

# The GREEN SWAPS Guide

*Inspiring and empowering  
wedding professionals to  
create more sustainable events  
in the Pacific Northwest.*



## Part I: Introduction

Welcome!

Shortly after the four of us came together in early 2022 to brainstorm how to make the wedding industry less wasteful, we knew that our fellow vendors could make the greatest impact. After-all, we are the pros who help guide couples as they plan their celebration.

It's been inspiring to learn about all of the ways wedding vendors across different industries are reducing their, and their clients' carbon footprints. The "Green Swaps Guide" is a compilation of these innovations gleaned from dozens of conversations over the past year.

We've organized this content into "universal" tips that probably pertains to most vendors, as well as "specific" tips germane to photographers but not necessarily vendors, or particular to the floral design industry, but irrelevant to DJs. Some of our "tips" may seem outside the traditional boundaries of "sustainability," but we felt strongly that promoting *human* sustainability is also vital.

Of course, we don't claim that our Guide is either comprehensive or without error; rather, it's a living document that will depend on vendors like you to constantly improve. To that end, we look forward to hearing your feedback, as well as anecdotes of how you're putting it to work. Together, we truly can make an important difference in inspiring greener weddings!

With gratitude,

Matt, Susan, Hannah & Marla  
*January 2023.*



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## Part II: Universal Green Swaps

### REDUCE WASTE & CONSERVE ENERGY

*green swap:*

#### **1. Send contracts, billing & payment invoices digitally.**

One of the easiest things you can do to save paper (and your sanity) is by never printing contracts or mailing paper invoices to your couples. Instead, use inexpensive software to send documents electronically. The ease of signing with a click, and accepting online payments without making your couples write and mail a check will confirm more clients and result in faster payments.

#### VENDOR TIP

##### **DocHub**

"For e-sign digital contracts, DocHub is a simple option for people using Gmail and other GSuite apps. You can upload a PDF version of your Google Doc and quickly indicate where initials, signatures and dates are needed just by using your client's email address. Free plans are available, but I think most vendors will find their \$120 annual Pro plan worth the investment."

*-Matt Kelley of Kingston House*

*More Tips:* Dropbox Sign, HoneyBook, Rock Paper Coin, DocuSign, AislePlanner, 17 Hats, PandaDoc, Maroo, Dubsado and many more!

*green swap:*

#### **2. Don't print your marketing materials.**

In lieu of expensive printed collateral (business cards, rack cards, brochures), consider investing that time and cost into creating outstanding digital marketing. You'll reach many more people, and trust us, venues probably won't share your rack cards with prospective couples. However, if you decide a printed piece is absolutely necessary, pay more to ensure it's printed on recycled paper using soy-based inks, and prioritize local printers/printing presses.

*green swap:*

### **3. Conduct consultations and meetings virtually.**

By now, we're all *very* accustomed to Zoom and FaceTime meetings. It's true that nothing compares with being face-to-face, especially when your goal is to build relationships with clients and fellow vendors. That being said, there are times when substituting a virtual meeting is the best overall option, not just the greenest one. For example, doing so offers greater scheduling flexibility. Also, when suggesting a virtual meeting to clients or vendors, be sure to remind folks that it's a greener alternative!

*green swap:*

### **4. Reuse, repurpose & repair items.**

The combination of our general lack of time, and inexpensive and poor-quality items, has created an incredibly wasteful cycle of consumption. When possible, purchase high-quality items that will last. Also, choose versatile items with parts or brands that will be easier to repair, or replace, if necessary. At the very least, once an item has reached the end of its useful life with you, donate it for its "second act."

*green swap:*

### **5. Donate unwanted supplies & items.**

Before throwing it away, consider if someone else could benefit from a gently-worn (or not so gently-worn) item. In fact, old or slightly damaged items that may not pass muster with our clients are perfectly usable in most homes and businesses. Online "Buy Nothing" Facebook groups (see below) are popular, and organizations like Goodwill accept most items. That being said, be sure to check

the organization’s website to evaluate whether or not your item can be accepted. Also, when possible, avoid organizations like The Salvation Army that have a long track record of anti-LGBTQ activities.

*green swap:*

## 6. Recycle right (and keep the faith!).

You’ve probably heard that less than 10 percent of plastics are recycled in the U.S. The infuriating reality is that even when we participate in recycling programs, so much of it still ends up in the landfill. That being said, knowing which items are *actually* recycled (no aspirational sorters, please!) can help improve the efficiency, and therefore, viability of curbside recycling programs. Furthermore, there are private companies and civic groups that collect #4-7 plastics, polystyrene and other harder-to-recycle items (sometimes for a fee).

### VENDOR TIP

#### Ridwell

Ridwell is a subscription service that offers recurring curbside pick-ups of hard-to-recycle items, such as plastic film, textiles, batteries, polystyrene, etc. Ridwell helps ensure that these items are easily and correctly disposed of, while being diverted from the landfill. They work with vetted local and domestic reuse and recycling partners, and through their website you can see where the different collected materials go. As of January 2023, Ridwell is available in just six metropolitan areas around the country, including the greater Seattle/Tacoma area. Although they’re not available in every neighborhood, they expand their service area as demand grows. If Ridwell isn’t offered in your neighborhood, you can sign-up on their waitlist (and encourage your neighbors to do the same)!

*green swap:*

## 7. Compost leftover food & organic debris.

According to the FDA, food is the single largest category of material placed in municipal landfills, amounting to 133 billion pounds or \$161 billion worth of food (2010). Consider the wasted nourishment and vast amounts of water, energy and labor! Although composting represents the “last-ditch effort” to save leftover

food, flowers and other organic debris from going to the landfill, there's real value in turning it into a nutrient-rich soil amendment. Major jurisdictions like Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma and Kitsap County have curbside collection programs. Contact yours to sign up or show your interest!

