



June 25, 2007

## Eco-friendly weddings keep sprouting up

**By Janet Kornblum, USA TODAY**

Their wedding invitations will be printed on recycled paper. The food they serve will be locally grown, and so will the wedding flowers. She will donate her dress after she uses it.

And when Carla Gunn and Ryan Lents of Chicago say "I do," the rings they slip on each other's fingers will be made from recycled gold.

Love, American-style circa 2007, increasingly means couples are saying "I do" with a social conscience. A growing number say they will use recycled wedding supplies, eat organic or locally grown food or even buy carbon offsets — that is, give money to organizations that promise to reduce greenhouse gases by, for instance, planting trees to counter the effect of guests creating pollution by traveling to the wedding.

"A lot of people are having green weddings these days," says Christa Vagnozzi, senior editor at online wedding site The Knot. "It's not just environmentalists. Being green is going a lot more mainstream."

Those who are making the effort insist this isn't just the latest fad.

"Our goal is to plan an event that is as light on the Earth as possible," says Lents, 25, a landscape architect. Having an environmentally friendly wedding "is part of an intentional and a deeply rooted desire to have my decisions at least be neutral to the Earth rather than destructive or wasteful."

It's "not just about the wedding for us," says Gunn, 25. "It's about how we are going to live after the wedding. We want our wedding to symbolize what our marriage is going to be about."

Jessica Rios, a California wedding consultant who specializes in eco-friendly weddings, has noticed an "immeasurable boost" in interest in the past year.

Couples "live day to day with an awareness of how their choices impact life on Earth, and they don't want their wedding day to be any different," she says.

But how green can a wedding really be? "You of course can make gestures in the direction of having a green wedding," says Rebecca Mead, author of *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding*. "You can have locally grown food. You can have your invitations made on recycled paper. You can have organic flowers. The wedding industry increasingly is providing a service — ways of taking what we think of as standard pieces of the wedding and giving them kind of an ecological spin."

But she adds, "You have to ask the question: How much of this is actually helping the environment, compared with, say, having a significantly smaller wedding or having no wedding at all? The greatest thing you can possibly do would be to go to City Hall and not have a party and not spend all that cost and energy."

Don't tell that to Lents and Gunn.

They already know that if they're falling short of going totally green, it's in the guest department. They ended up inviting 300 people to their Sept. 22 wedding — all of whom will have to travel in cars or planes to get there. "We failed miserably on that front," Lents says. But "in a way, that kind of gave us extra motivation: If we are failing on this particular point, we try to be creative" on others.

So instead of holding the wedding in Chicago, where they live, it's in Indianapolis, which is where they grew up and is more central for most of their relatives. It should cut down on travel.

Having a wedding that produces no carbon is virtually impossible, says Eric Carlson, executive director of Carbonfund.org, a non-profit company that sells carbon offsets.

Doing just about anything, from wearing clothes to eating organic cereal, has an impact on the environment, he says. "The only way to be carbon neutral is to be dead.

"You can use recycled materials, eat low on the food chain, promote carpooling. But you're still going to have a carbon footprint. That's where carbon offsets come in."

### **Green role models**

You're also setting an example, says Alexandra Kennaugh of the National Resources Defense Council. "All of those people who are coming to celebrate with you are learning the kind of values and commitment that you have, and they might be encouraged to do something in their lives."

But having a green wedding may not be as simple as it sounds.

For Rusty Carlson and Mark Hedin of Alameda, Calif., the impetus came after seeing *An Inconvenient Truth*, the documentary showing former vice president Al Gore talking about global warming. They had already begun planning the wedding, but Carlson went online to search for green alternatives.

"It was very difficult to find nice stuff," says Carlson, 36. "We're not hippies. A lot of the stuff is pretty hippie-ish. It's not the look and feel we are going for."

Carlson, who has a background in graphic design, finally found the invitations she wanted: The paper is embedded with wildflower seeds, so the invitation can be torn up and planted after the wedding.

For the reception, a catered barbecue with a Western theme, she'll use plates, cups and silverware that are biodegradable and can be turned into compost. There will be no chicken or beef, just salmon and "as many organic foods as possible," she says. They'll serve local kegged beers and locally made vodka. Tables will be decorated with organic herbs and flowers planted in recycled cans. And party favors will be a food item made by Carlson and her mom.

"It's not going to be 100% green," she says. "It may not even be 80%." But "any little thing is a good direction to go in."

Lents and Gunn also had to make a few concessions to tradition.

"Carla and I were lobbying for the vegetarian options because they were just delicious," Lents says, but "that was one thing that got voted down on by our parents. They've been pretty supportive and flexible with the ideas we've had up to this point. We had to kind of compromise on that one."

To supplement paper invitations, they set up a website where guests could get details such as directions. But they know not everyone goes online; grandparents will get the news verbally.

**Green — as in money**

As virtuous as they may feel, couples need to be careful not to get preachy, experts say.

"Any time someone tries to push their beliefs on you, it can be annoying," Rios says. "It's no different when a couple has a wedding, and it feels like they're trying to force you to believe things the way they do." But "that actually has never happened with any of my clients."

Green weddings also can come at a premium.

Weddings already are expensive: The average cost is \$28,000, says The Knot. But choices such as organic food can up the ante even more.

Some couples say it's worth it.

Dana Papke, 32, and Morgan Waters, 37, of Sacramento say organic is the way they eat regularly. So it makes sense to give guests the option at a wedding.

"We wanted people to eat the way they would eat if they were coming to our home," Waters says.

**Putting on a green wedding requires couples to think about options at each step of the way, says Marilyn Oliveira, senior editor at WeddingChannel.com, another wedding site owned by The Knot.**

**Today, couples may have to make an extra effort to make choices that in the future will be second nature. "With so much focus now on trying to save the environment and being more eco-friendly in general, I do think that this isn't just a trend," Oliveira says. "I think it's going to grow into something that people just naturally think about when they're planning their weddings."**

**Think recycled, organic**

Products used to help create green weddings:

**The alternative**

**Its virtues**

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[greenfieldpaper.com](http://greenfieldpaper.com)

### Recycled and non-wood-based papers for invitations

Invitations from Green Field paper company are embedded with wildflower seeds and printed with soy inks on non-wood recycled paper. The back of each card contains instructions. Prices vary. The handmade plantable fern invitation, for instance, costs \$325 for 50 invitations and \$150 for RSVP cards. Cala Lily invites start at \$325 for 50 invitations and \$150 for the reply card. More information: [greenfieldpaper.com](http://greenfieldpaper.com).



Dustin Alexander,  
[threadheadcreations.com](http://threadheadcreations.com)

### Natural-fiber wedding dresses

Several companies supply dresses and suits made from natural fibers such as silk and hemp. The Grace dress is by Threadhead Creations, [threadheadcreations.com](http://threadheadcreations.com), made from hemp and silk. Prices begin at \$485; a train is extra.



Leslie Smith Jr., USA  
TODAY

### Dishes that can be thrown into the compost bin

Eating utensils from World Centric, [worldcentric.org](http://worldcentric.org), are made from renewable materials such as sugarcane fiber, corn and potatoes.



[greenkarat.com](http://greenkarat.com)

### Wedding rings made from recycled precious metal

The metal in rings from green Karat, [www.greenkarat.com](http://www.greenkarat.com), can be recycled along with a recycled natural diamond. The diamond ring is \$1,675; \$2,125 for a ring with a natural diamond.