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Weddings are a multibillion-dollar-a-year industry in the United States, but there’s an even bigger price tag for wildlife and the environment. The average wedding produces over 400 pounds of trash and 63 tons of carbon dioxide. To offset this you’d need to plant 2,722 trees.

But your celebration doesn’t have to take a toll on the planet. It can be an opportunity to make sustainable choices and share your values while highlighting your personal style. And many greener wedding choices come with the added benefits of simplifying your plans and shrinking your costs.

This guide lays out many of the ways you can make your wedding friendlier to wildlife. But it’s not intended as an all-or-nothing checklist. Just because you can’t make every aspect of your wedding 100% sustainable doesn’t mean you shouldn’t make improvements where you can. Small changes add up, and wildlife can use all the help they can get.
ATTIRE
GOOD FOR WILDLIFE AND YOUR WALLET

SOMETHING OLD

I bought my dress from a bridal shop that sells donated used dresses. My dress didn’t require new materials to be made and the proceeds go toward combating sexual abuse and exploitation in my community.”
-Sarah, AZ

Many new wedding dresses and suits are made with animal-based textiles like silk and wool and are responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, and widespread habitat loss, only to be worn for a single day.

So buy a vintage dress or pantsuit instead. Choosing preloved dresswear can be more affordable, distinctive, and often still looks new, all while keeping perfectly good items in circulation.

Silk — a popular fabric choice for wedding dresses — uses approximately 2,542 gallons of water to produce just one yard. That means it can take up to 26,420 gallons of water to make just one ballroom gown. In fact, a mermaid-style dress uses up to 15,850 gallons of water, and a tea-length dress uses almost 8,000 gallons.
SOMETHING BORROWED

If you've dreamed of wearing your grandmother's hand-beaded vintage wedding dress or had your eye on an enviable item in your best friend's closet, now is the perfect time to ask about borrowing it for the ceremony.

Another option is renting a wedding dress. Renting has long been the norm for suits — why not dresses? Both options avoid the harmful waste that goes into producing a new item and can be extremely cost-effective.

More than half of all greenhouse gas emissions are embodied in the things we consume, so the longer we keep an item in circulation, the more it helps shift our use of materials and build a world where humans and wildlife can thrive.

“For our wedding, I borrowed a favorite vintage suit that was my grandfather's (he had recently passed). It only needed some slight tailoring so it was pretty inexpensive. It was the perfect way to include him and his memory on our special day.”

-Robert, NV
PICK SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

If you are buying a new wedding dress or suit, find a favorite local business to support and choose natural, ethical fibers like organic cotton and silk substitutes, while avoiding polyester, leather and wool. Farmed animals for the fashion industry consume almost one-third of all fresh water and are a leading cause of water pollution and habitat destruction, which in turn is the leading cause of species extinction.

To find your new favorite wildlife-friendly material, visit Collective Fashion Justice’s guide to ethical fabrics.

“My dress was handmade by a local dressmaker using unbleached raw silk and lace (not local, but as close as can be).”
-Meg, OR
CHOOSE A STYLE YOU CAN WEAR AGAIN

You probably won’t have many reasons to wear a wedding ballroom gown again, but if you go with a simpler dress style, a color other than white, or one made of material that can be dyed, you can get multiple uses out of it. For suits, if you’re not borrowing or renting, go with a style and color that’s versatile for other events. A suit comes in handy more often than a tux.

LET THE WEDDING PARTY DRESS THEMSELVES

If you give your wedding party a color scheme, instead of a single outfit option, they may be able to borrow or use something they already have without needing to buy anything new. And if they do have to buy new, it’s more likely to be something they’ll wear again. Giving your wedding party flexibility uses fewer resources — which is better for wildlife — and costs them less. It also makes for happier, more comfortable loved ones and stand-out pictures.

“I let my bridesmaids pick their own dresses (I just picked a color), and no one needed to purchase one for the wedding, they just used what they already had or borrowed.”

-Angela, WA
DONATE OR SELL

Once the party’s over, donating or selling your wedding dress or suit could help a future bride or groom make an eco-conscious choice for their wedding — or help a couple with fewer resources get what they’re looking for.

Online searches for preowned wedding gowns were up by 103% in 2022, and page views for vintage designer wedding pieces increased by 53%.

