

Temple Beth Shalom of Needham
Greening Your Simcha
Our Guide to Environmentally Friendly Choices for Events and Parties

GS-Introduction

Dear Friends,

Protecting the environment is a defining and critical challenge for all human beings today. As Jews, we are committed to protect and preserve our natural resources. From ancient times until today, our tradition has challenged us to be stewards of creation and God's partners in the work of *tikkun olam* -- restoring the world to divinely intended wholeness, justice and peace.

The *Shomrei Adamah* (Guardians of the Earth) Committee at TBS created this guide to help our congregation think about how to plan a celebration or event while keeping our precious natural resources in mind. As you make plans, we hope this guide will be helpful to you and maybe inspire some ideas of your own. We look forward to you adding your comments and ideas to this guide by emailing greensimcha@tbshalom.org.

Some questions to consider:

- What can we do differently to lessen the environmental impact of our celebration?
- Can less paper be used for invitations and responses?
- Could plants, reusable items, or canned goods for a charity take the place of cut flowers for the centerpieces?
- Could leftover food be given to shelters or soup kitchens?
- Might you ask your caterer about his/her company's environmental practices and make it clear that it is something you care about?
- Might gifts be suggested in the form of donations?

As you think about celebrations that you have shared with friends and family members, what do you remember most? In very few cases, it may be the amazing ice sculpture or the glorious flower arrangements on the tables. Most often people remember the intangibles – the joy, the people, the love, the togetherness, the fun...in short, the feeling of the event rather than the decorations or the other things that are disposed of the next day.

This guide is not intended to be comprehensive; not every suggestion will work for every event. Paper vs. plastic is just a starting point. Going the eco-friendly route may even mean a bit more expense. However, it's not "all or nothing"....even a few green ideas can make a difference... We can continue the conversation at TBS about how we, as a community, can look at our choices and do a few things differently. As we celebrate our milestones, let's think not only of this special day but also of the future earth that our children will inherit.

“Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” as a guiding principle can inform many of our decisions as we welcome, feed, and entertain many guests. It will make a positive difference in protecting and preserving our environment.

We can make a difference, one party at a time!

This guide is meant to be interactive and to expand with your input and feedback! Please email greensimcha@tbshalom.org if you have a question, comment, or great idea for greening a simcha, or if you notice outdated information or contacts. Thanks!

GS-Donating-Leftovers

Make plans in advance of your event to donate leftover food to a shelter, soup kitchen or food pantry. See the list below of local soup kitchens. Find out ahead of time what that organization’s policy is regarding accepting prepared (as opposed to nonperishable) food and be sure that the caterer and/or serving staff knows to wrap up and refrigerate leftover food quickly so that others can safely eat it. In order to ensure that the leftover food is either picked up or delivered in a timely manner, you could appoint a reliable friend or relative as your “food donation captain.” Remember, according to MA Law, food that has been served cannot be redistributed as donations. Only leftover “unserved food” can be donated. You could also make arrangements with your caterer to have the leftovers wrapped up so that you can take them home.

GS-Soup-Kitchens

Cambridge Cares About AIDS / Youth on Fire 1555 Mass Avenue Cambridge, MA 02138 (617) 661-2803	Faith Lutheran Church / Faith Kitchen 311 Broadway Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 354-0414
Harvard Square Churches Meal Program c/o Christ Church, Zero Garden Street Cambridge, MA 02138 (978) 454-9119	Loaves & Fishes Meals Program 35 Magazine Street Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 497-7277
Mass. Avenue Baptist Church Meals 146 Hampshire Street Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 868-4853	Project Uplift of Union Baptist Church 874 Main Street Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 864-6885
Salvation Army / Cambridge Meals 402 Mass Avenue Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 547-3400	Framingham Civic League 214 Concord Street Framingham, MA 01702 (508) 875-5218
Salvation Army / Framingham Meals Program 35-45 Concord Street Framingham, MA 01704 (508) 875-3341	Elderly Nutrition Program 300 Howard Street Framingham, MA 01702 (508) 872-2351

