



How to Plan a Wedding Sustainably

A guide on how to create your beautiful wedding while also being kind to our planet.



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Hi there!

Planning such a big event as a wedding can be overwhelming enough without trying to add more boxes for each element to tick.

But the last thing we want is for you to feel guilty for wanting your wedding to align with your life values, but not knowing how to go about it without adding extra stress onto your plate.

This is why we, Juliet and Veronica, have put together this guide, packed with suggestions and ideas for you to easily pick the best options that suit you and your wedding needs.

How To Use this Guide:

This guide is split into 7 main areas of your wedding for easy navigation, and provides a scaling range of small to large ideas, depending on a variety of factors: budget, time, and openness within your family and culture.

This scaling is reflective of the fact that each couple's situation is different, and all you can do is your best with the circumstances you have.

We hope you have fun with these and they spur on your own sustainable creations!

Wedding Planning

Overview

There are a lot of different moving parts to a wedding. Even though no two weddings are the same, they all tend to have, very broadly, the same parts. After all, we're all social human beings and celebrate similarly!

For clarity, below are 7 areas we've chosen that reflect most weddings, and our definition of each one.

GIFTS

Gifts for anyone you and your partner want to thank (including each other!) for contributing to your wedding.

RECEPTION

Anything related to organising main wedding venue.

PARTY FAVOURS

These are the small gift of thanks given to guests for attending.

OUTFITS

These are the wedding garments you, your partner and anyone else participating in your wedding are wearing.

FOOD

Your wedding menu and any guest entertainment you might have.

STATIONERY

Invitations, name placements, menus...your wedding stationery!

EXTRAS

All the extra events that go with your wedding leading up to the big day.

Gifts

Things to consider:

- Who do you want to give gifts to?
- How do you want to decide on gifts (personalised to each individual or the same for everyone)?
- What is your budget for gifts?
- When can you start preparing/buying these gifts during your wedding planning journey?

Ask yourself these questions to mentally tick that thought off and keep you organised.



What does 'with a conscience' mean?

You'll see this tacked on to a few suggestions throughout this sustainable wedding guide, so let's define it. These are businesses, products or services that are conscious of the bigger picture impact they have. These could be provided by people and businesses who, for a few examples, plant a tree for every purchase, donate and support a charity, or provide leftovers or unwanted products to those in need.

Changes you can make

If hosting your wedding is gift enough, consider no presents entirely!

Give eco-friendly gifts that promote sustainable living – gifts that are reusable or recycled; support sustainable initiatives or charities; are businesses with a conscience; or from local businesses with low global footprints.

Go homemade such as baked goods and handwritten cards if budgets are tight.

Get clever and give gifts that are super useful and can even serve for more than one purpose.

Be conscious of the packaging you use. Virgin materials (even paper!) are resource intensive and actually not always the most eco-friendly, so opt for recycled materials or re-use material from around your home. Get creative – scarves, tea towels...a mutual friend used old maps!

Experience gifts are probably your most sustainable option as they rarely involve material things. Think a massage, wine tasting, night at a hotel or theatre tickets.

Gifts

Reception

Things to consider:

- The reception venue is typically the one task you need to do early in the wedding planning process as they tend to get booked up the fastest.
- Have a list of criteria or questions you want answered when looking around for your venue BEFORE you start looking
- If a sustainable venue is one of those criteria, do some research to see what's out there
- Have a few dates in mind that you and your partner are happy with, BEFORE going venue shopping. This will take the pressure off of one date and avoid too much disappointment if your venue is booked already.

The venue is the foundation for your wedding reception, and could be one of the more expensive items on your wedding budget. The earlier you start your research on venues, the better the position you will be in to make a good decision.

As the foundation, your venue is a blank canvas for your wedding. Even if your venue is rather neutral on the sustainability front, you can add and fill it with all the other wedding elements sustainably, so don't feel environmentally-guilty if your ideal venue is like this.



Changes you can make

Booking a venue is arguably the most expensive part of a wedding. The bigger it is, the more decoration involved, hence becoming even more expensive. You can reduce decoration costs and avoid unnecessary decoration, waste and consumption by opting for spaces that are already naturally decorated and support the environment, embracing the nature around them, like a botanical garden, a farmstead or a winery.

Nowadays, there are more and more ethical and eco-friendly wedding reception options all around the world. Do some research to see if you can find one that fits your criteria.

If possible, choose a venue so that as few guests as possible have to travel long distances.

