



Rethinking Your Simcha:

A Guide to Environmentally Friendly Choices for Events and Parties

Mazel tov on your upcoming *simcha*! The goal of this guide is to help our congregation think about how to celebrate a joyous occasion while keeping our natural world in mind. The idea of “reduce, reuse, recycle” is a guiding principle to inform many of our decisions as we welcome, feed and entertain guests. In planning your special event, ask yourself:

- What can we do differently to lessen the environmental impact of our celebration?
- How much paper are we using for invitations and responses?
- Could plants or reusable items take the place of cut flowers?
- Can leftover food be given to Second Helpings?
- Can we order food that is organic or produced locally?

We understand that sometimes going the more eco-friendly route means going the more expensive route. Cost is certainly a major factor in party planning, and there may be some great ideas that put too much strain on your budget. However, perhaps you can still find a way to incorporate a few green ideas into your special event and still have a positive effect on the environment. If all of us make conscious choices to reduce, reuse and recycle it will make a big difference.

As we celebrate the milestones of our loved ones, let’s think not only of this special day in their lives, but also of the future earth that they and their children will inherit. We can make a difference, one party at a time!



– **Congregation Beth Shalom’s Social Action Committee**

An Important Disclaimer:

Please note that throughout this guide, we list a number of different websites, stores, vendors and other product or service providers, as well as a number of nonprofit organizations. We have compiled this information based on many sources, but members of the committee have not worked with all of these people or organizations, shopped at all of these sites, or used all of these products. *A mention in this guide in no way implies an endorsement from this committee or anyone else at Congregation Beth Shalom.* Please do your own “due diligence” -- research and reference checking -- when choosing people to contract with or products to purchase for your event.

Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) is one of Judaism's core values. After all, according *midrash*, when God showed Adam all of the beauty of the Garden of Eden, God said, "See my works, how lovely they are, how fine they are. All I have created, I created for you. Take care not to destroy my world, for if you ruin it, there is no one to come after you to put it right" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7). As a congregation, we must understand that we are stewards of the earth.

Congregation Beth Shalom's Social Action Committee, decided to create this guide in order to provide resources for congregants and to encourage people to 'green' their lifecycle events. We hope that you will enjoy the resources contained in this **Green Simcha Guide**, and will use them to add meaning to your own celebrations.



TOPIC	Page
Location / Transportation	3
Stationery	4
Clothing & Kippot	6
Food / Food Service	7
Decorations/Centerpieces/Favors	9
Gifts	10
Giving Back	11
Additional Resources	12

Not every suggestion in this guide will be appropriate for every event. Consider this your starting point, intended to spark ideas for making your *simcha* a little more "green."



Location/Transportation

One of the major considerations with the greatest environmental impact is the decision about where to hold an event, as well as where to house guests.

- In the case of a wedding, consider holding the wedding at whatever geographic location the majority of attendees live. For example, if most of the family members and friends of the couple from high school and college live on the East Coast—have an East Coast wedding. This will greatly reduce the collective travel expenses and energy consumption required for travel to and from the wedding.
- For a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, consider hosting your luncheon or evening event at the synagogue to reduce travel costs.
- If your event is off-site, encourage guests to carpool and arrange a van/bus for the kids. Try:
 - Cooper-Atlanta (info@cooper-atlanta.com) for shuttles. OR
 - Gerald McGinnis (678- 641-1412) for school buses. OR
 - Kevin McTigue at First Group Charter (Kevin.Mctigue@firstgroup.com) for buses
- Encourage your guests to use public transportation, if possible, to get to and from your event. Provide the necessary local information, such as routes and schedules of MARTA buses and trains (<http://www.itsmarta.com/schedules-maps.aspx>), to allow them to do so.
- When selecting a hotel or function hall, inquire about the facility's environmentally friendly options such as recycling, reduction of waste and energy efficient services.
- The **Green Hotels Association** (www.greenhotels.com) lists their environmentally-friendly properties. **Environmentally Friendly Hotels** (www.environmentallyfriendlyhotels.com) allows you to check out hotels that have made some kind of commitment to protecting the environment.