Holliston Pantry Shelf 23 Water Street Holliston, MA 01746 (508) 429-5392	Bread of Life Meals Program 511 Main Street Malden, MA 02148 (781) 397-0404
Philadelphie SDA Church Soup Kitchen 575 Main Street Malden, MA 02148 (617) 771-5621	Faith Covenant Meal 1306 Hancock Street Quincy, MA 02170 (617) 847-6967
Quincy Crisis Center Pantry 282 Billings Road Quincy, MA 02170 (617) 471-7075	Father Bill's Place 38 Broad Street Quincy, MA 02169 (617) 770-3314
Project Soup 258R Powder House Boulevard Somerville, MA 02144 (617) 776-7687 www.somervillehomelesscoalition.org	Bristol Lodge Meals 545 Moody Street Waltham, MA 02451 (781) 899-2099
Middlesex Human Service Agency, Inc. 50 Prospect Street, Suite 3 Waltham, MA 02453 (781) 894-6110	Salvation Army / Waltham Meals 33 Myrtle Street Waltham, MA 02453 (781) 894-0413

GS-Invitations

GS-Electronic-Invitations

Electronic invitations are the quick, free, easy and paperless option to green your invitation and reach your guest list. This option is also useful to share information from “save the dates” to reminders to thank you notes.

Website options for electronic invitations:

- www.evite.com Plentiful selection of different styles and events
- www.smilebox.com You can include a slideshow of photos and music with this site for your invitations and thank you notes
- http://www.paperlesspost.com/samples/bat_mitzvah_and_bar_mitzvah_invitations You can manage your guest list and RSVPs, create an online invitation to set the tone of your bar or bat mitzvah, and follow up with online thank you notes
- www.pingg.com Create online or paper invites

You could send a much smaller mailing to those guests who may not use e-mail. Consider scanning invitations/announcements and sending them electronically to those who can receive

them that way, reducing the number that need to be printed and transported.

A note of caution: be sure that when you send an electronic invitation it is clear to whom the invitation is directed. State if the event is for the entire family, adults only or for children only.

GS-If-You-Are-Using-Paper-Invitations:

Going to an entirely paperless invitation system may not be practical for many families but there are ways to make sending paper invitations a bit more environmentally friendly.

It is easy to cut down on the amount of paper being used in this process. Logistics and/or directions to the event can be printed on the back of the invitation rather than using a separate card. That extra sheet of tissue paper that is included in many fancy invites gets tossed immediately once the envelope is opened; why not omit it all together? Is it important that the envelope has a lining or that you use an inner and an outer envelope? Can the response card be a postcard instead of a card and an envelope? Can you skip the response card altogether and just ask people to send you an electronic response?

Also, please consider using recycled paper for invitations and/or envelopes and soy-based ink when printing your invitations. You can purchase thank you notes that fold over and become self-mailers. That way, you don't need a card or envelope.

When socially acceptable, writing thank you notes using online communication is going to be your most environmentally friendly option. Many of the websites listed above have electronic thank you note options.

GS-Gifts

As an event host, you likely will be a "giver" as well as a "receiver." For example, as a "giver" at a wedding, you may wish to provide gifts for bridesmaids and ushers. As a "receiver" at a milestone birthday or anniversary celebration, you might want to suggest "donations instead of gifts." Here are some ideas that may be of help as you go through the planning, actual event, and follow-up process. Please note that some of these ideas may work well for certain kinds of events (like weddings, anniversaries, adult birthday parties), but not as well for others (like bar/bat mitzvah parties).

GS-Gift-Registry

If it is appropriate for your event, you can register for gifts. People are going to give you presents, and registering means that you will get items that you like or need and also things that match. This reduces waste, both because you will be able to use what you get and because you will not be driving all over the area returning gifts you didn't really want in the first place.

GS-Donations

Many gift recipients are involved in non-profit activities. For example, one component of the Temple Beth Shalom B'nei Mitzvah journey is a "mitzvah project," a time commitment of at least eighteen hours to the bar or bat mitzvah child's chosen charitable organization. Your gift could be to support their chosen cause.

If you already have most of what you need, you might encourage guests to make donations in your name to an organization that you or they care about. Examples: a shelter, food pantry, hospital, environmental or other advocacy group, literacy/educational program, or children's organization.

Some organizations that preserve and educate about the environment are:

The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org)

The Audubon Society (www.massaudubon.org)

The Trustees of Reservations (www.thetrustees.org)

Some other organizations are:

[Heifer International](http://www.heifer.org) (www.heifer.org) lets you actually register at their website, but instead of the gifts coming to you, people in developing nations will benefit from your celebration. "Choose a meaningful gift to give a loved one and help children and families around the world receive training and animal gifts that help them become self-reliant."