*green swap:*

## 8. Use energy-efficient transportation options.

When possible, use public transportation, carpools, or a private vehicle powered by renewable energy. Of course, it's often impractical or inefficient to use public transportation. When you must rely on a private vehicle, try to consolidate multiple items on your to-do list into one trip, and try new-fangled tech like lowest-emission routing (see tip below)!

### VENDOR TIP

#### Google Maps' Lowest-Carbon Routing

"Since 2021, Google Maps has offered drivers the ability to see the lowest-carbon routing between destinations. In addition to saving money on gas, the handy feature can also be suggested to guests who are driving to an event. It's something literally anyone can do!"

*-Hannah Paukstis of The Hummingbird Event Co.*

# PROMOTING HUMAN SUSTAINABILITY

*green swap:*

## 9. Shop "small" & local when making buying decisions.

If you're a small business entrepreneur, you probably spend countless hours researching various products and services before making a purchase. Although mega-retailers like Amazon and Walmart provide convenience and are often less



inexpensive, they deliver a collective cost in the form of declining quality, fragmented community and the decline of American small businesses. We get it-sometimes you just need something fast. But consider the value added by purchasing quality products from a fellow local small business!

*green swap:*

## 10. Prioritize underrepresented groups when selecting & referring vendors.

When making purchasing decisions for your company or clients, make an effort to discover small businesses led by people-of-color, LGBTQIA+, women and other underrepresented groups. We all benefit from a strong and diverse vendor network.

*green swap:*

## 11. Pay staff (including yourself!) a living wage.

Families and individuals working in low-wage jobs make insufficient income to meet minimum standards given the local cost of living. To help bridge the financial gap, it's important to pay employees and contractors a living wage (see tip below). Additionally, it's important that we, too, are sufficiently compensated for our hard work! For small business entrepreneurs, it's common to prioritize bills over ourselves. If necessary, consider raising your rates, because no business is sustainable if you're burned out.

### VENDOR TIP

#### MIT's Living Wage Calculator

This [helpful tool](#) was developed to estimate the cost of living in a given state, city, county or metro area, based on typical expenses. The calculator helps individuals, communities, and employers determine a local wage rate that allows residents to meet minimum standards of living.

*green swap:*

## 12. Provide benefits to retain & empower staff.

Since many wedding industry vendors are not just small businesses, but micro ones, offering to contribute to your part-time bookkeeper's 401(k) plan is probably unrealistic. Nevertheless, our evolving economy and culture suggests that finding and retaining qualified personnel will remain challenging, and negotiating employee or contractor churn incurs its own costs. Not surprisingly, most experts agree that job flexibility and work-life balance are top considerations. In addition to flexible scheduling, if you're able to provide paid personal leave, health insurance or retirement contributions, that's wonderful; but to cover these expenses, don't be afraid to raise your fee to meet cost-of-living increases. Finally, don't forget that you are your company's most important person. Ensure your own work-life balance by not responding to every text, call or email immediately. Communicate with clients and partners your "off-hours" and take them!

*green swap:*

## 13. Participate in justice, equity & anti-bias education.

Everyone can benefit from anti-bias self-work as we work to realize justice and equity across all human experiences. To this end, it's critical that we prioritize anti-bias education for ourselves and our employees.

### VENDOR TIP

#### The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

PISAB Northwest offers its signature "Undoing Racism" Community Organizing Workshop each month. PISAB believes that effective community, systems and institutional change happens when those who serve as agents of transformation understand the foundations of race and racism and how they continually function as a barrier to community self-determination, self-sufficiency, and interdependency.

## BUILDING A SUSTAINABILITY NETWORK

*green swap:*

### **14. Promote green swaps with partners & clients.**

What's more fun than instituting green swaps for your business? Adding some friendly competition among wedding vendors into the mix! As you explore and implement carbon-reducing best business practices, why not share your swaps with fellow vendors, as well as your clients? It's inspiring to see the innovative ways that we can all become more sustainable!

*green swap:*

### **15. Purchase carbon offsets to make your business a net-zero emitter!**

Even the most dedicated green swap adherent is likely to produce some unavoidable emissions. If it's important to you to shrink your carbon footprint to net zero, you can participate in carbon offsetting. In essence, you pay to support sustainability projects, such as planting carbon-loving trees to installing renewable energy solutions in other communities. Of course, it's important to identify transparent programs that are certified by third-party organizations, like the American Carbon Registry.

#### VENDOR TIP

##### **Native**

Native, a public benefit corporation, is great because it both helps individuals and businesses to easily calculate their carbon footprint, be it for a single event, or your entire business, and to choose existing projects to support on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. Native is supported by well-known companies like all birds, Stonyfield and Stripe, and has over 80 projects that are certified by third-party organizations to help ensure their legitimacy.

*green swap:*

## 16. Choose credit unions, not banks.

We don't think you need an explanation for why most banks are awful. Thankfully, locally-based credit unions offer a much better experience and value for the vast majority of small businesses. Unlike banks, credit unions are nonprofits governed by their members (hopefully, you!). This is why you're more likely to feel a personal touch, and why they typically offer higher rates of return on savings accounts and lower interest rates on loans. Like banks, however, deposits are insured (up to \$250k per account). Although credit unions typically offer fewer financial bells and whistles, chances are good they'll more than meet your business needs. And while they tend to have fewer branches than the big banks, customers can use thousands of affiliated credit union ATMs throughout the region.

### VENDOR TIP

#### Verity Credit Union

"Verity Credit Union is my 'banking' choice because of how it aligns with my values. They pledge to 'put people, planet and prosperity for all above the bottom line to make meaningful, positive and lasting change in our world.' I'm thrilled to know that they invest about 87% of their members' deposits into the local economy and they're also a member of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values. The GABV is an international network of banks and cooperatives that uses finance to deliver sustainable economic, social and environmental development. In 2019, Verity and members of the GABV pledged to track and monitor the carbon impact of their loans and investments over the next three years. This kind of dedication, on a local and international scale, inspires me."