“I decided to donate my dress after I found a charity whose proceeds go toward breast cancer awareness. It’s a cause that’s close to my heart so I knew it was the right choice for me to do some good.”

-Lisette, GA
DECORATIONS
MAKE IT BEAUTIFUL & SUSTAINABLE
USE NATURAL DÉCOR

Botanical gardens, parks, museums and even historical buildings provide a beautiful backdrop without any additional decorations needed. Finding a venue that doesn’t need to be decorated will not only save you money but also minimize your environmental footprint. And since most places like the ones mentioned above are nonprofits, hosting your wedding there also helps support community spaces, art and local history.

Instead of investing in decorations like balloons that harm wildlife, pollute natural habitats, and even cause power outages, go with a more wildlife-friendly option like reusable paper lanterns or colorful garlands made of thrifty fabric that can be folded up and packed away until the next celebration. Both of these choices are examples of ways you can create an eyepopping backdrop without the threat to wildlife.

“We chose a beautiful tree to have the ceremony underneath and made that the focus of the decorations. -Kelly, PA
RENT OR BUY USED DECORATIONS

Renting decorations or buying them used is a great way to cut down on your costs and environmental footprint. It eliminates the materials, pollution and packaging that would’ve gone into new decorations and avoids piling them up in landfills or incinerators where they can release harmful pollutants.

Whether you end up buying new or used, you can always resell your wedding decorations, which puts items back in circulation, reducing their overall environmental footprint, and a little extra money back in your wallet.

“All of my decor was borrowed, thrifted, salvaged or from antique shops. Signage was made from old fence boards. I think it’s really easy to minimize the impact by being thrifty and looking for things you already have or can borrow instead of buying tons of mass produced decor.”

-Brynn, NJ
DECORATIONS & WEDDING FAVORS IN ONE

Find ways to have your decorations do double duty for you: Make eco-friendly place cards that function as favors, display potted plants or succulents as centerpieces that guests can keep, use thrifted glassware guests can reuse throughout the evening and then take home, or stick to décor you’ll use in your home after your wedding is over. This not only reduces your consumption and waste but also keeps items out of dumps and away from wildlife.

“I’m very conscious of my landfill contribution, and seeing how many other brides are selling their decorations afterward makes the idea of buying anything new (with more packaging) feel so excessive. If we do have to buy anything new, we are investing in pieces we can use after the wedding.”
-Meghan, DC
DINNERWARE
DITCH THE PAPER & PLASTIC FOR PORCELAIN & GLASS
USE THE GOOD CHINA

Choose reusable dishware rather than single-use, disposable plates and utensils. Many venues and caterers have dinnerware and glassware you can use, or you can provide your own. If you're wary of borrowing Grandma's antique porcelain dinnerware, take a trip to a local thrift shop and put together your own eclectic mix of plates, bowls and glasses. If you go the thrifting route, you can either keep your dinnerware treasures for future parties or donate them back for others to find.

“I collected dishes from Goodwill [and other] secondhand stores leading up to the day to cut down on trash. I bought a large silverware set from someone who had used it for their wedding. Then I gave it to our caterer to keep since she didn’t have one. We passed the set of plates on to another couple getting married, and I think they've been used for a few other weddings since.”
-Damiana, OR
BE PLASTIC-FREE

Ask your caterer and bartender not to use any single-use plastics like straws, single-serve creamers for coffee, bottled water or plastic cups. Instead have them use reusable stirring sticks or straws, a water station so people can easily refill their glasses, refillable dispensers, and plastic-free utensils. Avoid plastic-wrapped party favors, too.

400 million tons of new plastics are created each year — 40% of it for single-use purposes.

REUSE DRINKWARE

Ask your bartender or caterer about alternatives to disposable drinkware. For example, you could provide reusable glassware that your guests can label and then keep. If disposable plastic cups are unavoidable, leave out a few permanent markers and a sign requesting guests write their name on their cups so they can reuse them throughout the reception.

DON’T FORGET TO RECYCLE

Check with your venue and make sure they have recycling receptacles. If they don’t, ask if you can supply your own. Be sure to provide signs to help guests sort glass, aluminum, and paper according to local recycling guidelines.

Over one-third of waste generated can be diverted from the landfill by recycling.
FAVORS

GIVE YOUR GUESTS SOMETHING THAT WILL LAST

DONATE IN THEIR HONOR

In lieu of wedding favors people may leave behind, make a donation to your favorite charity in your guests' honor. Make sure to put up a sign that acknowledges this donation and tells your guests more about the great work the organization or charity does and why it's important to you.