[Kiva](http://www.kiva.org) (www.kiva.org) "We are a non-profit organization with a mission to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty. Leveraging the internet and a worldwide network of microfinance institutions, Kiva lets individuals lend as little as \$25 to help create opportunity around the world. You make a loan to a person in the directory who has a need – e.g., starting a small business in Ecuador; you get updates about the person's progress; you get paid back; and you get a chance to fund another loan, donate it to Kiva, or withdraw it to spend on something else."

[World Wildlife Fund](http://www.worldwildlife.org) (www.worldwildlife.org) "At the World Wildlife Fund Weddings and Celebrations Site and Registry, couples can choose to enhance their wedding by contributing to conservation and reducing the impact their activities have on the planet. Through the site's wedding gift registry, couples can create a personalized web page and registry giving guests the option of donating to WWF's worldwide conservation programs in lieu of traditional wedding gifts. Registry announcements can be emailed to guests with a personalized message from the couple and a link to their gift registry web page."

GS-Socially-Responsible-Gifts

As an alternative to a monetary donation by you or a gift giver, you may want to consider having actual items donated to a specific organization. Here are some possibilities:

- For a shower or party, you could contact a local shelter or human service organization to find out what that organization's current needs are (possibly things like new towels, sheets, pillows, personal care items, infant care items, cleaning supplies and so on). Then

you could ask your guests to bring those items instead of gifts for you. You don't wind up with more items that you really don't need, and someone else benefits from your *simcha*.

- [Changing The Present](#) is a site that has several ways to give socially responsible gifts and encourage your guests to do the same for you. "Changing the Present connects you with more than 1500 meaningful charitable gifts that change the world. Browse by [cause](#) or [nonprofit](#) to find the perfect gift for friends or for your own charitable giving."
- You could donate to JNF to plant trees in honor of each guest. The giveaway could be the certificate.

GS-Wrapping

If you are a gift giver, you are encouraged to wrap presents in reusable gift or cloth bags. For example, if the gift is small enough, there are lots of great durable bags out there designed to be used for things like groceries and trips to the drug store. Wrapping in newspaper, and decorating with colored markers can work too.

TBS member **Jane Evans**, owner of JanezBagz, makes beautiful cloth gift bags for Chanukah, birthdays, and other occasions. Visit <http://janezbagz.com/> or contact Jane (she's in the directory!)

Teens might like getting something in a cool tote bag or lightweight bag with drawstrings. Please consult your local teen for what "cool" might be this week. Less cool ones could be used for hospitality bags for hotel guests.

If it's practical and feasible, encourage guests to skip the gift-wrapping altogether. They could instead add a note or card to let you know who is giving the gift.

GS-Thank-You-Gifts

If you are also a gift giver (including things like attendant gifts or gifts to thank special people for their role in your event), consider giving something like tickets to a sporting or cultural event or passes or a membership to a local museum. Movie passes or restaurant gift cards also make lovely gifts, and giving a "night on the town" is a great way to say thank you.

GS-Clothing-and-Kippot

GS-Shopping-for-Clothing

Some things to keep in mind when choosing that special outfit:

- You may want to consider buying clothing made from materials that are environmentally-friendly such as organic cotton, recycled textiles, or plant material.

- You may consider looking at consignment stores that specialize in secondhand formal and/or party wear. You can find some great bargains, especially considering that the outfit has probably been worn only a few times, if that.
- Think back to the last event you attended. Do you remember what your close friends wore? If you don't, they probably don't remember what you wore either. Don't be afraid to wear your same beautiful clothes often!

GS-Donating-your-Dress

If you buy a new outfit, look for something that you can and will want to wear again. However if the outfit is the “wear-it-once” kind, consider selling it to a consignment store, selling it on-line or donating it. Below are places to donate that “special dress” in Massachusetts. (Found on <http://www.donatemydress.org>)

- **Becca's Closet**
Locations: Burlington, Plymouth, Whitman
Website: www.beccascloset.org
- **Belle of the Ball**
Location: Boston
Contact: Tiffany Cuddihy
Telephone: 617-776-5800
E-mail: TCuddihy@fuseideas.com
Website: www.antons.com/belle
- **North Shore Fairy Godmother Project**
Location: Lynn
Contact: Mary J. Hargraves
Telephone: 781-594-1255
E-mail: elfunfairgodmotherproject@ge.com
Website: www.northshorefairygodmother.org
- **Priceless Prom Gown Program**
Location: Haverhill
Contact: Carol Lanni
Telephone: 978-521-2664
E-mail: carol@pricelesspromgownprogram.com
Website: www.pricelesspromgownprogram.com