*-Susan Gallotte of Celebrations for Every Season*

*green swap:*

## 17. Obtain sustainability certifications for your business & prioritize working with others.

Obtaining sustainability certification from credible, third-party organizations and government agencies communicates your commitment to eco-friendly business practices *and* supports their work and visibility. Although respected certifications can require extensive reporting, it's also how they prevent greenwashing. From LEED-certified buildings to SIP-certified vineyards, chances are good there's a green business certification for you!

## VENDOR TIP

### Leaping Bunny, Fair Trade Certified and Salmon-Safe

"Our venue also offers lodging, so we consume a fair amount of hospitality-related consumer items. We rely on third-party groups to inform those purchasing decisions. For example, Leaping Bunny helps ensure animal-friendly products, Fair Trade Certified has rigorous standards to prevent worker exploitation, and when we replace appliances, we're sure to see which meet the Energy Star program's standards for efficiency. When it comes to our landscaping practices, we're working towards obtaining a Salmon-Safe certification to communicate our commitment to protecting water quality and habitat."

-Matt Kelley of Kingston House

*green swap:*

## 18. Incorporate your business with a social and/or environmental mission.

Sure, you're a small business entrepreneur living in a hyper-capitalist society. That being said, maybe maximizing profit isn't your only objective? If that's you, consider incorporating your business at the State and/or Federal level in a way that communicates those values. Of course, there's the traditional 501-c3 nonprofit model, but be sure to look into other options, like Washington state's "Social Purpose Corporation" (see tip below) and third-party certification through (for-profit) entities like B Corp. In addition to reflecting your values, these alternative models can even help shift the capitalist paradigm.

## VENDOR TIP

### Social Purpose Corporations (SPC)

A few states, like Washington and California, give entrepreneurs the option to create *for-profit* businesses that aren't legally required to pursue profits above all else; it's a wild thought! An SPC or "Social Purpose Corporation" allows businesses to consider social and/or environmental objectives *in addition to* turning a profit; otherwise, the steps to establish and operate this type of corporation are nearly identical to an LLC, "S" or "C" corp. At last check, there are about 400 active SPCs in Washington, including Emerald Hour! Remember, this is a State-level legal business designation. The IRS still requires a federally-recognized tax classification.

Part III: Vendor-specific

# Bartending / Mixology

## BARTENDING / MIXOLOGY

*green swap:*

### **1. Avoid single-use plastics.**

As a bartender, you can act as a “gatekeeper” when it comes to changing client behavior around wasteful, non-recyclable plastics. Many people assume that plastic SOLO-type cups can be and will be recycled. In the vast majority of instances, curbside recycling programs will reject these plastics and send them to the landfill. Partner with venue owners and caterers to discourage (ideally prohibit) non-recyclable plastics and steer couples towards eco-friendlier options.

*green swap:*

### **2. Sort recyclable, compostable and landfill-bound materials at the event venue.**

The bartender helps determine where the bulk of an event’s recyclable glass and plastic goes. If recyclables are mixed with non-recyclables, garnishes, etc., chances are good that the venue will just designate the entire bay as trash. Work with your venue and catering partners to create an efficient set-up to sort glass and plastic empties from compostable napkins and garnishes and trash. The bar tends to be a popular place, so encourage your venue to provide clearly marked containers that are frequently emptied.

*green swap:*

### **3. Prioritize organic, high-quality, locally-sourced ingredients and garnishes.**

Just as caterers should look to locally-grown, organic ingredients, bartenders should too. Guests may take that orange peel or cinnamon stick for granted, but why not look to highlight locally-grown blackberry or mint sprig? Although doing so rarely provides the absolute lowest price to your clients, communicating with them about the added value of the experience value.



*green swap:*

## **4. Compost used or leftover ingredients, garnishes and natural cork.**

A surprising amount of bar waste (e.g. used napkins, natural corks, citrus peels, mint stalks, etc.) can be composted in curbside bins. Check with your venue and catering partners and separate these items from waste and recycling. Synthetic corks should be either recycled or thrown away, depending on your waste collection provider's guidelines.

*green swap:*

## **5. Encourage clients to choose beer kegs or canned beer over bottled beer.**

Not sure if we can claim consensus here, but there's a compelling argument that says beer kegs from a local brewer produces a smaller carbon footprint than bottled beer. If your event doesn't need an entire keg's worth, opt for canned beer over bottled. Studies show that the aluminum is more likely to get recycled.

*green swap:*

## **6. Discourage single-serving plastic water bottles.**

Work with your couples and catering partners to avoid offering single-serving plastic water bottles. If the event is already using reusable or compostable barware for the reception, encourage providing extras at a water station with water dispensers.

*green swap:*

## **7. Educate clients about sourcing local beer, wine and spirits.**

Since shipping is a major source of carbon emissions in the industry, take the opportunity to educate clients and catering partners about sourcing local beer, wine and spirits products over imports.

Part III: Vendor-specific

# Beauty

## BEAUTY

*green swap:*

### **1. Minimize the use of single-use elements.**

Whenever possible, avoid using single-use elements as they produce a disproportionate amount of waste.

*green swap:*

### **2. Prioritize non-toxic products.**

Prioritize non-toxic products with eco-friendly elements because they're better for you, your clients and the environment! Don't be shy about advertising your intentional purchasing and the universal benefit.

*green swap:*

### **3. Clean your tools using eco-friendly means.**

Clean your tools using eco-friendly (non-toxic, multipurpose, and/or low-waste) means.

*green swap:*

### **4. Buy products with intention.**

To help reduce waste, buy new products with intention only as needed or anticipated.

*green swap:*

### **5. Sanitize items rather than using disposable ones.**

Sanitize reusable items instead of using disposable items, like spoolies and brushes.

*green swap:*

## **6. Prioritize ethical beauty brands.**

It's important to purchase brands that reflect ethical beauty standards, be it the way they source their products, to if they reject animal cruelty.

*green swap:*

## **7. Honor diversity/skin tones/hair types.**

It's simply good business sense to ensure that you're able to make everyone feel beautiful and respected, regardless of their specific heritage or appearance. Prospective clients who are familiar with being excluded from too many "mainstream" vendors will appreciate your inclusivity in both application and marketing.

