



ECO MINDED MAMAS

Top Tips for "Greening Up" Your Child's Next Birthday Party

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Whirling dervishes we mothers are: at any one time juggling dozens of things on our to do list, staying on top of everyone's schedules, keeping the household running, squeezing in exercise time, a few hours sleep – and oh yeah, doing what we have to do to bring in a paycheck. So when it comes time to pull together the details our children's birthday parties, most of the time, we take the path of what's super time-saving and convenient. But by ramming our shopping carts through the crowds at the big box stores or discount warehouses, and scooping cheap stuff off the shelves, can add up to a mountain of leftover garbage that we quickly toss into the nearest trash can. With just a little foresight and awareness, we can see how important our individual acts of conscious planning can add up to a very big contribution in Earth saving action. One party that you try to do differently, can ingrain habits that you can easily tap into for the next party – and before long, you've made a lifestyle change for your whole family, year in and year out – birthday to birthday.

Here a few simple, easy ways to get started:

For the invitations:

- Go paperless: use online services such as Evite.
- Try purchasing invitations on 100% recycled paper printed with nontoxic ink urbanicdesigns.com.
- Botanical Paperworks creates handmade invites that are seeded with wildflowers botanicalpaperworks.com. Have guests bring the invite to the party and plant them in little ceramic pots. Painting the pots (with non-toxic kid friendly paints) at the party can be a great craft activity, and becomes a wonderful party favor that lives on long after the party is over.
- My favorite paper (you'll love this one!): [Mr. Ellie Pooh's](http://Mr.ElliePooh.com) paper products are 100% recycled. They are made up of 75% elephant dung, and 25% post consumer paper. They are handmade, acid free and as organic as it gets. The paper is unbelievably soft and lovely. Use it for custom invitations, make sure and use soy or other nontoxic ink.
- Use your invitations to encourage guests to package all gifts in reusable bags or baskets.

For the party:

- Choose food that is seasonal and locally grown. Bright, cheerful cut up veggie and fruit platters can be great for children of all ages (bell peppers in all colors, tomatoes, sugar snap peas, carrots, broccoli florets, berries, apples, orange slices). The other parents will love that there is something to take the edge off the sugar.
- Check out Los Angeles mom's Clare Crespo's wonderful book "Secret Life of Food" for recipes and instructions on how to make hip and colorful concoctions to serve at your dinner party. As a party activity it can't be beat, that you can eat what you make: double fun.
- Try ordering the cake or cupcakes from an organic bakery. sweetdebbie'sorganiccupcakes.com, or ghaliaorganicdesserts.com
- Choose earth friendly tableware (plates, cutlery, cups) rather than new plastic: [Gaiam's](http://Gaiam.com) 100% biodegradable, compostable partyware or Preserve's 100% recycled plastic tableware recycline.com are excellent. Preserve products are dishwasher safe and can be re-used. Trader Joes, Target, and Fresh & Easy stock Preserve; Whole Foods stocks Gaiam and Preserve.
 - Choose reusable cloth table covers instead of vinyl or disposable plastic.
- Avoid single use plastic water bottles. Try pouring out of water pitchers that you fill from your filtered tap water. Choose paper juice boxes, rather than plastic pouches.
- Be sure and set up trash containers that separate out the recyclables from your party.

For the gifts:

- Encourage your guests to give books, art supplies, or gift certificates (for museum visits, music or dance lessons, roller or ice skating rinks, or other activities), instead of plastic toys, batteries, and excess packaging.

Better yet, if you feel your child simply doesn't need more "stuff", pick an environmental non-profit and ask for donations in lieu of gifts. [The Natural Resources Defense Council](http://TheNaturalResourcesDefenseCouncil.org) will send a beautiful e-card with photos of wildlife on them for gifts in honor of a birthday.

Randi Ragan is the owner and founder of [GreenBliss EcoSpa](http://GreenBlissEcoSpa.com), Los Angeles' award-winning eco-friendly spa and wellness service. Among its many offerings, GreenBliss has an eco-friendly children's spa party (for girls ages 6 – 16) which features non-toxic nail polishing, fruity face masks, aromatherapy chair massages, hair styling with fresh flowers, and a craft activity making essential oil scented bubble bath. Party favors include handcrafted soaps, organic lip balms, bamboo flip flops, and much more. Randi regularly writes, blogs, speaks, and consults as a green lifestyle expert.