Through its Belle of the Ball program, **Antons Cleaners** in Needham and surrounding towns accepts donations of fancy (prom) dresses, cleans them and distributes them to those in need. Visit <http://www.antons.com/for-our-community/>

GS-Kippot

- Purchase recycled cardboard “Eco-suede” *kippot* from www.zaramart.com
- [Kippot For Hope](#) is an organization that supports Jewish communities in Uganda through the sale of *kippot*, connecting them to Jewish communities worldwide.
- Consider donating the extra *kippot* from your *simcha* to needy communities.
- Purchase Fair Trade *Kippot* and contribute to economic justice in Guatemala with MayaWorks. 312-243-8050 or www.mayaworks.org

- [Circles of Life](#) offers “**seed Kippot.**” After the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, families can plant the kippot in their garden.

GS-Centerpieces

GS-Greener-Centerpieces

- **Think beyond balloons:** Balloon centerpieces make B’nei mitzvah parties look beautiful, but in most cases they are thrown away the next day. Helium is a limited resource, and you can’t recycle the rubber, plastic, and ribbon which make up the balloon decorations. So what else can you use to brighten up the party? Get your creative juices flowing and think big. Visit craft and toy stores to get ideas for items you can use and reuse. Ideas include kites, banners, windsocks, streamers, pink flamingoes, garden spinners, pinwheels, cloth ribbon or fabric- wrapped creations.
- **Flowers in season:** Choosing floral arrangements that are in season in your area during the time of year of your *simcha* is not only more economical, but better for the planet. You can cut down on the fuel costs of transporting your cut flowers from another part of the country, or world, by asking your florist for a seasonable bouquet. They may suggest using combinations of leaves, evergreen boughs, berries, even fruits or vegetables that could later be consumed or donated.
- **Potted flowering plants** make beautiful centerpieces that can be given to guests to take home and enjoy, or even plant outdoors.

GS-Centerpieces-to-Donate

There are ways to create centerpieces for your tables that can be beautiful and interesting, and at the same time help those in need. Ideas include:

- Create decorative baskets of **travel size personal care items** (shampoo, toothpaste, etc.). These items (and items from the restroom baskets if you’ve provided them) can then be donated to any organization, shelter or soup kitchen that helps people who are homeless or in transition. Examples include: Circle of Hope, Rosie’s Place, or the First Parish Church in Cambridge. Places such as these are also usually very happy to receive donations of **clean white socks**.
- If you would like to create centerpieces that include **full size personal care items**, these are gladly accepted at food pantries that serve low income families who have stable housing such as the Needham Community Council or Family Table.
- Centerpieces can also be created with **non-perishable food items** and donated to one of the food pantries listed above. If you are going to make centerpieces from non-perishable foods, it’s a good idea to use healthy foods such as tuna, beans, low sodium soups and vegetables, and low-sugar canned fruit.
- If your *simcha* falls around the time of a major Jewish holiday, you can create centerpieces of non-perishable foods that relate to that holiday and then donate those items to Family Table, which is a kosher food pantry. Examples include potato pancake mix and cans of kosher apple sauce at Chanukah, or matzo ball soup mix, macarons, and other such items at Passover.

- If your party has a theme, or if your bar or bat mitzvah child has a special interest, consider making centerpieces out of items related to this theme, such as sports equipment, books, art supplies, or pet supplies. The items can then be donated to a local organization. Check with local schools, after-school programs, hospitals, or shelters.
- [Mitzvah Tables](#) is a local business which creates custom centerpieces made from items you choose for donation. Your family selects either a type of charity or cause, or a theme for your centerpieces (ie: sports, children, books, food pantry). Mitzvah Tables will work with you to identify a charity if you don't already have one in mind and with the charity to find out what is most appropriate for a donation for them. They have two standard centerpiece prices: \$54 and \$72 (the price determines the value of the donation not the size of the centerpiece). They can also make larger centerpieces for buffet or gift table decorations. Mitzvah Tables will deliver the centerpieces to your event and give you letters to present to the charity. The donation is made in your family's name and you get the receipt for the donation. If you would like, for a small charge, they can also pick up the centerpieces and deliver them to the charity.