*green swap:*

## **8. Invest in quality products.**

Although our throwaway culture encourages us to buy cheap and often, if you're committed to quality work, then you should also invest in quality products.

Part III: Vendor-specific

# Catering

## CATERING (Including Cakes/Desserts)

*green swap:*

### **1. Use organic, locally-sourced, fair trade and seasonal ingredients.**

Whenever possible, look to locally-sourced and seasonal ingredients for optimal freshness. It's also important to know that the farm employs fair trade practices to help ensure that workers are properly compensated for their work.

*green swap:*

### **2. Offer clients vegetarian and fully plant-based menus.**

It's widely known that beef, pork and other meat has a huge carbon footprint. One of the most consequential ways to reduce an event's carbon footprint is by offering clients exciting vegetarian and fully plant-based (vegan) menu options that can persuade couples who are on the fence to "go green"!

*green swap:*

### **3. Don't source meat or seafood from "factory farms".**

If your clients are adamant about including meat and/or seafood on their menu, avoid the inhumane conditions inherent in the "factory farm" industry. Instead, look to local small farms whose animal care practices prioritize humane and healthy conditions.

*green swap:*

### **4. Implement procedures to eliminate food waste.**

Clients are discouraged from over-ordering and leftovers are either donated or composted. According to the FDA, food is the single largest category of material placed in municipal landfills. Beyond the wasted nourishment that could have fed people in need, consider all of the water, energy and labor used to produce food that is ultimately wasted!

*green swap:*

## **5. Use reusable, recyclable or compostable containers to transport food or for leftovers.**

As you know, a highlight for many couples (and their guests!) can be the opportunity to take home leftover food from your wedding or event. This is also a great way to avoid wasting food. Help the environment by having reusable, recyclable or compostable containers on-hand (either through you or the venue), and be sure the intended recipients know not to simply toss it into the trash.

*green swap:*

## **6. Don't individually wrap baked goods in cellophane.**

Cellophane is popular for food packaging. Although it's derived from natural sources (like wood), it can't be recycled and its production creates toxic chemicals. Furthermore, once in the landfill, it can also release methane, a powerful gas with significant negative environmental consequences.

*green swap:*

## **7. Don't use artificial coloring.**

Some studies have shown that artificial coloring has negative health consequences. Why take the chance, when there are natural options without the risk?

*green swap:*



## 8. Suggest and provide edible (or at least plastic-free) cake toppers.

It's common for couples to want to customize their cake with their initials or whimsical toppers. During your consultations, you can steer them away from single-use plastic items by suggesting (and better yet, providing!) edible or compostable cake toppers.

*green swap:*

## 9. Don't use single-use, non-recyclable tableware or packaging.

Don't use single-use, non-recyclable tableware (e.g. polystyrene or coated paper plates) or packaging that will go to the landfill. Only tableware that's reused or will be composted is used.

*green swap:*

## 10. Work with other vendors properly sort recyclable, compostable and landfill-bound materials.

If a venue doesn't sort recyclables or compost, my company offers to remove the waste for proper disposal.

*green swap:*

## 11. Use energy-efficient appliances and conserve energy.

Virtually all commercial caterers can significantly reduce their energy consumption by installing smart thermostats, motion-sensing lights or lighting timers, as well as energy-efficient appliances and low-flow faucets, shower heads and toilets.

Part III: Vendor-specific

# Entertainment

## ENTERTAINMENT (DJs & Live Music)

*green swap:*

### **1. Invest in high-quality equipment and utilize it for its entire lifespan.**

When buying new equipment, invest in high-quality pieces that will last.

*green swap:*

### **2. Purchase reliable used/b-stock equipment.**

When possible, consider purchasing good quality used or b-stock equipment instead of purchasing it new.

*green swap:*

### **3. Rent and/or borrow equipment for special use cases.**

If you need a piece of specialty equipment for a job, consider renting or borrowing equipment instead of investing in an item that may have limited future use. Don't be afraid to query your network to see if there's another DJ in the area that doesn't need the equipment on the date. If, however, you decide it's something that you may use on a regular basis, see if you can find a gently used item from your network, Facebook marketplace or Craigslist, or an official resale platform.

*green swap:*

### **4. Resell unwanted equipment.**

Help keep the b-stock economy strong by reselling unwanted equipment to fellow vendors, who may not want to invest in something new.

*green swap:*

## 5. Source equipment from local vendors.

Ordering equipment online may be convenient, but increases the carbon footprint of getting the product in your hands thanks to shipping. Before going that route, see if you're able to source equipment from local vendors through Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist or local stores.

*green swap:*

## 6. Use rechargeable batteries for wireless equipment.

Opt for rechargeable batteries instead of landfill-bound ones.

*green swap:*

## 7. Practice responsible energy consumption.

Avoid wasting energy by keeping electronics plugged in indefinitely. For example, when guests migrate from the ceremony to the reception area, there's no reason to keep draining electricity or battery power at the ceremony area.

*green swap:*

## 8. Service a local geographic footprint.

Beyond the marketing benefits of being able to identify yourself as an expert in your area, it's obviously better for the environment to stay close to home. Find a range that you're comfortable traveling (whether that be within 30 minutes of home, 2 hours, or within your state) and commit to focusing your efforts to weddings within that area.

*green swap:*

## 9. Take care to dispose of electronic waste responsibly.

It's very important to properly dispose of electronic waste. Most jurisdictions offer low-cost options to drop-off e-waste. Doing so helps ensure that harmful chemicals don't leach into the ground.

*green swap:*

## **10. Avoid single-use dance floor items.**

Try to redirect couples from employing single-use dance floor items, like glow sticks. Instead, suggest reusable items.

Part III: Vendor-specific

# Floral Design

## FLORAL DESIGN

*green swap:*

### 1. Prioritize what's in season.

Prioritize what's in season locally by designing with flowers when they naturally bloom. This is a double win since it supports local flower farmers and reduces the waste generated by importing flowers from far away.