All Things Stationery

A great deal of paper is used for invitations, thank you notes and other means of communication for an event. There are ways to minimize the use of paper or make paper choices that minimize the environmental impact of your event.

Electronic Invitations

- If you have the computer skills you have the option to send and receive your invitation electronically. Programs such as **Evite** (www.evite.org) or Paperless Post (www.paperlesspost.com) can be used to reach your entire guest list. This approach certainly saves paper and postage.
- Use e-mail for “save the date” information, possibly even directing people to a web page that you (or a friend or family member) set up with all of the event details and logistics. Or, consider scanning those beautiful invitations/announcements and sending them electronically to those who can receive them that way, again reducing the number that need to be printed and transported.

Electronic Thank You Notes

You also can evaluate whether there are some gifts that you could acknowledge with an electronic thank you note. You can explain that you are using the internet to cut down on your use of paper. However, you will have to gauge your crowd on this one. There’s a solid place in society for a handwritten thank you note from a grateful gift recipient. Environmentalism is very important, but this may not be the place to unintentionally offend people who have just given your child a lovely gift.

Paper Reduction

Be aware of how many different pieces of paper you are using. For example:

- Can the map of the event be printed on the back of the invitation rather than using a separate card? Do you need that extra sheet of tissue paper that sometimes is included? Is it important that the envelope has a lining or that you use an inner and an outer envelope? Can the response card be a postcard instead of a card with an envelope? Can you skip the response card altogether and just ask people to send you an electronic response?
- If your event is in a more formal setting, ask the person who will be coordinating the event whether the venue typically puts a listing of the courses at each place setting. If so, you could request that this step be skipped to save the paper.
- Consider buying the Thank You notes that fold over and become self-mailers. That way, you don’t need a card, envelope or postage.



Recycled Paper

Consider using recycled paper for invitations and/or envelopes. Many retailers have recycled paper options.

Soy-based Ink

Consider using soy-based ink when printing your invitations. Ink made from soybean oil takes less energy to make than ink made from petroleum products. In addition, soy-based ink is lower in volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and so releases far fewer of these harmful VOCs into the environment during the drying process. Moreover, soy-based ink comes from soybeans, a renewable energy source, and produces waste that is not considered hazardous, making it easier and cheaper to dispose of at the end of the printing process.

Programs

People use programs for all kinds of things at their events: identifying key people, explaining what's going on, adding supplemental readings and providing other information. This can be a very important part of the event and help your guests feel included, clued in and closer to the action. All of that being said...Consider printing on **recycled paper** and using **soy-based ink**. If you have the space in your program, let your guests know about the eco-friendly choices that you have made in planning your event. After all, the best thing that you can do with a good event idea is to pass it along!

Sample Retailers

- **Earthly Affair** (www.earthlyaffair.com) specializes in recycled and earth-friendly invitations. In Atlanta.
- **Green Field Paper Company** (<http://www.greenfieldpaper.com>) creating eco-friendly papers with a purpose since 1992. Online retailer.
- **Twisted Limbs Paperworks** (www.twistedlimbpaper.com) invitations and stationary made from handmade 100% recycled paper. Online retailer.

Clothing and Kippot



Recycling Your Outfit

If you purchase a new outfit for your special event, look for something that you can and will want to wear again. However, if the outfit is a wear-it-once kind of thing, consider selling it to a consignment store or donating it to a charity after the event. Some organizations to explore:

- Consider donating your Bar/Bat Mitzvah attire to the **Princess Project** (www.princessproject.org) or to Becca's Closet (www.beccascloset.org) which provide prom dresses and accessories to those who can't afford them.
- **Brides Against Breast Cancer** (www.bridesagainstbreastcancer.org) will resell your gown using the proceeds to educate about breast cancer and to help struggling breast cancer patients.
- If you're just looking to recycle your gown, a local wedding consignment shop is **LeDress Boutique** (www.ledressboutique.com).

