

Homes & Real Estate

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'Tis the season to go green while entertaining

But before the green guilt — a common Seattle-area condition — kicks in, remember that eco-conscious holiday entertaining doesn't have to be a chore or a burden. Having more fun and saving money are on the table, too.

By Tom Watson

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Every holiday party or dinner could become at least a little greener.

But before the green guilt — a common Seattle-area condition — kicks in, remember that eco-conscious holiday entertaining doesn't have to be a chore or a burden. Having more fun and saving money are on the table, too.

“Green holidays” programs and websites, such as King County's KCgreenholidays.com, are popular because many of us really do want to reduce our environmental impact during this ultra-commercialized season. At the same time, holiday greening needs to be simple and relatively painless or it won't happen.

Let's answer some common questions about green holiday entertaining.

Q: Isn't the greenest holiday party no party at all?

A: Sure, but that's no fun. Socializing and connecting with others helps us on many levels, so let's party. We can have our green holiday cake and eat it, too.

Q: Speaking of sustainable food, that's a major part of green holiday entertaining, right?

A: Absolutely. In the Northwest, a hotbed of the sustainable-food movement, the choices for greening our holiday food have gone through the roof the past few years.

Buying regionally produced food and beverages reduces transportation impacts and supports local economies. Area growers and producers not certified as organic often still use sustainable practices.

More than a dozen weekly farmers markets in western Washington stay open through mid-December, so start there.

As just one tasty, colorful example of what's available this season, Bloom Creek Cranberry Farm offers its fresh cranberries grown near Olympia at several farmers markets.

Nearly every grocery store now offers sustainable regionally produced goodies, as well. For the holidays, these include vegetables, fruit, cheese, grains, nuts, beer, wine and distilled beverages.

Q: How about decorating for the party?

A: Search your yard or ask neighbors if you can forage in theirs. Through mid-December, you may still find flowers and fresh herbs to use. Many of our yards offer abundant materials for holiday wreaths, from holly to evergreen branches to rose hips.

Q: Then there's the dreaded pre-party house cleaning. Can we green that up?

A: We often run short on time and try to make up for it by using powerful cleaning chemicals. We even buy products like furniture wax or silver polish just because we can't quickly find the products we already have.

Try to plan the cleaning better and start earlier, which will reduce your use of sketchy chemical products. If you hire housecleaners, ask them to use less-toxic cleaners.

Q: After the party, how can we make the cleanup greener and easier?

A: Many types of cups, glasses, plates and utensils are reusable, recyclable or compostable. Make your choices based mainly on the style of party and ease of cleanup.

For large parties, you can rent durable glasses and plates from several companies. The Northeast Seattle Tool Library (neseattletoollibrary.org) stocks several types of glasses for parties.

Plastic cups are accepted in Seattle's recycling program and many others, but not all. Check with your city or recycling hauler. Paper plates (without a waxy coating) and other food-soiled paper are accepted in residential yard-waste carts with food scraps.

Utensils labeled "compostable" actually aren't accepted with residential yard waste/food waste, so avoid those and other single-use forks, knives and spoons for parties.

Q: Does green holiday entertaining really make a difference?

A: Yes! Even our small individual efforts can set the stage for political and social change that can lead to reduced climate effects and global pollution.

And who doesn't like holidays and parties? In the words of a classic old Jonathan Richman song, "We need more parties in the U.S.A.!"

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