If you'd like to include the Center for Biological Diversity on your list, click here.

CHOOSE FAVORS WITH A PURPOSE

If you want to give your guests something to take home as a thank-you, find favors with a purpose. Edible favors like local honey or fair-trade coffee beans, mini herb kits or bird seed balls make adorable thank-yous without the waste.

If you’d like your guests to learn more about the connections between endless growth and endangered species, supply them with our award-winning Endangered Species Condoms packages. They’re useful, funny, and a good conversation starter.
HELP GUESTS GO GREEN
Send guests away with a favor that will encourage them to make wildlife-friendly choices long after your wedding is over. Items like reusable water bottles, bamboo utensil or straw packs, or even custom cookbooks featuring your favorite plant-based recipes are not only useful but also great reminders of your Earth-friendly celebration. Some couples up the ante and ask guests ahead of time for their favorite plant-based recipes to compile into a book favor.

Americans buy approximately 50 billion plastic, single-use water bottles every year. Opting for a reusable bottle saves an average of 156 plastic bottles annually.

PROVIDE A PHOTO BOOTH
What would a wedding be without photos to remember your beautiful day? For a fun, low-impact wedding favor, look into renting a photo booth for a few hours so guests can have a personal takeaway. Most photo booths can instantly email or text photos, making the images easy to get and post on social media without wasteful printing. And instead of buying new props, ask your vendor if they have reusable ones available — or make time to thrift fun props of your own.

“Our favors will be milkweed seeds for our guests to plant in the fall for next year's monarchs.”
-Arturo, CA
FLOWERS
MAKE YOUR WEDDING BLOOM
IF FRESH-CUT FLOWERS ARE A MUST, GO ORGANIC

Check out nurseries and Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSA) in your area for native, local, in-season and organic flowers. Organically grown flowers are beautiful and stand out from conventional wedding blooms like roses; without nasty pesticides, they’re healthier for your guests as well as for pollinators. Flowers that are native and in season are adapted to the local climate, so they require less water and other resources to grow. Using local flowers also means cutting down on the carbon cost of transportation.

“My husband and I had native wildflowers at our wedding, courtesy of a native plant nursery down the road. The bouquets were seasonal, based on what flowers were growing that time of year, and it helped support a local business that keeps acres of native wildflowers and shrubs that wildlife and pollinators get to use throughout the year. It also introduced people to the idea that “weeds” can be beautiful, and I hope inspired them to consider native plant landscaping.”

Elise, FL
ROSES FOR RENT

There are several services that (depending on your location) can help you cut costs by renting out fresh-cut flower arrangements. Flower rentals tend to coordinate with other nearby weddings that have the same décor, which helps reduce the high climate cost of fresh-cut flowers. You can also skip the live flowers and opt for beautiful faux or dried flower arrangements instead. There are many reputable faux and dried flower rentals that are thoughtfully set up for easy delivery and return in the same packaging.

Nearly 80% of flowers sold in the United States are flown in from Colombia and Ecuador. The transport of flowers is so damaging that a 2020 analysis revealed one bouquet of imported flowers has a more significant impact than an 8-ounce steak raised on deforested land in Brazil and consumed in London.
BOUQUET ALTERNATIVES

There are a lot of creative options to choose from besides fresh-cut flowers. You can get crafty with paper flowers (use recycled sheet music, maps, book pages or gift wrap tissue to make them unique) or use materials like thrifty fabrics for a festive vibe. Or replace flower decorations altogether with thrifty lanterns, paper fans, or potted plants that can also be taken home by guests.

SPREAD THE LOVE

If you decide fresh-cut flowers are best for your occasion, choose to do some good with them after your big celebration is over. One idea is to donate your flowers to a hospital or nursing home so they can continue to be enjoyed by patients. Another option is to get your flowers preserved in resin as a tabletop or tray, or dried and pressed in a frame as a keepsake to hang.

Studies show that regular exposure to nature improves emotional health, increases happiness and results in greater life satisfaction. It shouldn’t be a surprise, then, that flowers have also been proven to be mood boosters, though traditional bouquets aren’t the only way to bring joy to your wedding.