Kippot

Here are some ecologically friendly alternatives to traditional *kippot*:

- **Eco Suede Kippot** (www.jessyjudaica.com/store/kippah-gallery/eco-suede) These vegan friendly, kosher alternative to suede & leather are made from recycled cardboard.
- **Circles of Life Seed Paper Kippot** (www.circlesoflife.com) are made from 100% Recycled, 100% Recyclable, 100% Biodegradable Seed Paper (100% made in the USA from all local sources). When exposed to a plant friendly environment (soil and water) a beautiful flower garden will grow from your Kippot.
- **Folded Paper Kippot** (http://www.judaiquilt.com/Easy_Paper_Fold_Jewish_Art_hats.html): Order instructions to fold your own Kippot out of almost any kind of paper. They can be recycled when done.
- Believe it or not, you can even purchase recycled *kippot* to offer your guests when they arrive for the ceremony. **Fair Trade Judaica** (www.fairtradejudaica.org) is a great resource and can point you to some vendors. Or, you can do your own internet search for recycled *kippot*.
- Consider donating your extra *kippot* after your event. Perhaps Beth Shalom can use them for Shabbat. The Breman Home might also be a grateful recipient.



All Things Food and Food Service

Consult with your Caterer

It is perfectly acceptable to ask your caterer about his/her company's environmental practices and to make it clear that it is something that you care about. You can look for a "green-minded" caterer, or at least someone who is willing to support and assist your interest in taking the environment into account when planning and celebrating your event.

Sample Local "Green-minded" Caterers to Consider:

- Parsley's Custom Catering (www.parsleys.com)
- Dulce Vegan Bakery (www.dulcevegan.com)

"Recycle" the Leftovers

We all know that Jewish celebrations must include food! It is often the case that there is much that is left over after events, and sadly, such food often gets thrown away. Often, advanced planning can prevent this kind of waste, but if it cannot be avoided, please donate your leftover food to **Second Helpings** at Temple Sinai. Our volunteers will make sure that this food is brought to people in our community who are in need.

Reuse & Recycle

Ask your caterer about reusing and recycling as many elements of the food service as possible, including recycling cooking oil, reusing plastic containers, platters and serving implements, and composting scraps of food. Often, caterers will do the greener thing when asked, but won't do it unless asked.

Go Organic

Whenever possible, ask the caterer to buy fruit, vegetables and other products from local organic farms (you can even consider what is in season while planning your menu). Choosing organic means that food purchased by your caterer on your behalf will not contain pesticides. Choosing local food means that it won't have to travel far (thus reducing environmental impact) and will support your local economy.

Eat Local and Sustainable

Look for a caterer committed to working with local family farms using sustainable agricultural techniques and producing naturally raised meat without use of growth hormones, antibiotic injections, or trough feeding. Try to use locally grown produce when it is available, fresh farm eggs, and fish caught from the ocean.



Fair Trade Coffee

Fair Trade is an organized social movement and market-based approach that aims to help producers in developing countries and promote sustainability, as well as social and environmental standards. Ask your caterer to serve fair trade coffee. There are a number of sources for this coffee, and while you are not helping your local economy, you can help a small local farmer in a coffee-growing region.



Skip Course Listings

If your event is in a more formal setting, ask the person who will be coordinating the event whether the venue typically puts a listing of the courses at each place setting. If so, you could request that this step be skipped to save the paper.

Choose Reusable Table Settings

When you can, use plates, utensils, cups, serving pieces, napkins, tablecloths, etc. that can be washed and reused. When possible, recycle any plastic items.

- Durable china is always preferable to paper goods because it avoids repeated costs of production and disposal. Less gets shipped and thrown away when using china. Washing the china uses fewer resources than creating new paper goods.
- Serving utensils are not yet earth-friendly because they are still made of plastic. Nevertheless, it is possible to find some brands that are made from a percentage of recycled post consumer plastics, addition, trays, covers and serving utensils can be sterilized and re-used, which is more earth-friendly than recycling or just throwing them away.

