



# green is the new white...

**Getting married in the morning? Fiona Longsdon looks at ethical options to celebrate both your wedding day and the planet. With a bit of thought and planning, the day of your dreams can be in perfect harmony with the earth. So, let the champagne corks pop and start your married life as you mean to go on!**

**Y**our eco-credentials may already be greener than white, and yet it seems that the juggernaut of modern-day consumerism can affect even the most level headed couples when planning a wedding. But with a little thought into how your money is spent, a wedding day can be an opportunity to step forward together into an ethically positive future. Alongside a promise to honour and cherish your loved one, why not pledge that same lifetime of commitment to the planet?

There is a vast amount of decision-making involved in organizing your big day, and it can be tempting to make quick-fire choices that count against the environment. But, considering that a 100-guest wedding creates an estimated 7.7 tonnes of greenhouse gas, ethical values should be at the forefront of the planning. Whether your budget is lavish or frugal (an average wedding tally is a startling £20,000), environmentally aware lovebirds all over the country are seeing that they can enjoy the most memorable day of their lives with a clean, green conscience.

## back to basics

It has been said that modern day weddings, with their clichéd formula of official photographer, 'queen for a day' formality and first dances, is a construct that lacks spontaneity and true meaning. Some see traditional weddings as being pointlessly decadent, out of tune with nature and the seasons. Considering the pomp and pageantry of the recent Royal wedding, maybe there is a case for getting back to basics. Civil partnerships, Registry offices and the ready availability of licensed wedding

venues go some way to redress the balance, but it is important to remember that a wedding day is simply a celebration between two people who have chosen to make a loving commitment. How hard is it to incorporate green principles into that?

## green-fashion

There are plenty of eco-options that can make your wedding day a true red-carpet moment (or should that be green?), and what better place to start than with the all-important wedding dress. Last year, the British Fashion Council launched its first 'sustainable fashion' show, evidence of a new awareness and proof that blending ethics and style no longer requires compromise. For custom-made dresses, ethical and fair-trade fabric is easily available, including hemp, bamboo satin, while 'peace' silk, also known as 'ahimsa' silk, is a popular choice. The semi-wild silkworms have a full life-cycle before the silk strands are extracted and spun by hand, in sharp contrast to conventional silk farming, where as many as 10,000 silk worms are killed in boiling water per metre of finished fabric.

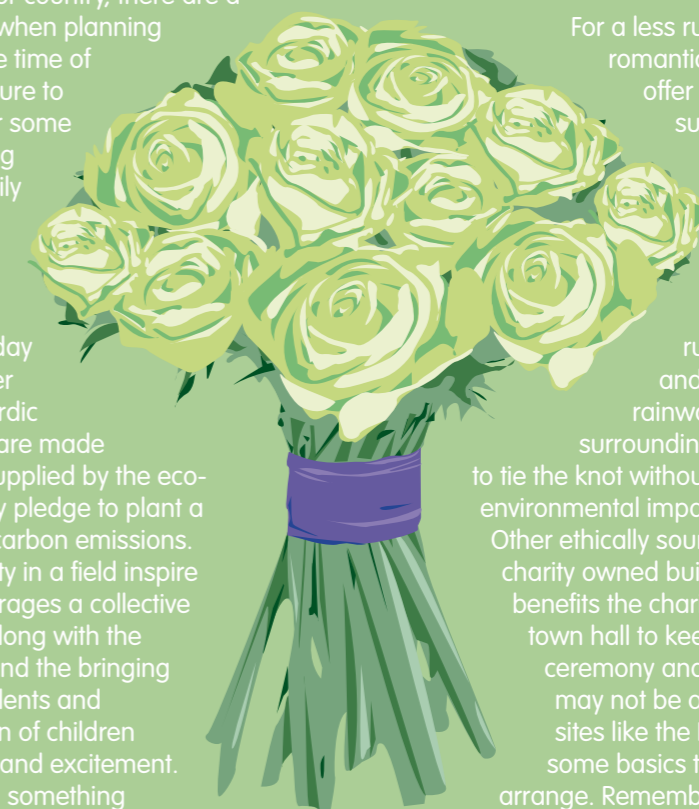
Two of Britain's most well known charities have tapped into the niche. If your heart is set on a traditional, luxury gown, Barnado's has a shop that sells a large collection of seconds, end-of-line and ex-sample dresses donated by retailers and designers, whilst Oxfam sells 'once-worn' wedding dresses on their website. Buying this way ensures that all profits go back to the charity, and minimizes personal consumption. For those Scarlet brides, opting for colour has the bonus of owning a dress that can easily be worn again, and a trawl