“Instead of a flower bouquet, I made a brooch bouquet from flower brooches collected from thrift stores. It was a lot of fun to make and I can keep it forever since they aren’t real flowers.”
-Meghan, DC
FOOD

HAVE AN EARTH-FRIENDLY FEAST

CREATE A PLANT-POWERED MENU

If you want a memorable food experience at your wedding, offer a full or half plant-based menu for your reception. Almost everything has a plant-based alternative these days, so your caterer may already have a few mouth-watering ideas. Your dream of a burger slider bar for dinner can be a delicious meat-free reality, and your perfect buttercream frosting can be made without dairy or eggs. Your guests likely won’t even notice the difference. Plant-based foods can also almost always accommodate for guests who may have medical, religious or ethical preferences and are unable to eat meat, eggs, seafood, or dairy.

A plant-based menu will be lighter on the climate by generating far fewer greenhouse gas emissions than animal-based foods; it will reduce threats to biodiversity by using less land and water and causing less pollution.

“Our wedding will be a vegetarian event, mostly vegan. The food, beer and flowers will all be organic.”

-Lori Ann, OR
REDUCE MEAT AND DAIRY OPTIONS

Instead of a vegan or vegetarian option being the outlier, make it the default and have your guests choose to add meat to the dish. That way you can reduce the amount of meat being served and make plant-based dishes the main event, next to your nuptials, of course.

Check out our Wedding Carbon Footprint Calculator so you can see the environmental impacts of your wedding options. To learn more about how you can create a more Earth-friendly menu at your event, read our Catering to the Climate report.

GO LOCAL

Ask your caterer to look for ingredients that can be locally sourced to lessen the transportation impact. The same applies for beer, wine and liquor for a bar (if you’re having one). Buying locally sourced food can help support small businesses in your area, encouraging more sustainable growing practices and keeping smaller family farms in business.
OPT FOR ORGANIC

Organically grown food doesn’t use synthetic chemicals for pesticides and fertilizers, so there’s less soil and water contamination. Organic farms also help support local pollinator and other wildlife populations since they avoid pesticides that kill indiscriminately.

**Pesticides threaten the survival and recovery of hundreds of federally protected species**, including polar bears, salmon, sea turtles, kit foxes, and many sensitive birds, amphibian and insect species.

BUCK THE BUFFET

Though buffet dinners present themselves as the easy and cost-effective option, plated dinners will give you more control over portion sizes and often result in less food waste. If you really want to minimize waste, you can even opt out of a full dinner and go with heavy appetizers or hire a food truck that will make fresh food as people order.

**Ten percent of all wedding food is wasted.** In an event of 100 people, that’s 10 full plates of paid-for food being thrown out. Wasting food also wastes natural resources wildlife rely on to survive.

“All of my wedding vendors (including the band), the food, the flowers, and the decorations are local from Oregon sources and organic farms in the Hood River Valley and Columbia Gorge.”

-Meg, OR
SAVE ROOM FOR DESSERT

There’s always room for dessert, but not if it’s being wasted. Unfortunately, cake happens to be one of the most wasted foods at a wedding. Consider smaller dessert alternatives that your guests can enjoy, like mini vegan cupcakes, donuts holes or cookie bites. Smaller, plant-based portions can be more appealing and lead to less waste — especially for those who can’t indulge in a large piece of cake.

If having a traditional wedding cake is a must, get a smaller cake, order from a vegan bakery, and get one baked with organic and local ingredients. Changes like this will not only make your wedding unique but will help you do your part in helping save wildlife — and that’s the sweetest part.

It takes nearly 80 million acres of land to produce the food that gets wasted every year in the United States — an area 35 times the size of Yellowstone National Park.
DONATE LEFTOVERS

When food is wasted, so is the land, water, energy and other resources that went into producing it, creating unnecessary harm to wildlife and wild ecosystems. And with large-scale events like a wedding, wasted food can really add up. Ask your caterer or venue ahead of time if you can donate leftover food to a local food bank or shelter instead of throwing it out. Your good deed could be a welcome meal for someone who really needs it.

Food waste attracts bears and other wildlife, which often has lethal consequences. The more we throw out, the more wildlife come to rely on the buffet of edible food in trash cans, drawing them closer to the places where people are.