GS-Paper-and-Plastic-Products

GS-Reduce-and-Reuse

The greenest option for tablecloths, plates, napkins, cups, utensils, etc... is to choose items such as china, linens, glassware, and flatware that can be washed and reused, rather than thrown away. However, this is not always practical.

When selecting paper and plastic products, the next best option is to select items that contain recycled content or can be recycled themselves (see below). Much of the trash from Eastern MA is burned (some at cogeneration facilities which produce electricity), so although some of these items may be compostable, they often do not end up in a landfill.

GS-Recycle

TBS has zero-sort recycling. The following items can be placed in the recycling bin. Please encourage your caterer to recycle as much as possible. **All recyclables must be free of food waste.**

- 1) Glass bottles and jars – Rinse clean
- 2) Metal Cans – Rinse clean
- 3) Aluminum Cans, foil, pie plates, baking trays – Rinse clean
- 4) Plastics 1-7 and rigid plastics – containers, bottles, cups, dairy tubs (yogurt, sour cream) – Rinse clean.
- 5) Boxboard – food boxes (crackers, cereal, egg cartons) – Must be free of food waste.

6) Corrugated Card board & boxes – Must be free of food waste. Pizza boxes without grease stains; if the bottom has grease stain, you can still recycle the top half of box.

7) Paper – newspapers, brown bags, magazines, inserts, plain paper

Please note the following items may not be recycled.

- No oil, paint or wax coated cardboard or paper.
- No plastic, filmy or foam packing materials.
- No plastic bags
- No Styrofoam

GS-Minimizing-What-Gets-Thrown-Away

Compost your leftover party food! TBS member and recent Bar Mitzvah Yuli Burstein discovered a local company that will pick up the food waste from your event and get it composted for a very reasonable price. Below you will find all the information you need to turn your bar or bat mitzvah into an even greater mitzvah. Many thanks to Yuli for putting together this information!

The Host with the Most... Comphosts!

- **Your venue:** Confirm that it's okay with the venue hosting your event.
- **Your caterer:** Make sure your caterer will put the food waste in the toter (a lidded and wheeled blue cart like the recycle ones). They'll probably like it because they won't have to haul away much trash, if any. Give them the list, below, of what can and can't be composted. Other than liquids, all food waste is okay.
- **The food waste collector:** Contact Mr. Jimmy Cassidy at HiddenAcresCompost@gmail.com or 508-269-1134 to arrange for him to bring toters to your venue and to pick them up after your event. It costs only \$23.99. Available for Newton, Needham, Wellesley, and points west.
- **Mr. Cassidy will deliver one or two 64-gallon toters on the agreed-upon day.** The toter is clean upon arrival, so it can be wheeled directly into the kitchen. The caterer puts all food waste into the toter, and wheels it outside after the event. The toter's tight lid keeps animals out and smells in. Mr. Cassidy will pick up the toters on the agreed-upon day.

When purchasing disposable items, notice whether or not they can be recycled. Some brands of plastic cups are categorized #1 or #2 plastic (these numbers can be found inside the little recycling logo) which means they can be recycled anywhere. Plastic never decomposes. Depending on the type of plastic, it could take between decades and possibly millennia to photo degrade (break down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic when exposed to sun or when floating in the ocean). And some types of plastic never degrade at all.

Paper will decompose in the landfill, unlike plastic. So consider purchasing paper tablecloths and cardboard plates instead of plastic. When buying paper, napkins and plates, look for products that have a high recycled content, including high post-consumer content.

GS-Notes:

Other Temples in our area have also participated in greening their simchot. Thanks to Temple Shalom of Newton, Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley, Temple Shalom of Newton, and Temple Beth Avodah in Newton for their support and willingness to share their research and literature.

*You can find more ideas in the **Baltimore Green & Just Celebrations Guide**, which was “created in 2012 to help families in our area celebrate weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs and other simchas in ways that reflect Jewish values about environmental stewardship and social justice.” Download a free copy [here](#).*

A mention in this guide in no way implies an endorsement or recommendation from this committee or anyone else at Temple Beth Shalom. We list a number of different websites, stores, vendors and other product or service providers, as well as a number of nonprofit organizations. We have compiled this information based on many sources, but members of the committee have not worked with all of these people, shopped at all of these sites, used all of these products, or specifically researched all of these nonprofit organizations. Please do your own “due diligence” -- research and reference checking -- when choosing people to contract with or products to purchase for your event.