Compostable Table Settings

One can now purchase compostable picnic supplies/table settings. These include plates made from sugarcane, and glasses and cutlery made from corn. One can purchase these products online through companies including **World Centric** (www.worldcentric.org), **Branch Home** (www.BranchHome.com), and **Eco Products** (www.ecoproducts.com). Consider shipping costs (environmental and financial). The products themselves are considerably less expensive than the usual paper and plastic ware. They are also available at local retailers such as Costco, BJ's and Party City.

Reduce Disposables

Review all of the disposable products you plan to use. Are there places where napkins are enough (rather than little plates and napkins)? Places where you can put out serving tongs rather than individual toothpicks (food safety regulations will govern some of this, but your caterer should be able to provide some guidance)? Other places where you can eliminate extra disposables? If disposables are called for, there are more "earth-friendly" goods than traditional paper. Bamboo plates are a good option if you want something more substantial and dressy; though single use, they are made from a renewable resource and can be composted because they biodegrade fairly quickly.

Decorations/Centerpieces/Favors

Inviting people, wearing clothes, and serving food are each essential elements of a *simcha*. Things like decorations and favors are entirely optional, but can be key in setting a mood. This is an area with lots of room to make great environmental choices and still put your creative stamp on the party.



Flowers

It takes many resources to grow flowers, fertilize them, care for them while they grow and then transport them (often over great distances) just so that they can sit on tables and look pretty for a few hours. We're not underestimating the importance of having a festive or elegant table for your event's meal, but could decorations and centerpieces be made of reusable items or things with less environmental impact? Good caterers or party planners can work miracles with things like mirrors, stones, scarves and other decorative items.

- If you are using flowers, consider using fewer of them in conjunction with other more eco-friendly ideas (skip the big bouquets for a sparser, more elegant look).
- Consider finding a place ahead of time to donate them after the event and devise a plan to get them there while they are still fresh. Maybe the flowers could go to the shelter with your leftover food, or maybe there is a hospital, nursing home or senior center that would welcome such a gift. Guests also may enjoy taking them home. Plan ahead, know where you want them to go, and enlist the help of a family member or friend who can manage the pick up or transport.
- If your event occurs in the right season, you could also plan to purchase flowers grown at a local organic farm. No pesticides, limited travel distance and supporting the local farm economy...everyone wins!
- Consider using plants rather than cut flowers. Plants still have many of the environmental downsides as cut flowers, but they do live longer and in many cases can even be replanted in guests' yards. Just be sure to remember to tell your guests to take the plants with them when they go.

Centerpieces

Use centerpieces made up of things that can be donated after the event (food pantry items, toys, books, sports equipment, even personal care items for shelters or residential treatment centers). If you need some help putting this together, many party planners and caterers can help you figure out how to display these items in a beautiful or festive way. You could also opt for a very simple decorated card in the center of each table explaining that the money that you would have spent on centerpieces has been donated to an organization that you have chosen to support.

- **Jewish Family & Career Services (JF&CS)** puts together lovely baskets of non-perishable foods that are later donated. Contact: Betsy Brody at 770-677-9300.

Confetti Substitute

If you feel that you must throw something festive at a bride or Bar/Bat Mitzvah at the conclusion of a ceremony, consider using rose petals rather than using confetti or rice. It is also traditional to throw candy at many *simchas*, which children will gladly scoop up.

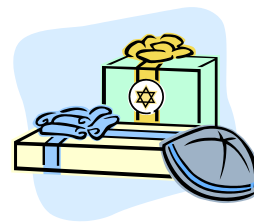
Party Favors

- Evaluate how important party favors and keepsakes are. Are you giving something that likely won't have much use and will wind up in the trash in a few days anyway? If you do want your guests to have something concrete to take away with them (besides all of those beautiful memories!), select something they will be able to use or eat. You could even consider a green-themed giveaway, such as a small seedling for guests to plant at home.
 - You can order tree seedlings from the **Georgia Forestry Commission** (<http://www.gatrees.org/Seedlings/OrderingInfo.cfm>)
- Avoid over-packaging your gifts to your guests. Think of ways to give a gift without tons of ribbon and paper that will look great for a few minutes and then hit the trashcan. Could you use some kind of reusable bag to hold party favors? If you are using a party planner or caterer, you could enlist his/her help to think this through.