Avoid single-use items, which will subsequently also look a lot more formal for the occasion.

Consider using what you already have or can borrow from family/friends. You can also go for a minimalist theme and not have any decorations at all, which would save on money and resources too.

If your reception location is not easy to get to, choose a venue with on-site accommodation for guests coming from out of town. Or, arrange a group transport option for larger groups, which will reduce stress for guests as well.

Reception

Party Favours

Things to consider:

- Some couples get their favours engraved as mementos, but to make your party favours more versatile, and thus more usable and sustainable, opt to not permanently mark your wedding details into the favour itself. Instead have a tag or sticker, or nothing at all. This will allow guests to use it or donate it, thus extending the party favours' life cycle.
- What is your budget for your party favours? Your wedding budget is always going to be a driving factor in your wedding, so keep this in mind when choosing your party favours.
- How useful is this party favour? Some people collect party favours as a sentimental memento, but others do throw them away or leave them at the wedding. The more useful your party favour, the more likely it will be kept, reused, recycled, or donated on to someone else. Keep this in mind when choosing your party favour.



Making party favours multi-use!

Juliet says: Want a way to be sustainable and save some money too? Make your party favours serve 2 purposes. At our wedding, we had marble coasters with just the guests' names engraved into the coaster. Not only was this the party favour, but it was also the name placement for our seating arrangement, reducing our stationery requirements. So ask yourself, how can we maybe make our party favours multi-purpose? Get creative!

Changes you can make

Your location is as unique as your wedding, and there could be some lovely local products or food goods that would support local businesses and local environments and reduce transport footprints. Think hand soaps from local lavender farms, jam made locally or a soy candle that melts into hand cream.

Party favours are not essential and if you decide to skip them, most people won't even notice them missing. Giving your guests a good time, good food and good memories can be already seen as a "gift" from the hosts.

Opt for a donation to a charity of your choice in place of a favour instead.

A good Rule of Thumb to follow is to make your party favours edible, reusable or plantable.

Many couples also choose useful gifts, like for example edible party favours. Confetti, jams, or even small bottles of a special liquor.

Have small potted plants as decorations around the venue and gift them at the end of the party to each guest as a party favour. Not only will this gift remind them of the good time they had, but also signifies the beginning of a new life as a married couple. Alternatively, you can also gift some bee-friendly flower seeds guests can plant as a favour.

Party Favours

Outfits



Things to consider:

- How can you make our wedding party attire more sustainable? Whether you are wearing suits, dresses, cultural dress, or require multiple outfits, there will be ways you can choose more sustainably.
- If you're buying new: Handmade v off the rack? Mass produced garments tend to require alterations anyway as no 2 people have the same body shape; but handmade from scratch usually means a lot more expensive. See if you can find a middle ground and buy from a smaller company who produces outfits locally, and support a local seamstress for any alterations.
- Don't forget accessories! Jewellery, shoes, makeup. How can you make these sustainable?

Wedding gowns are arguably one of the most unsustainable clothing items for one simple reason: they're often worn only once. If you can change this narrative, you're off to a great start – secondhand, hire, donate, repurpose – it can't be said enough!

Changes you can make

See if you can find your perfect gown and rent it. You will drastically cut costs and you won't have to worry about selling it after.

Another eco-friendly option is to buy it secondhand. There are countless places where you can look, from Facebook groups for other newly-wed couples repurposing outfits to secondhand online stores and vintage shops.

Opt for garments made sustainably, from eco-friendly materials, from local businesses or businesses with a conscience, rather than a big corporation.

With jewellery, opt for vintage or ethically sourced and produced, or let people use their own existing jewellery!

For makeup, either use what you already have or opt for cruelty free and eco-friendly ranges. Alternatively, having a makeup artist is essentially like 'hiring' make-up!

For shoes and accessories, try to use what you already have. Otherwise, buy sustainable and versatile items that you can re-wear after your wedding.

Consider designing your own outfits! It's not as crazy as it sounds and sometimes can be cheaper than something bought in store. In this way, you will be able to create exactly what you have envisioned, you'll be able to select ethically and sustainably sourced materials and you will be supporting a local seamstress (Veronica says: this is exactly what my mother did and what I'm considering doing!)

Outfits

Food

Things to consider:

- What is the environmental impact of your menu?
- Will guests have sit-down meals or canapés?
- What will happen to food waste?
- How can we minimise food waste?

Food is one of the main features of your wedding, and is most likely to be one of the biggest parts of your wedding expenses. You'll also have guests' dietary requirements to work with, so will require some expected input from your guests.