TAKE IT TO-GO

Another option to avoid food waste is supplying to-go boxes to guests. Look for cardboard carryout containers or ones made with recyclable materials. This growing trend is also a great opportunity to create a unique, reuseable wedding favor while giving your guests the green light to pack up delicious food and desserts for later. Wildlife-friendly touches like this can really make a statement and may inspire others to do the same.
Honeymooning doesn’t mean you have to break the bank to celebrate newlywed life. A honeymoon is all about you and your partner, not the place, so get creative with some local getaways. Depending on where you live, consider renting a cozy cabin in the woods, having a staycation on the beach, going on a hiking/camping excursion, or hitting up some of your favorite local haunts together.

MAKE IT WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY

Chances are if you’re this far into our Wildlife-Friendly Wedding Guide, you’re a fan of wildlife. Consider a trip to a national park to see some native species in their splendor or visit an animal sanctuary or aquarium to learn about and support their conservation work. If you decide to camp or hike in any protected areas, be sure to check their website for guidance about how to respect the wilderness before you go.
GO LIGHT ON TRANSPORTATION

If you're planning on renting a car, ask about alternative options like hybrid or electric vehicles. Even better, use a local bike share, ride share or public transportation to get around. These options save on emissions, which is good for wildlife, and they save you money, which is good for your wallet.

**Biking generates 93% less CO2 per mile than driving a car and can be a great way to get to know the area through a new lens.**

![Image of a small cottage](image)

STAY SMALL

While researching your perfect place to stay, look for small-scale local boutique hotels, a cute bed and breakfast, or a cozy home to rent in the community you're staying in. Their impact is usually less than a large chain hotel, and you'll have more privacy and quiet time during your stay. If a larger hotel is more your style, choose one that has earned a certification in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) by the U.S. Green Building Council or other industry awards in sustainability.

**A high-quality small boutique can reduce your carbon footprint by as much as 48%.**
ETHICAL ECOTOURISM

If you're looking into tours, be sure to research ecotourist activities. Ecotourism can be a more responsible way to get closer to wildlife while supporting conservation efforts and the local communities protecting these beautiful places. Being respectful of local culture and economies is top priority when traveling to any new place. If you want to give back to the community you’re visiting, look for volunteer vacations where you can bond over working to protect wildlife and wild spaces.

Ecotourism puts wildlife and wild habitat protection at the forefront of the trip, making your adventure not only memorable but also safe for you, the animals and the natural habitats you'll see.

“We decided to spend our honeymoon in an adorable little town near a national park. We took part in some amazing guided nature hikes, camped for a few days in the park and saw some incredible wildlife and then stayed in a small BnB for the remainder of the trip. It was perfect!”

-Marcela, UT
BE SUN & SEA SAFE

Whether you’re hitting the pool, ocean, lake or river, wear sunscreen. But make sure it’s a “Reef Safe” SPF that doesn’t contain oxybenzone and octinoxate, two very common and extremely toxic chemicals to marine life, especially coral, because the chemicals cause them to bleach and die.

We’ve already lost half of our coral reefs due to climate change, and the added stress of chemical contamination deepens the crisis. Making this small change can result in healthier oceans and aquatic life.

SAFE SEX SAVES WILDLIFE

No matter where you go, many honeymooners spend time hitting the sheets. Make sure the right contraceptive for you and your partner is at the top of both of your packing lists, so you don’t add to your family before you’re ready. Almost half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, and the demands of our growing human population mean fewer resources and less space for already endangered wildlife.

Before your clothes hit the floor, think of the California condor!
INVITATIONS

WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY PAPER PRODUCT ALTERNATIVES

GO PAPERLESS WITH E-VITES

Email your save-the-dates and invitations. It saves trees and wildlife from deforestation, and people are less likely to lose them. Many couples also use wedding websites, which include easy, online RSVPs that avoid the challenge of people who forget to mail back the paper card.

SEND AN INVITE THEY CAN GROW

A fabulous and wildlife-friendly alternative to traditional paper wedding invites are plantable ones. There are hundreds of online companies that can design and print gorgeous and unique invitations on fully compostable paper embedded with seeds — so instead of tossing the invitation into the trash, guests can plant it and watch the flowers grow. Just make sure the seeds are native to your region.

