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## socially conscious yet elegant wedding planning

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You want a wedding that oozes elegance, but you don't want your indulgences to negatively impact the planet. A modern wedding doesn't have to be a choice between wanton and wasteful or fair-minded and forgettable. Nearly all aspects of the event can be executed in a sophisticated, eco-chic way.

"Eco-chic means doing good with style," says Emily Anderson, author of *Eco-Chic Weddings* and *Eco-Chic Home*. It's not about making the occasion completely carbon neutral and using 100 percent recycled materials. Even one or two eco-minded decisions can impact your event's effects on the environment.

### set the scene

Choosing the venue often marks the first decision that a bride and groom make together concerning their wedding. If possible, have your reception and ceremony in one location to minimize travel-related emissions. When possible, providing your guests with transportation to and from the event is not only better for the environment, but also logistically easier for everyone.

Donnie Brown, Style Network star and author of *Donnie Brown Weddings*, suggests holding daytime weddings in a space with ample natural light. "One of the most expensive things you can do is

run all the power and all the lights," says Brown. Cutting down on wattage means consuming less energy.

Unlikely wedding venues seamlessly weave eco-sound practices into elegant settings. Many not-for-profit museums, zoos and gardens offer stunning rental facilities. An event at such an institution guarantees a unique affair and supports the organization's good works.

### write it right

Invitations set the tone for your event, and you want the first impressions of your wedding to be elegant, not earthy. Begin your wedding on an eco-chic note

by choosing the right stationer. It is best to go with a triple bottom line company: an organization that focuses not only on making a profit, but also on doing good for people and for the planet.

As with most wedding line items, when it comes to stationery, oftentimes the choice that positively impacts the environment will also decrease your expenses. The jury is still out on whether email correspondence is acceptable etiquette, but even without electronic communication, you can cut down on paper waste. Can the accommodations card be printed on the back of the directions card? Do you really need a printed menu for each guest? By evaluating what is really important, you can have a big effect on the planet.

Andrea Solomon, wedding and event planner in the greater Detroit area, recommends using paper made from an unlikely material. "Plantable paper" has annual and perennial wildflower seeds embedded into it," Solomon explains. After the wedding is over, guests can bury their invitations and escort cards in soil and watch them grow into beautiful flowers that will be reminders of your event for months and years to come. Plus, plantable paper doubles as favors, reducing your footprint, expense, and hassle.

Don't overlook your ink choice. Find a printer that uses ink made from soy instead of petroleum, which is harder to remove during the de-inking process of recycling. Your guests won't know the difference, but the planet will.

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### closest buds

A socially conscious bride should look for flowers that are in season and locally grown. Imported plants may be sprayed with artificial scents, which means that you and your guests could be touching and breathing in harmful chemicals. Plus, fresh flora naturally looks and smells better than buds flown in from across the globe.

In addition to being ecologically sound, going local is almost always the most socially responsible choice, too. “Most of the flowers imported to the United States come from water-scarce areas,” explains Isabelle Fredborg, a corporate responsibility consultant who assists companies with ethical issues. In such cases, irrigation takes water from streams and lakes, limiting the community’s ability to get the water that they need to grow crops, keep cattle and stay hygienic. If your heart is set on using imported flowers, make sure they are Fair Trade Certified, which ensures that the growers are treated with respect and paid a reasonable wage.

### clean plates

Ethically sourced proteins are a great way to make a subtle statement about your social conscience. When choosing the menu, opt for fish and game that are not threatened species. Check with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for the most current information.

Kate Harrison, CEO of Green Bride Guide and author of *The Green Bride*

*Guide: How to Plan an Earth-Friendly Wedding on Any Budget*, suggests working with your caterer to stock the menu with local, organic ingredients. “The average distance from farm to table in the United States is 5,000 miles,” Harrison



explains. Going local not only cuts down on your event’s carbon footprint, but by using the freshest ingredients, your guests will enjoy a delectable, flavorful meal.

### inspired attire

Before you shop for your dress, think about the textiles you want to wear. Whether you are buying off-the-rack or having a gown custom-made, choose eco-friendly materials like peace silk, hemp silk and organic cotton.

Be thoughtful and informed when choosing your designer. Many mainstream and boutique labels work with artisan embroiderers, helping women in underprivileged countries become finan-

cially independent. By wearing a gown from an ethically sound company, you’ll have a dress that you feel good in and feel good about wearing.

### fresh loot

Favors that guests love won’t go to waste, so for a guaranteed crowd pleaser, go edible. To support the community and the environment, send your guests home with locally sourced goodies like your favorite bakery’s signature cupcakes or organic honey from a local bee farm. “Whatever you choose as your favor, make it indigenous to your area,” suggests Melissa Phillips, professional bridal consultant and owner of *Simply Perfect by Melissa* in Chicago.

If you’re not set on tangible take-aways, consider donating to your favorite charity instead. As recent groom Nathan Hand recalls, “Instead of a small gift, my wife and I put a card at each seat that listed three charities and read, ‘In lieu of a favor, do us one and select a charity below. We’ll make a gift in your honor to those in need.’” A simple note explaining the donation will give your loved ones insight into the issues that are important to you and increase exposure for worthy organizations.

Overall, being eco-chic should not lead to unnecessary wedding stress. “Every choice makes a difference,” says Harrison. “There are 2.2 million weddings a year. If every bride does a couple of things to be greener, it all adds up.” ■