

# Eco-chic Weddings | Green Living

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By Barbi Walker

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something... green?

Yes, at least that's what more brides are saying these days as they plan their weddings.



Spring is just around the corner, which means wedding season. With the kiss of beautiful weather and a gorgeous blooming desert, Arizona's eco-savvy, Earth-friendly bride-to-be has more beautiful, sassy and sophisticated ways than ever to "green up" her wedding day.

From invitations, to location, to the ever-important dress, a gal can be as "green" as she wants to be. Planning and budgeting are the key elements to pulling off a memorable event, but for an "eco-elegant" wedding, education is just as important.

"Brides are aware of the damage a wedding can do," said Kristina Celik, spokesperson for Arizona Weddings Magazine & Website. "Eco-friendly is such a huge part of the wedding process, it's kind of standard." Celik added that because brides want to be eco-friendly, vendors are responding – and in some cases, educating the brides.

According to Celik, sustainable weddings were a trend four years ago, but now it's become a staple in wedding planning and brides have many options. In fact, of the last 10 weddings Celik was involved with, six of the brides did something eco-friendly.

Being green is becoming a part of many people's everyday lives, and weddings are fully part of that trend. In fact, "eco-chic weddings" are such a craze that Google lists over 3.5 million sources; numerous books abound on the topic, and there is even a wedding magazine dedicated to green weddings, Eco-Beautiful Weddings.

Planning an eco-chic wedding is easier these days – whether you plan to do a full-scale, all-green event or are just looking to add eco-smart elements, like Arizona-native Ryan Couch and his fiancée, Lettie Hobbins, are planning in Tucson.

"For Ryan and me, having a vegan reception was more about incorporating the way we live into our wedding," Hobbins said. "It's all a part of creating a celebration that is a reflection of who we are as a couple. Vegan living is a huge part of our lifestyle, particularly for Ryan, and we didn't want to

exclude that part of our lives from such a large-scale event,” Hobbins said. In fact, according to Eco-Beautiful Weddings magazine, a plant-based menu is the greenest catering option.

If it isn't feasible or possible to have an entirely eco wedding, brides can do many things to offset the impacts of less green-friendly necessities – starting with invitations. Photographer Emily Carroll said one of her clients set up a Web site for all aspects of the wedding, from the announcement to the photographs.

Carroll pointed out that so many pieces of paper can be involved in the wedding that using a website not only reduces waste, but also makes it easier for brides to keep track of replies as well as showcasing wedding photos.

WeddingWire.com is one such website that is free and easy to use. The Web site lets brides keep track of everything from budget, to vendors, to the guest list. There is even a page to plan the seating chart! This little workhorse Web site comes complete with apps for smart phones and Facebook and is great for the do-it-yourself bride or as an accompaniment to a wedding planner.

“I think it's a trend that's fueled by cost, but the ability to show pictures and reduce waste is a plus,” Carroll said. However, if brides still want to have the personal touch of an invitation, Carroll suggests printing invitations on recycled paper and using the Web for things like “Save The Date” notices.

Little Owl Letterpress in Phoenix is going one step beyond recycled paper – they use tree-free paper.

“Our paper is made from reclaimed cotton that comes from the garment district,” Gina Vallecorsa, one of the Letterpress owners said. They also use much less ink – less than half a teaspoon can make hundreds of invitations, Vallecorsa added – plus, the press is in their backyard, truly reducing carbon emissions for the print shop owners!

For your thank-you notes, one can choose the Arizona based company, Ecosaurus. Their cards and envelopes are made from vegetable-based inks, use 100 percent post-consumer waste paper, are processed chlorine-free, FSC Certified and Green-e Certified.

Choosing a more earth-friendly menu, using a Web site for many of the event planning and communication aspects, and selecting eco-friendly invitations and printing are all great for going green, but having a savvy wedding planner might be worth the investment – especially if the planner automatically thinks green.

Event planners oversee the entire planning of the wedding, and if having a “vintage-ous” wedding, as one eco-wedding blog put it, then finding the right event planner is key.

Local event planner Lettie Peterson says vintage is what her party planning business Rust & Lace, is all about. Almost everything they use is vintage, aka repurposed.