One study found that gardens with native plants can attract up to five times the number of butterfly and moth species compared to gardens with nonnative plants.
CHOOSE RECYCLED PAPER

If you have your heart set on sending invitations through the mail, choose 100% recycled paper products. Instead of having an elaborate multi-piece invitation with various paper products inside, opt for something simpler by consolidating important information on one card or supplying a QR code or website link so your guests can stay updated.

SIGNAGE

Use signs instead of individual paper programs and menus that just get left behind. There are many ways to do this creatively with thrifty chalkboards, mirrors, old vinyl records, repurposed windowpanes and other unique reusable items. Afterward you can choose to offer them up to your guests, donate or sell them, or keep them for future events.

BIODEGRADABLE PLACECARDS

If you’re assigning tables or seats, place cards are hard to avoid (and they can be useful to indicate to servers what meal guests have selected). Get creative and use natural materials like leaves, shells or rocks — or reusables like olive oil bottles or photo frames with guest names written on them.

“We decided to have ‘Endangered Species Tables’ instead of numbers. Each table had a description of each species and why they are endangered. My sister did the sketches, and we received several positive comments about the idea.”
-Justin, MI
REGISTRY

CHOOSE GIFTS THAT HAVE A LOW ENVIRONMENTAL COST

LESS STUFF, MORE WILDLIFE

In 2023 78% of American couples lived together prior to getting married. That means there are more engaged couples who don’t need a traditional gift registry since they already have what they need for their homes. If you’re one of these couples or you’re about to merge two homes, think about whether you really need more stuff or if you’d rather get creative with your registry.

Whether you set up a fund for honeymoon travel, a down payment for a home, charity donations, or gift cards for romantic dates, there are tons of registry ideas that allow people to gift you a memorable experience. If you do end up requesting physical gifts, make sure they’re things you’ll get good use from or opt for secondhand to give items new life and avoid waste.

“As the proud parents of a rescue pit bull (who also happened to be our ring-bearer) and as people who already had more stuff than we knew what to do with, my fiancée and I wanted to offer our wedding guests an option to make a donation to a cause that mattered to us in lieu of going out and buying us a gift.”

-Clayton, AZ
HERE ARE SOME OPTIONS FOR A MORE WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY REGISTRY:

- **SoKind** is a registry and wish list service that encourages the giving of homemade gifts, charitable donations, secondhand goods, experiences, time, day-of-event help and more.
- **HoneyFund** allows you to register for honeymoon necessities like meals, activities, even something as basic as a car rental.
- **The Good Beginning** registry is an online registry for donating to charitable causes throughout the world.
- **The Knot Gifts Back** donates up to 3% to the charity of your choice for each qualified gift purchased off your registry on The Knot at no extra cost to you or your guests.

DONATE FOR LOVE

Instead of creating a registry for your wedding, encourage guests to donate directly to the causes you care about most in lieu of gifts. Provide a “gift area” to collect physical items for a children's, women's or animal shelter that you both love or set up various online fundraisers to collect funds for several organizations you care about. Some organizations even have online wish lists already set up for people to purchase items to be delivered with ease. Be sure to check with the organizations first on most needed items so that you can provide a list to your guests. The organization may even be able to help facilitate online gifts by setting up a dedicated landing page for your occasion.
Work with a jeweler who sources their materials ethically and sustainably. Mining — whether it’s for diamonds or other gemstones — wreaks havoc on the environment because of the deforestation, pollution and serious devastation to wildlife that comes with it. If brand new jewelry is what you want, look into purchasing a lab-created diamond or precious gemstone so you’ll know exactly how your stone was obtained (and skip the unethical, human injustices attached to many mined jewels).

Lab-created diamonds and precious gemstones are chemically, physically and visually identical to their natural counterparts. Mined diamonds produce 4,383 times more waste than lab-created ones and uses 6.8 times as much water.
VINTAGE
To save on raw materials, go with an antique or vintage ring if you can. Vintage rings come in many unique styles, so you can find something one-of-a-kind that reflects your personality. And if you’d like something more sentimental, talk to your loved ones about any possible rings or other jewelry that could be passed down.

REPURPOSED
Seek out designers who use repurposed material to create their jewelry. Some jewelers may even let you supply the material. If you or your relatives have jewelry that’s outdated or not worn anymore, think about repurposing it. Ask your jeweler if the stones and/or metals you collected can be used for your ring, and you’ll have a new family heirloom with your own twist.

