

LET'S PA



DRESSES (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) BY WINTER WATER FACTORY,
ADOOKA, AND KICKEE PANTS. HEADBAND BY GOODY.

S ARTY!

photography by Nicole Hill Gerulat

As an eco-conscious parent, you've likely been there before: You want to throw your child a great party, but struggle to find ways to avoid the piles of paper plates, plastic favors, and hardly-touched eats that can come with the celebration. But apart from the obvious (like skipping the disposables), how can you throw an unforgettable fiesta, while leaving a carbon footprint that's a little lighter? Whether you're hosting a sleepover for your child's closest friends or a big backyard bash, we've got easy ways to ensure your party's a huge hit—for your kids and the planet.





HAIRPIN BY TUMBLEWEED KIDS.
(OPPOSITE PAGE) HAIR BOW BY ISLAND PICNIC.

cut waste

Make parties that generate trash bags full of crumpled wrapping paper and half-eaten cake a thing of the past. Here's how:

Wrap up the wrappings One of the biggest offenders when it comes to party waste? Paper-wrapped gifts, says Danny Seo, an environmental lifestyle expert and author of *Upcycling Celebrations: A Use-What-You-Have Guide to Decorating, Gift-Giving & Entertaining*. One easy solution is to request that parents bring gifts wrapped in something easily recyclable, like newspaper or used easel paper customized with their child's drawings. "It's a welcome request for most parents—they can raid their recycling bin and not worry that their kid will be the only one without an elaborately wrapped present," says Seo. Or, have a "don't wrap it party," where guests bring gifts as they are, sans wrapping.

Watch what you eat (or don't!) Food accounts for another major source of unnecessary trash, says Seo, especially when it comes to what's prepped versus what kids actually eat. "The reality is, kids don't eat much and they aren't impressed with a bounty of food on the table," he says. So think small snacks that pack themselves, like pita sandwiches or anything skewered (bamboo skewers can be composted). And for dessert, skip the cake and go with mini-cupcakes, says Tracey Bianchi, author of *Green Mama: The Guilt-Free Guide to Helping You and Your Kids Save the Planet*. "Kids eat two bites of cake and they're done." (Check out our recipes on page 62 for more finger food ideas!)

Stick to no-frills decor Forget balloons and traditional gift bags, says Seo. "This is all designed to show off, and kids simply don't notice." Instead, he suggests making the party an experience with things kids can *do* instead of what they can see (think: playing freeze tag at a park with few decorations). And try to keep the celebration local—carpooling is nice in theory, but isn't always realistic, so keeping things centrally located can help cut back on fuel use.

Donate extras If you end up with leftover party goods, Seo suggests checking out freecycle.org—the nonprofit connects you with others looking to get, or get rid of, free stuff locally.



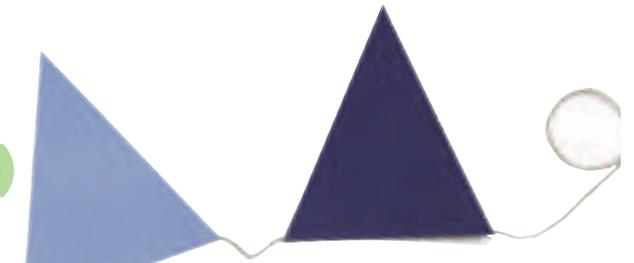
avoid gift overload

Want to steer clear of a post-party mountain of presents—but still give your child something special? Here's one option: Try *ECHOage.com*, a website created by two Canadian moms that combines giving gifts with giving to a good cause. Just create an invite on the site, then choose a listed charity and a present (or presents) your child wants to receive. For example, it'll say on the invite that Josh is turning 5 and will get an iPod and be supporting the Special Olympics Chicago, explains co-founder Debbie Zinman. The invite is e-mailed to guests, who can then donate directly through the site. In the end, half the money collected is sent to parents to buy the gift, and the other half is donated to the charity. Another idea? Stash extra gifts in storage, then donate them to Toys for Tots or a similar gift drive during the holidays, suggests Bianchi.



use simple (but fun!) decor

Keeping decorations dialed back doesn't mean you have to totally nix a color scheme or cute eco-touches.



Make a wish!

Made from 100 percent beeswax, the Big Dipper Wax Works Birthday Number Cake Candles (available in 0 through 9) are created using eco-friendly inks. \$2.50 each, ecopartytime.com.

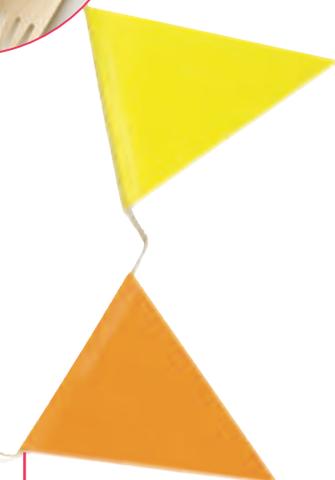
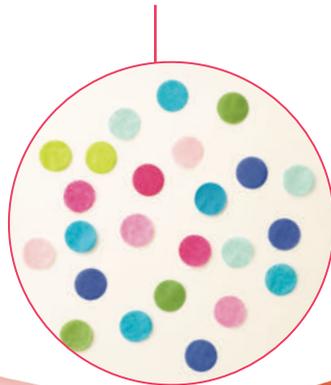


Dig in

Forget plastic forks—party treats will be even tastier (or at least cuter!) with these forks from Sucre Shop, made from sustainably harvested wood. \$10 for a pack of 20, etsy.com/shop/sucreshop.