through clothes swap events, Freecycle options and vintage shops is always worth the effort for some funky finds. With this array of ethical choices, there's no excuse not to go green from top to toe – even down to some silky undies!

Bridegrooms like to mark the day with a display of sartorial glory too, and hiring from a local costume shop costs very little, and is a sure way to surprise! Heidi and Darren Bishop married in thrifty, green style seven years ago. She describes how Darren, an all-year-round jeans and t-shirt type of guy, insisted on keeping his planned outfit a secret. All was revealed on the day, with Darren dressed as a swashbuckling Highwayman. "I couldn't believe he'd given it so much thought," says Heidi. "It was a private joke between us - I've always told him he rides horses as fearlessly as a Highwayman!"

## natural instincts

Whether you live in the town or country, there are a few practicalities to consider when planning a venue for your wedding; the time of year (British summer time is sure to provide the perfect excuse for some bridal white wellies!), travelling distances for friends and family and, of course, the budget. With a little creative thinking - and a sun dance or two - a tent and a field can provide a magical setting for wedding day carousing. Yurts and Tipis offer shelter in style and Katàs, Nordic inspired giant tipi style tents, are made entirely of natural material. Supplied by the eco-chic company, Papakata, they pledge to plant a tree for each event, to offset carbon emissions. Not only does a wedding party in a field inspire spontaneity, but it also encourages a collective approach between friends. Along with the fun of preparing for a feast, and the bringing together of friends' various talents and resources, the happy inclusion of children adds to the sense of warmth and excitement. In the spirit of 'something old, something new', the freedom of sharing your day with babies and grannies is, for many, a fitting celebration and a highlight of the day. The compost loos often come a close second...



Nigel Clarke, and his partner Ema, married in the garden of their Sussex home two summers ago. They procured most of the kit (including tables, chairs, carpet, and wood for constructing the compost loos) through the Freecycle network, and served their own elderflower champagne, nettle beer and home-brew. Friends contributed to the wedding feast by bringing bowls of salads to accompany the locally supplied hog-roast, and a mountain of delicious puddings gave guests the perfect excuse to dance to Nigel's band into the small hours. Children made merry with percussion instruments to 'accompany' the service, and were an integral part of the day. Making their own written vows under a willow tree in their garden was, Nigel says, "the most magical and memorable part of the day". He explains that, although they both shared a spiritual awareness beforehand, this moment "triggered a deeper awareness" which has remained with them since.

For a less rustic setting, there are many romantic eco-friendly venues that offer beautiful and ambient surroundings, without a heavy carbon footprint. Nearly two years ago, the Eden Project opened its doors as a green wedding venue. Hailed as the ultimate green site, the Eden Project runs on renewable power and irrigates with harvested rainwater. Amongst lush, tropical surroundings, couples are now able to tie the knot without the costly and huge environmental impact of flying across the world. Other ethically sound options include hiring a charity owned building, where the rental fee benefits the charity, or simply booking the local town hall to keep mileage down between ceremony and reception. Local venues may not be at the cutting edge of green sites like the Eden Project, but there are some basics that are straightforward to arrange. Remember to ensure all food produce is local, seasonal and organic, watch for unnecessary extravagance, minimize waste wherever you can, and don't forget to check for energy-saving light bulbs!