GET INKED
If tattoos are your thing, you might have already considered passing on traditional rings altogether and choosing this option. Tattooing isn’t for everyone, of course, but whether one or both of you decide to go under the needle, choose an artist who’s clean, safe and trustworthy. Many inks are vegan now, so don’t be afraid to ask.

“My husband’s ring was made with recycled gold from a piece of family jewelry no one was using, and I bought mine made with recycled gold from Etsy.”
-Valerie, CA
VENUE/LOCATION

FIND THE PERFECT PLACE TO SET THE SCENE

GET OUTSIDE

“It was important to us when choosing a ceremony location that we could capture the beauty of the place we lived. Typical wedding venues weren’t the aesthetic we were looking for, plus we had a very small number of guests. Saguaro National Park provided a beautiful backdrop for the ceremony and we didn’t need to spend extra money to decorate!”
-Maggie, AZ

There are so many options for an outdoor wedding these days: parks, museum courtyards, backyards, and forest clearings. Often these locations are cheaper than the average venue, and sometimes only a small permit fee is required. And the best part: The breathtaking outdoor backdrop can replace decorations.

Wherever you decide to set up, make sure to follow the “leave no trace” rule and pack out whatever you pack in. Always make sure to check with whoever manages the area to find out if there are any restrictions or limitations. And since Mother Nature can be unpredictable, have a backup plan. It may be as simple as using the visitors’ center or an approved tent for shelter.
KEEP IT LOCAL

A destination wedding may seem like an appealing alternative to a big wedding closer to home — smaller guest list, less food, fewer favors. But the environmental cost of putting a group of your nearest and dearest on a plane can be enormous, especially to wildlife. If traveling is a must for your special day, consider destinations like beaches or national parks that are closer to home. Look into train routes or sprinter van/bus rentals to help minimize the number of cars on the road, and book an eco-friendly hotel for your guests to stay in. Depending on where you end up, your eco-hotel may have wildlife-friendly excursions available.

Avoiding one round-trip transatlantic flight a year can save 1.6 tons of carbon dioxide emissions per person.

PICK A CENTRAL SPOT

Nowadays, families and loved ones are often living all over the country and sometimes even the world, making it harder to find a spot that’s easy for everyone to get to. Pick a city where most of your guests are located and suggest a central airport or travel hub to lessen the load on your loved ones and the environment.

“My fiancée and I live across the country from our families and most of our friends. Even though it would be easier for us to have the wedding where we currently live, we decided it would be better to have our wedding where most of our guests are and save them the travel.”

-Evan, NJ
ALL-IN-ONE

One of the easiest things you can do while planning your wedding is choosing to have both your ceremony and reception at the same place. It’s less coordinating for you beforehand, and you won’t have to deal with transportation headaches. It also cuts the carbon costs of your guests driving from the ceremony to the reception.

BE COOL AND CARPOOL

Coordinate transportation if there’s a central location your guests are coming from, like a hotel. Renting a shuttle bus, sprinter van, or charter bus can transport a large number of guests to and from your wedding. It’s safer, easier and carbon-saving. Some charter buses can fit up to 56 people. Bonus points if you can use a service that has hybrid vehicles.

An average bus carrying 42 people can remove up to 42 cars from the road during a commute. That means a bus running every 15 minutes can take as many as 168 cars off the road each hour.

SUPPORT A GOOD CAUSE

Choose a nonprofit-owned venue like a historical site, nature center, museum or park whose rental fees go toward supporting their mission. If you’d like to go further, you can also let your guests know why you chose the venue, why it means so much to you, and how they can make a donation.
CHOOSE AN ESTABLISHED VENUE

Though you can turn almost any place into a wedding venue these days, you may be left supplying everything from chairs and tables to trash receptacles and porta-potties and that can get expensive. The benefit of choosing a venue that already has dedicated services for big events like weddings means you don’t need to rent many additional items. This eliminates the transportation emissions and extra coordination needed for those rentals.

KEEP IT GREEN

Look for venues that are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified and have strong sustainability policies, such as responsible waste management and renewable energy use.

One study found that on average, green buildings use **26% less energy**, emit **33% less carbon dioxide**, use **30% less indoor water**, and send **50%-75% less waste** to landfills and incinerators.

“We had our wedding outside at a local bird sanctuary. There was no fee to host the wedding there since we weren’t using any of their facilities, but we gave them a donation to support their conservation efforts. They even let us borrow their center’s reusable chairs for the ceremony.”

