



something Borrowed,
something Green

Michelle and Joe Castle's Bellevue home provided the perfect setting for their eco-conscious wedding. Photo by Thia Konig

The biggest day of your life is also likely to have the largest impact on the environment. The average annual carbon footprint of a U.S. household is 12 tons. A weekend wedding in the Wood River Valley can easily set the Earth back 17 tons.

How to throw a green wedding in the Wood River Valley.

By Jennifer Tuohy
Photos by Thia Konig and Dev Khalsa

As with all green endeavors, it's the little things that count. Attention to detail and careful planning can cut your wedding's carbon and dollar costs. The wedding industry is slowly walking down the aisle of eco-consciousness but, as with many industries, going green is a grassroots movement. It's the vendors who are helping brides to think globally. "There aren't a lot of brides asking for a green wedding,

yet. But I try to push them that way," said Taylor Sturges, of Taylor'd Events in Ketchum. Sturges finds plenty of areas to conserve. "Everything is rented, recycled or reused," she said.

But the biggest obstacle is the perceived cost. When even a budget affair sets you back \$20,000, it's hard to fork up the extra dough for locally grown lamb. But if you have the time and energy to be creative and if you can sacrifice a few extravagances to help benefit the environment, a green wedding is within reach. We talked to local brides and vendors and gathered these terra-friendly tips for throwing a green Wood River Valley wedding.

Prepare your paper

Cut down on unnecessary paper products or opt for recycled varieties. “The quality is comparable now, and there are a lot more options than there used to be,” said Michelle Castle, a recent bride and owner of Butterfly Designs stationery. Castle printed her own Bellevue wedding invitations on recycled paper and did so locally, saving on shipping and packaging.

Bear in mind, greener often means smaller. “The average invite is super thick, with lots of paper and envelopes, and usually not printed on recycled paper,” said Molly Fox, of Ketchum’s Environmental Resource Center. Fox used the internet for her Hailey wedding. “There are numerous sites, such as theknot.com, where you can publish all the information your guests need. You can also collect RSVP’s online.” That saves not only trees but dollars too.

Reducing your paper consumption works in all areas of your event. “Start with what you ultimately want, not even thinking about if it’s green or not, and then find a way to make it happen,” said Castle. Instead of a traditional guest book, Sarah and Zach Latham chose a pair of antique wooden skis for guests to sign at their Galena Lodge nuptials. “We hung them over our mantel at home.” Castle substituted wine bottles for table numbers for her June affair. “Once the party got started, the guests opened up the bottle, drank the wine and then we recycled the bottles.”



PHOTO BY THIA KONIG

Love your location



PHOTO BY DEV KHALSA

A major way to cut back on your wedding’s carbon footprint is in the way guests travel. “We asked guests to use buses that we arranged or carpool to Galena Lodge,” said Sarah Latham, whose company, White Canvas Designs, specializes in finding environmentally friendly materials for its clients. The bride traveled the last mile to the meadow ceremony by horse and cart. Molly Fox encouraged guests who lived nearby to ride their bikes to their nuptials. “We have pictures of all the bikes parked in front of our house.”

Flying to Idaho is a hard carbon cost to avoid, but you can offset that impact. “We made a donation at carbonfund.org,” said Latham. Visit nativeenergy.com to calculate your wedding’s footprint, and then choose from a variety of ways to offset (a means of taking responsibility for your impact and channeling funds into some positive projects). If you can’t afford offsets, ask guests to contribute in lieu of gifts.

Consider hosting your wedding in a LEED-certified building or in the space of an organization you support, such as the Sun Valley Center for the Arts or the Sawtooth Botanical Garden. The greenest option is outdoors, and a meadow setting equals natural light, so no wasted electricity. Wherever you choose, take care of it. Be sure to set up recycling locations for all disposable items, and remember—if you pack it in, pack it out.

Enjoy eco-conscious edibles



PHOTO BY THIA KONIG

Many green choices are affordable choices. But when it comes to organic artisan food, going green can be costly. “Everything costs more because it costs the growers and producers more to do it,” said Ketchum caterer Judith McQueen. But if conscientiously grown food truly moves you, the extra expense is justified. The obvious place to start saving is by trimming the guest list: Less food equals less expense.

Castle chose local, organically grown food with not just the Earth in mind but her guests’ experience, too. She wanted them to taste the fruits of her new home. “We used Lava Lake lamb and produce from local growers. The menu said where each item had come from, which helped our guests feel connected with the location.”

McQueen feels passionately that choosing local food results in a higher quality. “Lettuce fresh out of the ground won’t wilt very fast and tastes fantastic. You pay more, but the product is superior.” Choosing local also cuts on waste. “I know when a wedding is coming, so I can get in touch with my growers in Fairfield and Hagerman and say, ‘I’d really like to do baby carrots,’ and they can plant for me.”

If organic catering is out of your budget, consider a potluck wedding. Ask guests to bring locavore dishes; they will feel connected to the event and you may be surprised at the quality of your spread. Latham enlisted her friends’ help. Instead of a traditional frosted, three-tiered cake, they whipped up scrumptious apple pies.

Favor fruitful favors

Does anyone really need a plastic magnet displaying the happy couple’s entwined initials? When planning gifts for your guests, think useful, not cute. From trees to charities, there are countless ways to remind your loved ones of your day and help the planet. “Make a donation in their honor to a charitable organization,” said Molly Fox. Take it one step further and consider a local charity such as the ERC to provide guests with a lasting connection to your locale.

Something homemade says personal and responsible. Latham poured Idaho honey into glass jars and left her guests with a taste of the state and a homespun touch. Castle gave out handmade note cards displaying different Sun Valley scenes she had designed herself. “I used recycled paper, plus it’s something that can be put to use, not just an object that sits on a mantelpiece.”

Castle also skipped the traditional welcome baskets and chose handy cotton totes. She popped plastic water bottles into each one with a “Please Refill Me” note attached.

One of Taylor Sturges’ brides gave donations to The Nature Conservancy in her guests’ names and another distributed packets of seeds to grow a little garden.



PHOTO BY DEV KHALSA

Design your décor

Conscientious choices for flowers and favors can save money and resources. Many cut flowers are imported from developing countries, where pesticide use is high and labor conditions and wages are low. Choose a florist who specializes in organically grown, in-season, local flowers. Then recycle them. Sturges takes leftover bouquets to Hailey's Blaine Manor nursing home or St. Luke's hospital where they can be enjoyed afresh.

Sturges also advises clients to grow their own centerpieces; a pretty, planted pot will last longer and guests can take them home. For her August 2006 wedding at Redfish Lake, Alysia Heyer incorporated the surroundings into her decor. "We went to Stanley and cut down dead lodgepole pine." After hollowing out the centers, she placed tea lights in each one and arranged them in a container growing with succulents and thyme. At the end of the evening, she passed her centerpieces on to another bride.

"Be aware of the environment you are having your wedding in," said Castle. "Think what's out there that you could use." During a stroll along the Big Wood, Castle was struck by the beauty of the riverbed. So for her centerpieces she purchased local river rock in bulk and placed them in water-filled vases with a candle floating on top. A simple bouquet of organic white roses completed the elegant display. As an added bonus, she reused the rock. "It's throughout my home. Every time I look at it, it brings a smile to my face."

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Photos by Kristen Schultz

TAYLOR STURGES

208 · 725 · 2027

TAYLOR@TAYLORDEVENTSSV.COM



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