Today, nearly 90 percent of couples live together before marrying. Unsurprisingly therefore, the traditional wedding-list, with appeals for toasters, cushions and coffee makers is becoming a thing of the past. Beck Brown, who set up The Alternative Wedding Company after organizing her own green wedding to Phillip four years ago, asked each of their guests to give a copy of their favourite book, in lieu of expensive gifts or token offerings. Beck explains, "It was an amazingly personal tribute, and is a lasting connection between us and our friends." Alternatively, the online company, Douzo, offers a refreshingly new concept of giving. It provides couples with the opportunity to create, and share on-line, a wish list for any type of gift - this could include tickets for a show, charitable donations, contributions to a honeymoon, or pledges of time and help to re-paint the house!

Dan Brousson of Onya Bags is getting hitched this September to his long-term partner, Georgina. With a meadow and a Bedouin tent, beer supplied by the local brewery and a wood-fired pizza oven, his wedding celebrations will take on a festival-type atmosphere. Kicking off the revelry on the Friday with a celebration of his 40th birthday, family and friends will pitch their tents and camp for the weekend, with children making up nearly a third of the numbers. In addition to a 'nothing new' dress code, Dan and Georgina have asked their guests to each bring along an instrument, rather than a gift, from which Dan anticipates a "crazy jam session" to run long into the night.

### something old...

Remembering the true meaning of the day will ensure irrelevant issues don't sidetrack you. "It's about seeking out bargains and not getting sucked in," says Beck Brown, who feels that even the 'eco-options' involved with wedding planning are now becoming a pricey, trendy choice for some. Wartime weddings of the 1940s are a good framework to reflect back upon. Using a little ingenuity and effort, women collaborated to make dresses out of spare lengths of fabric, favours were entreated for 'luxuries' such as flowers and fruitcake, and a photographer would take maybe 4 or 6 photos of the happy couple to commemorate the day. Ration coupons were shared to gather plenty of food and drink, and a small reception at a relative's house marked a simple, yet memorable start to married life.

This resourceful approach is key to planning an environmentally healthy wedding. Hand-made invitations are a great opportunity to draw friends together and get

the creative juices flowing, using recycled card, dried flowers, and perhaps an imaginative dash of vegetable ink, is sure to have beautiful end results. Or for those with little time to spare, Vinati's Paper is an eco-friendly stationery supplier whose principles include using fair-

trade, recycled material and chlorine-free pulps. Many couples choose to email guests instead, and the good, old-fashioned method of word-of-mouth is worth remembering!

Again, simplicity, and a little imagination is all that's required for bridal flowers

and decorations. Why not take a leaf out of Dan and Georgina's book, and grow your own pesticide-free flowers in advance, or let your artistic license bloom with abundant pickings from the hedgerow? If the local, seasonal offerings are scarce, combining some fresh herbs in a wedding garland will make a glorious, fragrant alternative, and encourage friends and family to dry lavender and rose petals to create a biodegradable shower of confetti. By saving shapely jam jars for vases, and snapping up bundles of old ribbon from Oxfam, you'll be amazed by the results of such easy, earthy enterprise.

### out of the box

Planning a wedding with care and integrity, without the straightjacket of convention, does not mean sacrificing a little taste of luxury. Diamonds can still be a girl's best friend, but make sure any jewellery - sparkly or otherwise - adheres to fair-trade standards and is conflict-free. Taking a step away from the more conventional ornaments, and thinking 'out of the box' opens up a realm of alternatives. How about a pair of matching eco-wood rings to symbolise, not only your love for one another, but your commitment to the planet too? If you're looking to honeymoon, why not hunker down in a cosy gypsy caravan? Holly Strawbridge set up 'Gypsy Caravans Cornwall' last year, offering impressive, full eco-accommodation, which provides the perfect romantic haven for newly-weds. If it's Mediterranean sunsets you're after, take on board the principles of responsible travel and ecotourism. Or, maybe, just slip quietly away on a bicycle made for two?

With some thought and good intention, your wedding day doesn't need to literally cost the earth. Considering we're all on this planet 'till death us do part', it's practically a no-brainer.

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