*green swap:*

### 2. Work with wholesalers and flower farmers.

Work with wholesalers and flower farmers to source local flowers first, and ensure that you know the origin of the flowers prior to purchase. A great source for locally grown flowers is the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market (see below).

#### VENDOR TIP

##### Seattle Wholesale Growers Market

Imagine a farmer-owned cooperative committed to providing the very best the Pacific Northwest has to offer in cut flowers, foliage and plants. It's here! Not only do they promote sustainability by supporting local flower farmers, they offer resources to help floral designers in their quest for fresh, local flowers with their [Floral Calendar](#) that lists general flower availability by the month and a weekly Fresh Sheet list so you can know what's available.

*green swap:*

### 3. Educate clients on the seasonality of local flowers.

When clients ask for imported or out-of-season flowers, educate them on the seasonality of local flowers and suggest more sustainable substitutions. There's a good chance they'll be pleasantly surprised by learning about new and wonderful

flowers.

*green swap:*

## 4. Advise clients on best use of floral pieces.

Advise clients on which floral pieces will have the greatest visual impact and which can be repurposed for other parts of their celebration, to help avoid over-ordering floral components.

*green swap:*

## 5. Avoid the use of floral foam.

Instead of using floral foam, opt for chicken wire, moss poles or floral frogs. You can learn about alternatives to floral foam from fellow Emerald Hour members, as well as organizations like the Slow Flower Society, and Sustainable Floristry.org.

*green swap:*

## 6. Wash and reuse non-floral items.

Wash and reuse non-floral items. chicken wire, water tubes, wire and vases, unless the hard goods are a part of an arrangement a client or guest takes home.

*green swap:*

## 7. Compost all green floral waste.

Compost all green floral waste, both from production and the wedding itself, that aren't gifted or donated. Talk with the venue to see if these items can be composted on-site.

*green swap:*

## 8. Repurpose ceremony florals.

Whenever possible, repurpose ceremony or other event location florals (e.g. cocktail hour, reception). Two of the easiest ways? Ceremony flowers being



moved to the reception area and bridesmaid bouquets being used as centerpieces! Just have vases ready on the guest tables or wherever and pop those bouquets in as soon as the ceremony is over. The bridesmaids will thank you, too, because, honestly, who knows what to do with a bouquet like that during cocktail hour?

*green swap:*

## 9. Rent and collect vessels.

Rent vessels to clients and collect them at the end of the event, unless the client requests otherwise.

*green swap:*

## 10. Avoid buying vases.

Don't buy new vases if they are already in your inventory, or available to rent from another vendor, especially Rental and Venue vendors.

*green swap:*

## 11. Avoid adding inorganic materials to arrangements.

Avoid adding inorganic materials to arrangements without a plan for salvaging and reuse (e.g. glittered/plastic picks and sprays, opalina, etc.). Eliminate any dyeing or spray-painting of flowers from your company policies.

*green swap:*

## 12. Be mindful when using foraged materials.

Make sure they are positively identified and checked against the [noxious weed list](#).

*green swap:*

## 13. For adventure weddings and elopements.

Design with hearty blooms that can handle a bit of jostling without shedding petals and seeds everywhere. Also, use native species when the flowers are going into sensitive environments to avoid any accidental spreading of seeds from invasive species. Finally, choose blooms and design tactics that are weather-appropriate to ensure they last the day so they're enjoyed for as long as possible!

## Additional Resources

<https://www.sustainablefloristry.org/industry-program/>

<https://www.slowflowerssociety.com/>

<https://oshunpouch.com/>

Part III: Vendor-specific

# Event Management / Planning

## EVENT PLANNING

*green swap:*

### **1. Support & educate clients on the choices they can make to create a more sustainable wedding.**

This is something a planner can (and should) do throughout the wedding planning process! Couples may not realize the environmental impact of some of the wedding decisions they'll have to make, so as their planning partners it's important to be prepared to offer guidance and suggestions. You could create your own blog post or resource with some specific recommendations, or just offer links to other online resources they can refer to!

At the same time, it's important to avoid making recommendations for the sake of wedding "tradition" or "etiquette" (i.e. recommending that a couple should mail out a complete invitation suite, when they expressed interest in sending invitations digitally). A lot of the waste generated by the wedding industry in the U.S. is rooted in traditions and expectations. Planners should support couples in planning an event that is aligned with their values, vs. the status quo.

If you offer design services, help couples make design choices that offer maximum impact. By prioritizing a few statement pieces that elevate the design of the event, couples can avoid adding unnecessary design elements. Less stuff = less of an environmental impact.

*green swap:*

### **2. Maintain a list of sustainability-minded wedding venues, vendors, and other businesses that a couple might be seeking while planning their wedding.**

One of the biggest ways wedding planners can support couples is through the recommendation of wedding vendors. By maintaining an active list of sustainability-minded vendors and businesses, you'll be able to steer couples

towards vendors that can help them create a more sustainable event. The Emerald Hour Member Directory is a great place to start!

*green swap:*

### **3. Facilitate the use of rentable décor, tableware and other wedding day items.**

Opting for rented items over single-use items is one of the biggest ways to reduce wedding-day waste. Couples are often surprised by how many items can be rented and that rentals can still be cost effective. Maintain a list of local rental companies that couples can go to for their wedding day needs (from linens to glassware to decorative pieces) and when possible, help facilitate rental orders to make it as easy as possible for couples to opt for this more sustainable solution.

*green swap:*

### **4. Offer a small collection of rentable décor/wedding items.**

There can be so many items used on a wedding day that couples have no need to use again. To help couples avoid buying single use items, consider offering a small collection of rental items that couples commonly need on a wedding day. This could include things like a card basket, table number holders, easels, frames, votives, etc.

