Plan a green get-together

Whether you are planning a party for your office or home, you can implement one or more environmental practices to give your celebration some green—and more often than not, save some while you’re at it.

Here are a few ideas to help you plan your party or open house. Pick and choose the ones that work for you.

Decorations
- Use natural decorations such as gourds, pumpkins, prairie plants, cranberries, pine cones, pine branches, and strings of popcorn.
- Create eye-catching displays by grouping together existing items such as plants and stringing them with lights.
- String LED (light-emitting diode) lights—they use 90% less energy than traditional lights.

Invitations
- Give the postal service a rest by using electronic invites—just google “electronic invitations” and you’ll find a slew of sites to help you with your invitations—but a cleverly worded email can do the trick as well.
- Get RSVPs so you know how many you need to feed.

Food
- Determine your menu and make a shopping list. Then buy just what you need.
- Plan an easy menu. The more items you make, the more likely leftovers will get thrown out.
- Call on farmers or other local resources so even a few appetizers or menu items feature local foods (see http://bit.ly/b1N3ff for recipe ideas).
- Call on a local caterer that specializes in use of local foods, and let them plan your party offerings.
- Draw the line on foods during the season of indulgence. Food fuels many holiday celebrations, but games, conversations and other interactive activities can take the focus from fats to fun. Remember, you are not alone in wanting to keep your waistline intact.
- Share extra food with friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

Dinnerware
- Ask guests to bring their own mug or even their own dishes. This is a “higher order” practice, but your friends might admire and appreciate your green leadership.
- Go eclectic—proudly use cloth napkins, whether they also serve other lives as wash clothes or dish clothes. Add them to any assortment of cloth napkins you own, and you’ll have a colorful mix that doesn’t say “iron me.” Don’t be afraid to set a trend by doing things according to your values.

Compost food and dinnerware
- Google “compostable dinnerware” and you’ll find what you need to serve a large group and not need to wash loads of dishes afterwards. But remember that compostable dinnerware is only compostable if it’s composted. If it’s thrown in the trash, it’ll go straight to one of Iowa’s landfills and likely hang around there for your lifetime and beyond.
• Have a compost bucket or trash can available (depending on the size of your party), with signage telling guests what can go in the compost bin and what cannot, if you request your guests help with cleanup.

**Rethink the timing**

• Consider a pre-Thanksgiving or post-New Year’s party—when you have time to be more intentional about your party. Plus, friends, family or colleagues have more time, too and might be able to help with food items or other party plans.

**Planning for next year**

• After the party, create a journal for the coming year, noting what ideas worked, what food was consumed, how much you needed, and other party ideas so you can refer to it in the coming year and plan an even better party.

**Additional resources:**

How to reduce food waste during this season of indulgence ([http://bit.ly/cQcC8D](http://bit.ly/cQcC8D))

Visit our [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/ReclaimYourHolidays) for more ideas and to contribute your own!

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