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EcoConsumer

Throw a green party, and throw less away

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

It used to be that the only time anyone would throw a "green" party was on St. Patrick's Day.

Today, many of us want to reduce our environmental impacts in everything we do — including hosting a green party. In addition to conserving resources and preventing waste, throwing an eco-friendly party can save money and time, and reduce stress.

Follow these tips for green summer entertaining:

Paperless invitations

Save paper and time by sending invitations electronically. These are not as impersonal as they seem. For example, with Evite (www.evite.com), the most popular free online invitation service, guests can see who else has accepted the invitation, and read their often-funny comments.

Evite invitations include advertisements (that's how they're free) at the top, or on the side. For snazzy invites without ads, try a competing service such as Sendomatic (www.sendomatic.com), which charges \$12.95 to send an invitation to 100 or fewer people.

Simply e-mailing your invites also works well. Put the e-mail addresses in the "blind CC," or BCC, box, so the invited guests don't get everyone else's e-mail address.

Green treats



Paul Schmid / The Seattle Times

Farmers markets are the perfect places to find fresh, locally grown, often organic food for summer parties. Choose from more than 70 farmers markets in the Puget Sound area (www.pugetsoundfresh.org), with 28 in King County alone.

Reduce waste and excessive leftovers by preparing only the amount of food you'll need. Evite offers a portion guide for parties (www.evite.com/pages/party/prepare.jsp) > www.evite.com/pages/party/prepare.jsp). Click on "Food Portion Guidelines."

Organic beer and wine make an appealing addition to your bar. Comparably priced with other beers and wines, you can find them locally at Whole Foods, many grocery co-ops and select other stores. Look for organic beverages made in Washington state, such as beer from Fish Brewing Co. in Olympia, or Badger Mountain wine from Kennewick.

Ditch the disposables

If you rent your tableware instead of using disposables, you'll pay more, but it may be worth it to add that green touch of class.

Companies in the Seattle area that rent durable dishes, glasses and silverware include AA Party Rentals, Abbey Party Rents, Alexander Party Rentals, Larry's Markets Catering and Pedersen's. Check their selections online.

If you rent durable tableware and possibly borrow some as well, your additional costs may be less than \$60.

Set out labeled recycling bins for bottles and cans, and a separate container for food waste. In Seattle and many other King County communities, you can put food waste and soiled paper in the yard-waste bin that your hauler picks up.

The bug stops here

How do you keep mosquitoes from joining the party? The nonprofit American Mosquito Control Association (www.mosquito.org) advises against electronic "bug zappers" because they kill too many beneficial insects, and are relatively ineffective against mosquitoes. Ultrasonic devices also get a failing grade.

Instead, simply running a large fan out on your deck will help keep mosquitoes away.

The association also recommends using yellow "bug light" bulbs outdoors, since they don't attract mosquitoes like other incandescent lights.

If wasps are a problem, keep food covered, or bring it indoors.

Go natural with décor

For decorating, aim for reusable or compostable materials. At farmers markets, grab some cut flowers or other natural decorative items. Talk to the growers to make sure flowers were grown without pesticides (unlike the cut flowers found at most florists).

Revisit old decorations and spruce them up, if necessary, with flowers or greenery from your yard.

Go with larger decorative elements, not a lot of little stuff. You'll have less clutter, and less waste.

The monthly EcoConsumer column aims to help readers balance consuming and conserving. Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services. Reach him at tom.watson@metrokc.gov. Watch for more EcoConsumer resources from King County at www.KCecoconsumer.com.

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