Make a Donation

You could also consider skipping the favors and instead make a donation in honor of your guests to an organization that you support. Plant a tree in Israel (www.inf.org) or donate a book to a literacy project in honor of each guest, noting this donation on the seating card that guests pick up when they arrive at the party or announcing it sometime during the event festivities.

Gifts



Gift Registry

If it is appropriate for your event, register for gifts. Registering will help to ensure that you receive gifts that you like or need. This reduces waste, both because you will be able to use what you get and because you will not be driving all over the area returning gifts that you didn't really want in the first place.

- Consider creating a registry through the **I Do Foundation** (www.idofoundation.org), which facilitates partnering of gift registries with charitable non-profit foundations. A percentage of every gift purchase is donated to one's favorite charity at no extra cost to the purchaser.

Donations

If you already have most of what you need, encourage guests to make donations in your name to an organization that you care about (shelter, food pantry, hospital, environmental group, literacy/educational program, children's organization, etc.).

- One possible example is **Heifer International** (www.heifer.org), which lets you register at their website, but instead of having gifts coming to you, people in developing nations will benefit from your celebration.
- If you are hosting a shower or party, you could contact a local shelter or human service organization such as the **Community Action Center** (www.ourcac.org) to find out what that organization's current needs are (e.g. food, clothing, personal care items, towels, bedding, infant care items, cleaning supplies and so on). Then you could ask your guests to bring those items instead of gifts for you. You won't wind up with items that you don't need, and someone else will benefit from your *simcha*.

Socially Responsible Gifts

You could also take a look at **Changing the Present** (www.changingthepresent.org), a website has several ways to give socially responsible gifts and encourage your guests to do the same for you.

Wrapping

Encourage gift givers to wrap presents in reusable gift or cloth bags. Or, if it is practical and feasible, encourage guests to skip the gift-wrapping altogether. They could instead add a note or card to let you know from whom the gift comes.

Giving Back

Purchase Carbon Offsets

Purchasing carbon offsets is a relatively new, but growing concept. The idea is that you roughly figure out your event's "carbon footprint" and then make a donation to help offset the impact of the resources that are used for your event. **TerraPass** (www.terrapass.com) has a good explanation of this concept, as well as a very helpful wedding calculator (that can be used for other events as well) to help you figure out your event's environmental impact.

Make a Contribution

In honor of your *simcha*, make a contribution to an organization that takes steps to preserve and protect the environment locally, nationally or internationally.

- Plant trees in Israel through the **Jewish National Fund** (www.jnf.org).
- Also consider a donation to **Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger** (www.mazon.org) or other domestic or international program that helps to provide food or other basic necessities to people who need it in this country and around the world.





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

- **The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)** (www.coejl.org) has a booklet called “Creating Environmentally Sound Life-Cycle Celebrations.” They also have an environmental guide to gift giving for different occasions.
- **Green Bride Guide** (www.greenbrideguide.com/) provides useful information and more ideas about “green” weddings and celebrations.
- **The Big Green Jewish Website** (www.biggreenjewish.org) is an initiative of the Jewish Social Action Forum, a body of organisations in the UK Jewish community that, collectively, are committed to raising awareness of issues of universal concern.



Acknowledgments:

Much of this guide is based on “*Greening Your Simcha*”, a resource created by the members and clergy of Temple Shalom in Newton, Massachusetts and “*How to Have a Green Simcha*” by Temple Sinai (Atlanta)’s Shomrei Adamah Subcommittee on the Environment. Congregation Beth Shalom wishes to thank them for inspiring us and allowing us to use parts of these resources.