*green swap:*

### **5. When purchasing new rental items, pursue second-hand, ethically-sourced and/or high-quality items.**

If you're aiming to add or replace items in your rental collection, try to avoid the big retailers offering low-quality and unethically-made goods whenever possible. Sites like Facebook Marketplace and OfferUp are great places to find gently used wedding items, and local thrift stores often have a good inventory of items like vases, votives, baskets, cake stands, etc. When you do have to buy "new," look to

local businesses first and be sure to invest in higher quality pieces that have a longer lifespan.

*green swap:*

## **6. Help couples shop responsibly.**

If clients are looking for an item that can't be rented, offer suggestions on how to shop more responsibly. Facebook Marketplace has a constant stream of secondhand wedding items, and there are even groups dedicated to buying and selling wedding items such as The Seattle Wedding & Event Network Buy/Sell/Give Group. You can also encourage couples to check thrift stores, which are great for finding vintage pieces, components for DIY projects, as well as common wedding items.

*green swap:*

## **7. Steer clients away from environmentally-harmful items and practices such as sparklers, balloon arches, confetti, lantern releases, etc.**

Provide clients with a list of practical (and fun) alternatives to some of these more harmful practices. Or, consider adding a clause in your contract to inform clients that you will not set-up or facilitate the use of certain items.

*green swap:*

## **8. Clarify what recycling, compost, and waste disposal options are available at wedding venues.**

Before an event, check-in with the venue to confirm what recycling, compost, and waste disposal options are available, and what requirements the venue might have. Be sure to convey these guidelines to any onsite vendor teams so they can be prepared. Sustainability-minded venues often have strict requirements related to waste disposal, so it's especially important to ensure guidelines are followed at the end of the night so couples don't have to face any unexpected fees!

*green swap:*

## **9. When possible, help keep used wedding items and waste out of the landfill.**

If contracted to stay at an event throughout the tear-down process, offer guidance to vendors (or any remaining wedding guests/family members) on where and how to dispose of items. This can fall under the category of “not my job,” but as a sustainability-minder planner, you can help ensure that items are disposed of in the correct places, and/or ensure that wedding leftovers (i.e. dinner, dessert, or flowers) are sent home with someone and do not go to waste. If there’s leftover flowers at the end of the night that the wedding party did not want to take, you can send them home with vendors or venue staff.

It’s helpful to ask clients ahead of time what wedding items they do and do not want to preserve, so you can plan ahead. For example, some couples may want to save a handful of event menus. You can collect those to send home with the couple at the end of the night, and have the peace of mind to know that you can ensure proper recycling of the rest.

*green swap:*

## **10. Educate clients on “Leave no Trace principles” for elopements/weddings taking place on public lands or natural areas.**

If working with couples holding outdoor elopements or “adventure” weddings, make sure that couples are familiar with the “Leave no Trace” principles, and encourage clients to educate their guests, as well. You could create a blog post or have this information available in a welcome packet for all couples to refer to. Also, consider adding a clause in your contract requiring clients and their guests to follow Leave no Trace principles.

*green swap:*

## **11. When facilitating elopements/weddings**

## **taking place on public lands or natural areas, ensure that all proper permits are obtained.**

It can be confusing for couples to navigate the process for obtaining a permit to host an event on public land, and some couples might not be aware that a permit is typically needed. As the planner, be prepared to advise couples on which permit is necessary based on where their event is taking place and guide them through the process of obtaining the permit. It's also important to stay up to date on any new rules or changes to an existing process. When in doubt, make the extra effort to contact the appropriate office to get any questions answered.



Part III: Vendor-specific

# Photography & Videography

## PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY

*green swap:*

### **1. Shop local when purchasing new equipment.**

Ordering gear online is certainly convenient, but increases the carbon footprint of getting the product in your hands thanks to shipping. Shop local and rest easy knowing you're also using your purchasing power to support your community!

*green swap:*

### **2. Stick to your local market.**

Beyond the marketing benefits of being able to identify yourself as an expert in your area, it's obviously better for the environment to stay close to home. Find a range that you're comfortable traveling (whether that be within 30 minutes of home, 2 hours, or within your state) and commit to focusing your efforts on weddings within that area.

*green swap:*

### **3. When traveling, opt for the most sustainable method available.**

It's not always feasible to take public transit to shoot locations, but there are always steps you can take to minimize your impact. When driving, keep your packing list light so you don't weigh down the car unnecessarily. And when flying, go ahead and splurge on a direct flight, since takeoff and landing are the most carbon-intensive parts of a flight!

*green swap:*

### **4. Rent, borrow, or buy second-hand equipment when possible.**

If you need a piece of specialty equipment for a job, there are options to rent camera bodies, lenses, lighting equipment, accessories... look for a local camera store that rents out equipment, then check online. Or if there's another photographer in your area that doesn't need the equipment on your shoot date, even better! When you do want to add a new piece of gear to your collection, see if you can find a gently used item from your network, Facebook marketplace or Craigslist, or an official resale platform like those found on Adorama or B and H.

## VENDOR TIP

### **Lensrentals.com**

[Lensrentals.com](https://www.lensrentals.com) is a reliable source for renting, and also sells their used gear with clear descriptions of their condition so that you know what you're getting.

*green swap:*

## **5. Invest in high-quality pieces that will last.**

When buying new equipment, hold those purchases to high standards and invest in gear that will stand the test of time. Like if you're currently on a DSLR but planning to upgrade to mirrorless soon... go ahead and hold off on purchasing that fancy new 35mm.

*green swap:*

## **6. Repair, don't replace damaged gear.**

When gear gets damaged, try to repair it before replacing it. This might involve shipping your equipment back to the brand for an intense fix, or dropping into your local camera store for their expertise.

*green swap:*

## **7. Sell or donate items that you're retiring from your collection.**

No matter what you're getting rid of (and oftentimes, regardless of its condition) there's somebody out there who will take it off your hands! Look for other artists,

consignment shops, and resale websites. There are lots of takers on Craigslist and eBay, but also Facebook Marketplace, Facebook groups, and on your Instagram stories.

