day of hikes and environmental tours.

Calculate the mileage guests will travel and offset their carbon dioxide emissions by donating to programs that plant trees or preserve rain forests.

Use hydrangeas, berries and other local and seasonal flowers for her bouquet and the decorations, instead of burning up fuel transporting flowers from faraway farms. Design an organic autumnal menu (same reason). Find a vintage dress to avoid the waste of a wedding gown that will never be worn again.

“It’s well worth it to start your life together in a way that’s in line with your values and beliefs,” said Ms. Harrison, 28, a graduate student at [Yale](#), who is to marry in October. “You don’t want this event that is supposed to start your life together to come at the expense of the environment or workers in another country.”

Call Ms. Harrison the anti-Bridezilla, whose wedding is all about the planet, rather than “all about me.” People in the wedding business say the eco-friendly or “green” wedding has arrived, its appeal having expanded to spur a mini-industry of stores and Web sites offering couples biodegradable plates made of sugar cane fiber and flowers grown according to sustainable farming practices.

The quality and choice of products has so steadily improved that the green concept is spreading to other kinds of parties, allowing hosts to embrace the earth without sacrificing style, party planners and others say.

“People are making purchasing decisions based on environmental concerns,” said Gerald Prolman, the founder of [OrganicBouquet.com](#), an online organic florist. Mr. Prolman, who said his Web site has doubled its sales yearly since it began in 2001, added a wholesale business last August to meet growing demand.

“Whether it’s food or cotton or flowers,” Mr. Prolman said, “people are asking questions: How are farmworkers treated? Who produced the product? How is the environment affected in that process?”

Eric Fenster, an owner of Back to Earth, an organic catering company in Berkeley, said that when he started his business in 2001, his clients consisted almost exclusively of social justice and environmental nonprofit groups. But that market has expanded to make weddings a third of his business.

And few events offer as many opportunities to say “I care” than a wedding, whose average cost is \$25,000 to \$30,000. Bridal magazines, too, have recognized the trend, and a new online site, [Portovert.com](#), made its appearance last month, catering to “eco-savvy brides and grooms.”

MILLIE MARTINI BRATTEN, the editor in chief of Brides magazine, said that over the last five years the interest in green weddings has blossomed from a desire to incorporate a few green elements, like a vegan menu, to making sure the entire celebration won’t contribute to the depletion of natural resources. This may include finding halls that recycle, hiring caterers who use

locally grown ingredients, decorating with potted plants that can be transplanted and using soy-based candles, rather than those of petroleum-based wax.

“If anything, it makes the wedding even more meaningful,” said Ms. Martini Bratten, whose magazine’s February-March issue features a planning guide for a green wedding.

Today, some in the eco-business note, even the honeymoon can be green without roughing it. “You used to have to go camping,” said Ted Ning, the executive director of the Lohas Journal, a resource guide for businesses that serve the environmentally conscious market. “Now you have these amazing luxurious spas in Africa or Fiji. You can look at different animals while getting a massage in a tree.”

But can weddings really make a dent in [global warming](#), particularly if the couple then set out on an emission-spewing trans-Atlantic flight for the honeymoon?

Janet Larsen, the director of research at the Earth Policy Institute, an environmental research group in Washington, said that every little bit helps. “All the actions add up,” she said. “Anything individuals can do to reduce their overall environmental footprint can make a difference.” Joshua Houdek, 32, and Kristi Papenfuss, 35, are planning a “zero waste” wedding for 250 guests in August. It will take place on a farm and include compostable plates and utensils, organic and fair trade-certified food, locally brewed beer and organic wine and wedding rings that are “100 percent reclaimed, recycled, ecologically responsible gold,” said Mr. Houdek, who works as a [Sierra Club](#) organizer in Minneapolis.

In lieu of traditional gifts, Mr. Houdek and Ms. Papenfuss, an elementary school teacher, plan to ask guests to sign up for renewable energy and reforestation projects to counteract their energy consumption or to donate to the Sierra Club or other environmental groups.

The couple doesn’t think it’s too much to ask. “We’re not forcing them,” Mr. Houdek stressed, though Ms. Papenfuss said that some people have been surprised at the elements that are making an appearance at their wedding.

“We’ve had a few people say ‘What?’ when we talk about biodegradable forks that are potato-based,” she said. ‘What do you mean forks made out of potato?’ ”

For her wedding, Ms. Harrison, who is working on a law degree and a master’s in environmental management, and her fiancé, Barry Muchnick, 33, also a graduate student at Yale, plan to treat

guests to a rehearsal barbecue dinner at an organic farm in Garrison, N.Y. The next day's ceremony is to take place at Castle Rock, a state-owned 19th-century castle in a scenic trail area, followed by the reception at a golf club, whose restaurant serves [organic food](#).

The couple are looking for shuttle buses that run on biodiesel fuel to move guests between sites, and Ms. Harrison is making pottery for her guests to take home as party favors. It all sounds like more work and expense than the traditional wedding. While Mr. Ning of Lohas Journal noted that going organic often means paying up to 20 percent more because many products come from small farms that receive no government subsidies, some brides noted that a wedding at a farm is more economical than at a hotel or hall.



A green wedding guide in Brides magazine.

“It doesn’t have to be any more or any less expensive,” Ms. Papenfuss said.

Some couples make tradeoffs so they can afford to go green. Sarah Minick, 29, an environmental planner in the Bay Area, and Siddhartha Mitra, 27, a doctoral student at the University of California at San Francisco, kept their wedding last July on the small side, about 75 guests, so they could offer an organic menu, which they said cost about 10 percent more than traditional food. The couple had their ceremony and reception in a natural setting that required few decorations, the University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley. They went less green on the favors, though: they gave non-native tropical plants because they thought them more beautiful than locally grown varieties and felt their guests would enjoy them more, Mr. Mitra said.

“We’re really happy with how it turned out,” the bridegroom said. “It reflected us.”

The environmentally conscious party concept is spreading. Marriott International will soon announce deals with [organicbouquet.com](#) and other vendors to make organic flowers available to customers for events, starting in the spring, said Laurie Goldstein, a spokeswoman for the hotel chain. Ms. Goldstein, who said the demand was driven by corporate meeting planners seeking to

be more socially responsible, called organic flowers “the first step” to offering all-green events, including organic food and organic cotton tablecloths.

Even Hollywood is jumping on the bandwagon. For the Golden Globes last month, E! Entertainment partnered with the Environmental Media Association as hosts to a Golden Green after-party, including napkins printed with energy-saving tips. The organizers also committed themselves to planting a tree for each of the 800-plus guests.

For private parties, as for weddings, Ms. Martini Bratten advises couples that no matter how well intentioned, they should not appear to be coercing guests into contributing to a cause. Asking them to buy a certain gift or donate to a specific group is fine as long as that is conveyed as just one choice, she said. “It shouldn’t be a requirement,” she said. “Imposing your wishes on someone else is crossing the line.”

What about the host who wants to send guests home with energy-efficient light bulbs?

Many couples said that more often than not their friends and families want to make a difference, too. “I have a couple of relatives who think some of it is unnecessary, but they appreciate the mind-set behind it,” Ms. Harrison said. “It’s a huge opportunity for people to make choices that can effect change. It’s one of the biggest contributions you can make as a young adult.”