“We are reusing and repurposing all the time,” Peterson said. “We recycle the idea again, but find ways to personalize it.” Peterson added that there is definitely a trend in “refurbished” style weddings. Celik agrees, and says brides want more of a do-it-yourself look.

Peterson knows where to find everything vintage for her clients, including a vintage dress for a bride who wanted something a la Marilyn Monroe.

Eco-savvy event planner Kim Duncan, of KD Event Designs in Flagstaff, said she asks brides to borrow as much as possible for their big day.

“I feel like weddings in general are extremely wasteful and I try to use as little resources as possible,” Duncan said.

Duncan has used mason jars, string lights and potted plants in her weddings. She even used apples as place card holders, and the apples were the guests' snack too! Apparently fruit is making its way into the hearts, tables and stomachs of many weddings. Jodi Dobb, owner of Blooming Mill Flowers, has used fruit, including lemons from her own backyard, to make centerpieces for eco weddings.

Dobb said that using live plants, fruits, vegetables and branches in arrangements are all green options. Live plants can be enjoyed for years and given as favors, and fruits and vegetables create depth and dimension, plus a burst of color.

Dobb added that if a bride is going to use flowers, she should find growers who do not use chemicals or fumigation, and she should try to find locally grown flowers – or something that regenerates, like tulips. Lastly, Dobb says to avoid floral foam, because it emits formaldehyde and doesn't break down in landfills.



Venues that already have beautiful foliage, such as the Desert Botanical Garden, the Boojum Tree or The Farm At South Mountain (all in Phoenix) will provide live flowers, vibrant color and breathtaking beauty naturally.

In fact, The Farm At South Mountain has many ways a bride can make her wedding as eco-friendly as possible, such as providing local products from small family farms, local beer and wine, or bamboo and cornstarch plates and utensils – all 100 percent biodegradable, Ashley Oakes, spokesperson for The Farm, said.

If you're up north, try Jackpot Ranch, a 72-acre ranch in Verde Valley, complete with breathtaking views and a horse to ride down the aisle if you're that adventurous. Having the wedding at one of these locales during the day also cuts down on the use of electricity for lighting.

However, if you're more of an urban girl with an uptown attitude, opt for a vintage or historic building like the uber-cool, modern monOrchid in downtown Phoenix. This mixed-use space was built in 1937 by Arizona legend, Del Webb. In fact, it was his plumbing warehouse, according to the building's owner, Lane Rainey. The building is an adaptive-reuse space in the City's core.

With so many options for adding a little green to your wedding and so many resources to locate them, it's hard to imagine a wedding without the eco factor. Unfortunately, some brides are still missing the sustainable aspect. One event planner in South Florida sees very little incorporation of eco-friendly steps in many weddings. Marlaina Skowron of Engagements LLC in Palm Beach, Florida, said she still sees too much waste, even when the bride has the funds to choose eco-friendly options. "To be eco-minded, you have to be strategic," she said.

Skowron said if brides would spend a little more time planning, they would save money and create

less waste (from clothing to tossed-out food, which is her biggest pet peeve). Her distaste of wasted food has led her to try to incorporate a way to donate unused food to local shelters and soup kitchens.

“I’ve tried so many times to bring in Palm Beach Rescue, but every time I mention it, people say no. [Venues] are afraid of lawsuits and being sued,” Skowron added.

Unfortunately, this is just one aspect of non-eco-friendly weddings Skowron sees in the wedding planning business. Skowron said some brides are buying two dresses, one for the wedding and another for the reception, and some go completely in debt just to throw a wedding!

*So with all of the sustainable resources available, why are some brides still being wasteful?*

“Their personalities are geared that way already,” Peterson said. “Planning an eco-friendly wedding probably already follows their personalities.”

Maybe so, but more and more brides and grooms are choosing sustainable options for their weddings and their lives – like Lettie Hobbins.

“Ultimately, sharing vegan food at our wedding is one way to bring additional compassion into an event designed to celebrate our love for each other,” Hobbins said.

Barbi Walker is a freelance writer and an award-winning journalist. Barbi lives in Phoenix with her husband and young son. For more information on eco-friendly weddings send us your question to [submissions@greenlivingaz.com](mailto:submissions@greenlivingaz.com).