*green swap:*

## **8. When discarding gear, take care to dispose of electronic waste responsibly.**

It's very important to properly dispose of electronic waste. Most jurisdictions offer low-cost options to drop-off e-waste. Doing so helps ensure that harmful chemicals don't leach into the ground!

*green swap:*

## **9. Practice Leave No Trace principles when on public land and in natural areas.**

This goes for you and your clients— do your very best to follow the 7 principles of Leave No Trace. This includes taking care not to leave any litter behind, not taking things from the environment when you leave, staying off of fragile flora like cryptobiotic soil or wildflowers, not feeding wildlife... you can learn more about L.N.T. on their [website](#).

*green swap:*

## **10. Promote responsible behavior in the outdoors.**

Geotagging locations that don't have the infrastructure to support large crowds can have disastrous consequences for the environment if your post goes viral. And on a smaller level, people viewing your post might not know how to recreate responsibly when visiting fragile wildflower meadows, dangerous cliffs, or other sensitive locations. Educate your followers about responsible behaviors, and think before geotagging the locations in which you photograph.

*green swap:*

## **11. Disallow the use of single-use, wasteful, or harmful practices and props.**

Smoke bombs, confetti, balloons, using aerosol sprays to create atmospheric fog, popping champagne and letting the cork fly.. Pack it in, pack it out.

*green swap:*

## **12. Minimize wasteful printing, and source eco-friendly options.**

Gone are the days when wedding galleries were delivered in a giant box of 4x6 proofs. When you order prints and products, ensure that they're wanted first! And when choosing your suppliers, look for companies that share their practices on sustainability.

*green swap:*

## **13. Opt for environmentally-friendly mailing options.**

Opt for environmentally-friendly mailing options when shipping products to clients– reuse what you've got, use paper packing options instead of styrofoam or packing peanuts, or source eco-friendly mailers directly from a source like e(and request minimal packaging when you order from outside suppliers!)

### VENDOR TIP

**ecoenclose.com**

[ecoenclose.com](https://www.ecoenclose.com) offers sustainable packaging that you can even personalize with your own branding! In addition to boxes and envelopes, you can find stickers, labels, tape, and more.

# Part III: Vendor-specific Rentals

## RENTALS

*green swap:*

### **1. Celebrate the beauty, quality and sustainability of thrifted and repurposed items.**

Reassure couples about the benefits of using thrifted items. Point out the fact that they're more sustainable precisely because they are not newly manufactured and that older items are often of a higher quality. Many people find the beauty of vintage dishes, glassware, and furniture to be superior to modern, mass produced items.

Where to find all this cool stuff? Thrift stores are great for finding countless items that are needed for weddings like dishes, glassware, candles, furniture, and other decor. Facebook Marketplace has a constant stream of secondhand wedding items. There are even groups dedicated to buying and selling wedding items such as The Seattle Wedding & Event Network Buy/Sell/Give Group.

*green swap:*

### **2. Feature items made of natural materials such as glass, china, wood and linen over plastic and polyester.**

While the manufacturing of all items requires energy and resources, items made of natural materials are inherently easier on the planet than those that require petroleum products and toxic chemicals for their production. Not only do glass, china, wood, linen and cotton feel good to the touch, they are extremely durable and perform in a superior fashion to plastic and polyester. Encourage couples to consider natural elements when renting items for their wedding.

*green swap:*

### **3. Prioritize ethically-sourced and/or high-quality items over purchasing single use**

## “throwaway” items.

Try to avoid the big retailers offering low-quality and unethically-made goods whenever possible. Look to local thrift stores and sites like Facebook Marketplace and OfferUp to find high quality, gently used items that can be used again and again. If you must buy new, check out local businesses and be sure to invest in higher quality pieces that have a longer lifespan.

*green swap:*

## 4. Pack items in reusable, eco-friendly material, such as cloth instead of plastic or polystyrene.

By stocking sturdy, durable items to begin with, you can easily wrap them for storage and transport in simple pieces of flannel or cotton. Material like this is easily found at thrift stores and then can be cut into whatever sizes you need. Plastic bubble wrap and styrofoam are toxic to the environment and difficult to clean between rentals. Cotton material can easily be thrown into the washing machine and reused countless times.

*green swap:*

## 5. Deliver rental items in reusable totes/crates/boxes.

There is no need for single use boxes when it comes to rentals. Reusing totes, crates, boxes and baskets is cost effective and makes packing/unpacking/storing smooth and easy. By using durable items to pack and deliver rentals, the rental items themselves are protected too.

*green swap:*

## 6. Transport items in the most efficient way possible.

Efficiency can be prioritized to maximize sustainability at several stages of the transportation journey (pun intended!) If you start by packing the items in their



boxes and then packing them into the vehicle in the most efficient way possible, you can save space in your vehicle and save on trips, the size of vehicle needed, and/or the number of vehicles needed to transport everything. Drive a fuel efficient vehicle, a hybrid or, even better, an electric and you can definitely lower the carbon impact of transporting the rental items.

*green swap:*

## 7. Use zero-waste and eco-friendly cleaning products to wash items and launder linens.

Washing dishes, glassware, silverware and linens is a big part of a party rental business. By choosing earth friendly cleaning products that are not sold in plastic bottles, you can make this process much greener! Did you know that 90% of the water we drink and the food we eat contain microplastics? We have got to stop using plastic wherever we can and companies like Blueland make it easy and affordable.

### VENDOR TIP

#### Blueland

"I use Blueland products for all of my dishwashing and laundry needs. Blueland is a certified B corporation that creates innovative cleaning products in reusable packaging that are effective, convenient, safe for use, affordable and sourced from environmentally responsible ingredients. Their refillable laundry soap and dishwasher soap come in the form of tablets or powder so I just add water and wash! No more plastic bottles! Their products are refillable and have helped to eliminate over 1 billion single use plastic bottles from landfills and oceans since 2019. Bonus: Blueland is committed to protecting the planet and all of its people. They prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion among their teams and welcome, celebrate and champion all backgrounds."