TIP:

RSVPs are really important for your wedding food. They can be the difference between food waste and accurate preparation (note that some exceptional circumstances are unavoidable). This is where a formal invitation (not facebook invites) pays off as it encourages accurate RSVPs. And, leave enough time between the RSVP date and the wedding date for caterers to plan food accordingly (speak to your caterer for advice!).

Changes you can make

Having a vegetarian or vegan menu is probably the best way to reduce your wedding's environmental impact and show off the amazing plant-based food, maybe even encouraging guests to adopt more of it in their lifestyle. You might be surprised to find out that many guests won't even notice meat missing from their plate, so go for it!

If a full vegetarian or vegan menu is a huge hurdle for your family, opt to have vegetarian and vegan menus or food available. Most people still won't realise most of your dishes don't have meat or dairy in them.

Ideally, choose a menu with ingredients that are locally sourced and seasonal.

Leftovers can be given either to the guests to take home or look beforehand for a charity that will accept open food donations.

If you do have any food waste, you can compost it!

Leftover are unavoidable but food waste is not. Opt for alternative serving styles like carefully organized buffets where each guest can choose what and how much they will eat.

If your menu is fully plant-based you could give the leftovers to a local farm (to be agreed beforehand) to be used as feed for the animals.

Food

Stationery

Things to consider:

- Invitations, RSVP cards, etc
- Confetti, petals, bubbles – re-consider these to see if you actually need them, and if so, opt for sustainable options that you provide (some businesses create confetti out of autumn leaf fall!)
- Name placements – get creative! Check out what Juliet did at her wedding on the Party Favours page
- Ceremony booklets
- Seating Plans – how will you be telling guests where to sit, if having a sit-down meal?
- What other stationery are you having?

Wedding stationery is one of the most fun parts – the invitations, the ceremony booklets, the name placements...but at the end of the day, these tend to be single use and serve only one purpose. Plus they tend to be made of virgin paper. This is an area where you'll have plenty of sustainable options!



Juliet says: For our engagement, my dad and I found a branch in the backyard and cut stationery holders for names, menus, etc. The paper I inherited from Luke's late grandmother who scrapbooked, which I wrote on by hand. Got this idea from Pinterest!

Changes you can make

If you have a small number of guests, you might totally opt out of wedding stationery!

Use recycled or sustainably-sourced paper and use non-toxic & water soluble ink. There are lots of stationers out there making their own paper from all sorts of material; you could make this a feature.

Consider using plantable paper embedded with seeds. Guests can then plant the stationery and watch it grow into herbs or flowers. Zero waste!

You could also go all digital and create a whole website about your wedding, where guests can RSVP, check for details, see the menu, set dietary requirements, upload photos they take on the night, etc. This option still has a carbon footprint though, but depending on the guest number it could be more sustainable than printing it all on paper.

Get creative: you don't need to use paper for things like name placements, seating plan, etc. There is plenty of inspiration you can get from the internet (Pinterest for the win!).

If you don't care about traditional paper invitations, then you can opt for digital ones.

Stationery

Extras

Things to consider:

Don't forget, depending on your culture there can be lots of events leading up to the wedding that also present opportunities to be more sustainable. If you are clashing with cultural and traditional requirements for the actual wedding day, you might be able to compromise and create sustainable pre-wedding events instead.

The venues, the food, the invites, the outfits...everything we've gone through so far can apply to any other pre-wedding event (just on a smaller scale!).



The Key Thing to Remember is:

The most sustainable things you can do are: use things you already own; hire and rent; opt for secondhand; and if you do buy, sell it on or donate it.

A Note to You...

At the end of the day, living sustainably is a constant learning curve for even the most experienced, as more information and new ways of being sustainable are always being discovered.

Don't beat yourself up if you think you could have done more to create a sustainable wedding day. There are a lot of factors involved in a wedding, from traditions and cultures to family influences and pressure to accommodate everyone. It's hard to block some of these out sometimes, and it can be mentally and physically easier to give in. If you do, it is ok - you are human, and you and all of us are simply trying to do our best.

If everyone simply did their best to live sustainably, the world would be better off. So thank you for playing your part in this goal, and giving your best efforts to create your beautiful wedding as sustainably as possible. We hope you've found some new and thoughtful ideas in this Sustainable Wedding eBook, and if you have we would love to hear of it!

And most importantly - get some fun in there and enjoy wedding planning!

Juliet & Veronica xx