-Chantel, CO
MISCELLANEOUS

WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY EXTRAS

SUSTAINABLE SENDOFF

“Instead of having some sort of confetti, we reused old ribbon we had laying around to make ribbon wands for each of the guests to wave at the end of the ceremony.”
-Toni, NY

Throwing confetti, glitter or releasing balloons may make for a cool photo op, but they’re disastrous for the environment and wildlife. If you decide on a sendoff, go for one that’s visually appealing and safe for nature. Have guests throw dried flowers or rose petals, native wildflower seeds, blow bubbles, or wave homemade ribbon wands from collected sticks and thrifted ribbon. Wild birdseed is also a great alternative to throwing rice, which isn’t safe for birds. No matter what you choose, check with your venue before throwing anything.

Balloons are the most common cause of debris-related death in seabirds when they — along with sea turtles — swallow the debris, mistaking it for jellyfish and other edible ocean life. Bubbles are a safer option since they’re made with biodegradable detergent and glycerin.
PETS
If having your pet in your wedding is part of the plan, ask your venue about it first. For outdoor weddings, be sure to keep your pet on a leash or in a designated area for their own safety and the safety of the wildlife that may be around. (And, as always, make sure to pick up after them.)

EDUCATE
Whether your wedding is at a nature center, national park or other wildlife-friendly venue, consider asking if there’s staff available to do a short presentation for your guests about wildlife, play a wildlife-themed trivia game during cocktail hour, or make a simple take-home gift like native milkweed seed bags to help monarch butterflies.

Monarchs have declined more than 90% over the past two decades and the greatest threat to their survival is pesticides that are killing off milkweed plants.

“We are planning to have little signs with information about the local farms placed on the buffet tables so people know that their food came from the area.”
-Ferris, NC
PLAY TOUR GUIDE

On your wedding website, include a map of your favorite natural areas or sustainable businesses so guests can carry the wildlife-friendly theme with them throughout their stay. And make sure to list nearby bike shares, car shares and public transportation stops so they can get around easily. This allows you to highlight your favorite destinations and help them reduce their travel footprint at the same time.

DO GOOD

If the traditional wild bachelor/bachelorette party isn’t your thing, tell your group you’d rather do something like volunteering to do an afternoon of habitat restoration or visiting a wildlife sanctuary or aquarium. It will give you and your friends a chance to spend quality time together.

Research has shown that volunteering improves mental and physical health, provides a sense of purpose, and nurtures new and existing relationships.

“The wildlife refuge we had our wedding at was incredible. They brought out their resident education owls and other birds for our guests while they waited, and they provided us with a beautiful, natural space.”

-Sarah, NJ
RESOURCES

BLOG

TAKE A DEEPER DIVE INTO WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY WEDDINGS
Visit our blog to get unique inspo while you plan your wedding and to learn more about the importance of making wildlife-friendly adjustments to your big day. We publish monthly and have an array of topics ranging from wedding cakes to top trends to wedding attire.

CARBON FOOTPRINT CALCULATOR

FIND OUT HOW WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY YOUR WEDDING IS
Big events can come with big carbon footprints, and weddings are no exception. Food and transportation are two of the main components of our individual carbon footprints, so it’s no surprise that those will likely be the largest sources of your wedding’s greenhouse gas emissions. This calculator will help you begin to understand the carbon emissions associated with your wedding, as well as where you can reduce your impact on the climate.

CONTACT US

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU
Please email us at wildlifefriendlyweddings@biologicaldiversity.org.
ABOUT US

POPULATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

A PROGRAM OF THE CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The Wildlife-Friendly Wedding Guide is a project of the Center for Biological Diversity. The Center works to save life on Earth and believes in the interconnectedness of human life with nature. Whether you’re getting married, thinking of getting married, or are a wedding or event planner, the Wildlife-Friendly Wedding Guide seeks to empower others to be more conscious of their wedding day environmental footprint and choose more Earth-friendly options to have more meaningful and lasting celebrations without the cost to wildlife and the environment.

The Center’s Population and Sustainability program addresses the human impacts on wildlife and the environment caused by population pressure and destructive consumption and production. We fight for solutions that advance justice, equity, health, and a compassionate world where both people and wildlife can thrive.