Colorful confetti

Up for a little mess? Then ACME Party Box Company's recycled paper Confetti Packs—made by hand in San Francisco—are sure to be a huge hit. \$12 for 4 packs, acmepartybox.com.



Bold and bright

The paper used to create this banner is made from stone, instead of trees—and its rainbow colors will instantly make it feel like a party. \$10, hip-hooray.com.

make any venue more planet-friendly

Christine Lenches-Hinkel, founder and principal consultant of Waste Less Living, in Pasadena, California, an eco-event service that delivers and recovers extra materials and food waste to compost or donate, answers two questions about how to keep your party green.

Q. Usually my son's birthday party is at home, but this year, he wants to go to a bowling alley. How can we still keep it eco and healthy?

A. While having a party at home is certainly easier, hosting one at an outside venue puts you in the position to educate not only your guests, but also the staff at the site where your party's being held. Remember: you're the customer, so don't be afraid to let the staff know that the party will be with minimal waste and sustainability in mind. That being said, there are simple ways you can keep your child's festivity fun *and* green. For example, better food choices are environmentally responsible, so check out what food the venue offers. If it's of the greasy burgers and fries variety, think about serving up your own, healthier choices. And for decorations, stick with reusables, like cloth coverings. Or, swap out the disposable tablecloths for butcher paper. Kids can draw pictures on it, and then you can compost it afterward.

Q. We've done parties in the backyard and at the park—what are some new green, kid-friendly spaces where we can celebrate?

A. There are plenty of places that can provide both a learning experience and an eco-conscious environment for little ones—while still giving them a celebration they won't soon forget. If your child is the outdoorsy type, schedule a visit to a community garden. There kids can see gardens in action, learn about different flowers and plants, and maybe even harvest some vegetables. Or, go on a birthday hike on a nearby trail—talk to your local park about having a naturalist (who can point out rocks, trees, and everything in between) lead the way.



give greener favors

Goody bags are cute, but the plastic toys and candy they contain usually get tossed as soon as the celebration's over. A more eco option? Doing an activity that can double as a favor. Kids will be entertained—and they'll get to take home a piece of the party. Here, some age-appropriate ideas:

Ages 4 and under: Old crayons get a new life—and a new shape—with this activity, says Jen Hansard, mother of two and co-founder of the green parenting blog *familysponge.com*. Before the party, round up a bunch of old crayons. On the big day, put them all in a pile, then let kids pick out their favorite colors and break the crayons into lots of little pieces. Once that's done, fill an oven-safe silicone mold (try kid-friendly shapes like hearts or stars) with the crayon pieces. While the kids move on to the next activity, you throw the crayons in the oven and bake at 300 degrees for about 20 minutes, or until melted. After the crayons have cooled completely, send one (or a few!) home with each child.

Ages 5 to 7: Introduce kids to gardening by planting seedlings. To prep, cut recycled egg cartons into sections of two or four cups—these will act as "flowerpots." (Poke a hole in the bottom of each cup so that water can drain, advises Hansard.) Start by having kids decorate their pots with nontoxic crayons and markers. Then, instruct them to put some dirt into the pot and place one finger into each cup to create small indents where seeds can be dropped. Hansard suggests using marigolds or basil seeds—marigolds bloom quickly, while basil doesn't take much effort to maintain. After putting in the seeds, cover with a sprinkle of additional soil, and mist with water.

Ages 8 to 12: For this age group, crafts can be a little more complex. Hansard suggests creating "robots" from recycled household items, like cardboard boxes, bottle caps, and toilet paper rolls. "This is a way for kids to see everyday trash as actual art projects," she says. For a smaller-scale activity, kids can string together friendship bracelets using hemp twine and wooden beads. Up the fun by putting out nontoxic paint so kids can personalize their beads.



DRESSES BY
OLIVIA KATE COUTURE

Choose more sustainable invites

There are lots of websites where you can send invites electronically. Two we love:

Punchbowl.com lets you personalize everything from the colors and the envelope liner to the “stamp.” It’s free to sign up, though there’s a paid version that gives access to more features, like special fonts and poll questions to include in your card.

Greenvelope.com is full of sweet and simple invitations to personalize. The best part: Not only are you saving trees by skipping paper invites, the site also donates a portion of its profits to Mountains to Sound, a nonprofit that maintains forests.

If your child prefers something she can hand out at school, here are a few eco options:

Green thumb

Instead of tossing it, guests can plant the Celebrate Plantable Birthday Invitation from Botanical PaperWorks, which is made from seed paper. \$88 for 25, botanicalpaperworks.com.

Rawr!

Any little monster would love this Monster Hug Cut Out invitation by Pear Tree Greetings, made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled material. \$36 for 16, peartreegreetings.com.

Splash, splash

Get guests excited about a summer pool party with the Swimming Pool Siren invite by Tiny Prints, which is printed on the company’s “signature matte paper”—made partially from post-consumer waste. \$29 for 15, tinyprints.com.

Four-legged friends

The whole gang will appreciate Paper Culture’s This is Where the Wild Things Live invite—it’s printed on recycled paper and for each order placed, the company plants a tree. \$35 for 15, paperculture.com.