*-Susan Gallotte of Celebrations for Every Season*

*green swap:*

## 8. Clean/laundry items on-site.

By washing items and laundering linens on site you can lower the carbon cost of each process. You can use energy efficient appliances and earth friendly/no

plastic cleaning products. Plus there is no cost for transporting items to and from cleaning companies.

Part III: Vendor-specific  
**Stationers**

## STATIONERS

*green swap:*

### **1. Offer clients recycled, hemp, or seed paper options.**

When helping clients to select paper stock for their invitations, save the dates or thank you cards, encourage them to consider recycled, hemp or seed paper options. See paper is a special way your correspondence can be repurposed into a garden!

*green swap:*

### **2. Use only non-toxic inks.**

Be sure that your custom printing uses only non-toxic inks, like soy-based options.

*green swap:*

### **3. Store paints and other perishable supplies correctly.**

Proper storage of your paints and other perishable supplies will help your bottom line by preserving their efficacy.

*green swap:*

### **4. Properly dispose of toxic waste.**

Of course, it's very important that all toxic waste is disposed of properly, and that's not in the waste bin! Most jurisdictions publish information about where and how to dispose of hazardous waste.

*green swap:*

## 5. Use eco-friendlier office supplies.

Use eco-friendlier (recycled, reusable, or low-waste) office supplies for sketching, proofing, designing, etc.

*green swap:*

## 6. Deliver proofs online.

While there is something undeniably special about being able to hold your invitation or other printed collateral, it's simply not necessary during the proofing process. Use digital platforms that are easy to access and provide customers with an enjoyable viewing experience.

*green swap:*

## 7. Use eco-friendlier mailing options.

Use eco-friendlier mailing options to ship products to clients.

*green swap:*

## 8. Discourage unnecessary opulence.

Discourage (separate papers for everything, wrapped in ribbon, wooden tags, foil-stamped).

Part III: Vendor-specific  
**Venues**

## VENUES

*green swap:*

### **1. Conduct events outdoors.**

As an event venue, creating attractive outdoor spaces for your couples' events can dramatically decrease energy use and associated costs.

*green swap:*

### **2. Invest in renewable energy infrastructure.**

Offsetting your venue's energy use through renewable energy infrastructure (e.g. solar panels) is a significant investment. That said, the rising price of electricity by most local utilities means that many customers can recoup their investment in under 10 years. The Inflation Reduction Act has increased tax credits to 30% for residential and commercial solar energy systems installed over the next decade.

*green swap:*

### **3. Install smart, energy-efficient appliances and lighting.**

Virtually all event venues can significantly reduce their energy consumption by installing smart thermostats, motion-sensing lights or lighting timers, as well as energy-efficient appliances and low-flow faucets, shower heads and toilets.

*green swap:*

### **4. Prohibit non-recyclable plastics.**

As a venue owner or operator, you can act as a "gatekeeper" when it comes to changing client behavior around wasteful, non-recyclable plastics. Many people assume that plastic SOLO-type cups can be and will be recycled. In the vast majority of instances, curbside recycling programs will reject these plastics and send them to the landfill. Prohibit non-recyclable plastics and steer couples

towards eco-friendlier options.

*green swap:*

## **5. Require recycling and impose fees for non-adherence.**

It seems like common sense, but it's important that your couples and vendors (especially catering and bartending) know that recycling is required at events taking place at your venue. To encourage compliance, include language in your contracts with clients imposing a fee if venue staff have to remove recyclable materials from event trash.

*green swap:*

## **6. Provide on-site composting of food, floral and other organic items.**

Organic waste like leftover food contributes a huge portion of area landfills. Thankfully, municipal and county composting programs are expanding in our area, and their industrial scale allows for meats and oils, foods that typically cannot be composted in backyard operations. In addition to food waste, communicate with couples and floral designers that their organic waste can also be composted on-site. However, be sure they know that wire, ties and other non-compostable hardware has been removed.

*green swap:*

## **7. Offer couples on-site furniture and décor rentals.**

It's virtually inevitable that venues won't have every single piece of furniture, every sign or other amenity desired by couples for their weddings. As a result, couples will look to rental companies to acquire items. Help reduce those costs and the resulting carbon emissions involved with delivering items (and picking them back up) by offering some of the most popular rental items in-house.



*green swap:*

## 8. Promote smaller events by reducing your allowable guest count.

Undoubtedly, the single best way to reduce an event's carbon footprint is to reduce the number of guests. Although some couples with large families and personal networks will push back, others will appreciate the prompt to remove "courtesy invitees" and focus on the people they love most.

*green swap:*

## 9. Whenever possible, reuse or recycle non-curbside collection materials (e.g. polystyrene, #4-7 plastics).

Unfortunately, most curbside recycling programs don't accept plastics and films found in everyday grocery items. For example, many municipal recyclers no longer accept juice containers with plastic pourers or plastic bags. Although it requires a special effort, venues can take advantage of periodic special collection events for polystyrene (aka styrofoam), and many grocery stores will accept plastic bags and other films.

*green swap:*

## 10. Use greener landscaping practices.

Unfortunately, toxic herbicides, pesticides and poisons are frequently accepted tools for modern landscaping and lawn care. They shouldn't be! Venues can dramatically decrease their negative environmental impact by avoiding harmful chemicals, transitioning to electric landscaping tools instead of gas-powered ones, and by conserving water and planting native plants.!

### VENDOR TIP

#### Conservation District Plant Sales

Most counties in Washington offer spring plant sales that offer dozens of different types of wonderful native trees, shrubs, flowers and groundcovers. Typically, these plants are sold in

bundles of 5 or 10 bare root plants, which makes them especially easy to plant. Plus, since they're native to our area, there's a great chance they will thrive in your garden! Support the work of local conservation districts *and* local birds and wildlife by planting native plants!



Emerald Hour SPC

Website: [emeraldhour.org](http://emeraldhour.org)  
Instagram: [@emeraldhourorg](https://www.instagram.com/emeraldhourorg)  
Facebook: [/emeraldhour](https://www.facebook.com/emeraldhour)