



The Daily Gleaner

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T'is the season to be Merry . . . and green!

I always budget for more expenses this time of year, not for presents but for entertaining, parties and other gatherings. From late November through to January 1st, my calendar quickly fills up with parties and events. I think most of us love the holiday season because it' is a chance to spend fun, quality time with family, friends and colleagues.

All that said, because this time of year is so busy, sometimes organizing a party or event can be rushed. When we rush to get things organized, we often try to find the quickest and easiest way to accomplish the task. And when it comes to hosting a party, often the quickest and easiest way of doing things is not the most environmentally friendly way. So here are some easy ideas on how to host or help organize a 'green' event this season.

First things first – **the invitation:** if you haven't already switched to e-invites, start now. Sending invitations electronically, either by email or through special websites such as *sendomatic.com*, is a creative and productive way to reduce excess paper waste during the holiday season.

Next on the list – **the menu:** whether you are planning a cocktail party, a potluck or a sit down meal, be sure to plan your menu ahead of time so you can be prepared to make 'green' choices. One of the best ways to reduce your party's 'carbon footprint' (greenhouse gas emissions) is to buy local, so make the farmers' market the first stop on your grocery run. Next, buy in bulk - most likely over the entire holiday you are entertaining many more people than you would normally, so stock up all at once and avoid excess packaging. Finally, be sure to have lots of vegetarian options for your guests - always the most environmentally friendly food option.

Gifts and door prizes: when handing out door prizes or take-away gifts for guests, place them in gift bags rather than wrapping them up. Gift bags get re-used over and over again, where wrapping usually ends up directly in the garbage. Or you could consider buying gifts that don't need to be wrapped or bagged and can just be decorated with a cloth ribbon that can be re-used.

Decorating: be creative and be resourceful. Use the back of old Christmas cards as place cards for your table setting. Instead of purchasing new decorations just for your party, put aside some extra Christmas balls from your tree and put them in a big glass bowl or vase; borrow decorations from friends; use natural or multi-colored beeswax candles for lighting; and layout some pine branches from your backyard for a natural holiday scent. Always avoid using balloons and plastic (i.e. petroleum-based) products.

Serving treats and eats: the easy thing to do is use paper plates, plastic cutlery and cups, and paper napkins. However, this creates excess waste very quickly. Using 'real' plates, cutlery, cups and napkins creates zero waste and a more palatable presentation. At the very least, try reducing your waste by offering only paper napkins with hors d'oeuvres, rather than both paper napkins and plates. And for cups, put a marker beside the plastic cups with a sign asking guests to write

their name on their cup and continue using the same one throughout the evening, then quickly rinse and recycle them after the party.

Getting there and home again. Remember ‘green’ holiday celebrations need to go hand in hand with ‘safe’ celebrations. If you need to drive, carpool with a designated driver or arrange for a cab home. And of course, if the party is nearby, walk there with friends - what a wonderful way to enjoy a winter evening and ensure safe passage home when the party is over. As you walk home, just look behind you in the newly fallen snow – doesn’t your ‘footprint’ look just a little smaller?

Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who looks for ways to conserve energy, waste less and challenge herself to do more for the health of our planet. Check for more winter and Christmas energy-saving tips at www.greenmattersfredericton.com.