

Making Ripples

Sustainable Summer Parties

by Amanda Bancroft

Summer is a popular time for family reunions, church picnics, grilling outdoors, weddings, and other events at parks or venues. Despite all the conventional ways they generate waste or pollution, summer parties don't have to be unsustainable, and nobody has to be perfect to make a difference. Little things count, too! There are many ways to reduce your carbon footprint at your group's upcoming event.

How will guests arrive? Razorback Transit is free in Fayetteville and goes close to many parks, venues like Chuck E. Cheese, and movie theaters. The bus is great if you have enough time to get to and from your destination, and it also saves you money on gas. Carpooling is a great option not just because it's "green," but because it increases the time you have to socialize with loved ones. Bicycling as a group to a park or event is becoming more common, even families with children do it. The journey can become part of the fun!

Depending on the restrictions of the type of event you're planning, it can be difficult to reduce waste. Asking guests to bring their own plates, cups and cutlery can cut down on trash and litter. If you're serving coffee, they can bring their favorite mug. Have some plates and things available for those who will inevitably forget. If kitchen facilities aren't available, two plastic bins or buckets (one for soapy water, one for rinse) can at least get the debris off so guests can bring them home without soiling or staining anything.

What kind of food do you plan to serve? If possible, you might consider catering from a locally-owned restaurant or using organic produce. Even one meatless meal can reduce water use from agriculture, have a positive impact on animal welfare, and mitigate other concerns involved with meat production. But if you're not willing to consider vegan or vegetarian snacks or meals, try to serve humanely raised organic meats or free-range eggs.

Grills or fire pits can be fun and produce tantalizing aromas. Yet, many times there won't be one available on the day or location of your event. If you're serious about sustainability, you can build or buy your own portable solar cooker or oven. There are free plans and inexpensive kits available online, and could make a great family project that fuels anticipation for the upcoming event. If you want reliability and can invest money in it, there are various brands of sun oven for sale online and some companies even provide free solar cookers to people in need around the world. These crock-pot-oven hybrids cook, boil, and bake almost anything, but cannot broil.

As with any choice in life, pick something that works well for you based on your party's needs and limitations, and don't worry about eco goals you haven't achieved. There's always next time! Keep trying.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.