

A watercolor illustration of various flowers and greenery, including a large light green rose, smaller white and pink blossoms, and green leaves. A central white rectangular box with a thin grey border contains the title and subtitle. The title is written in a black cursive font on a gold glitter background, while the subtitle is in a black sans-serif font on a white background.

The Green Wedding Guide

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO A
ZERO WASTE + ETHICAL + SUSTAINABLE
WEDDING

Curated with Love by Kelsey Jorissen

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A watercolor illustration of a pink flower with green leaves, partially overlapping the title text.

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Introduction

If you are here as a new bride, congrats! If you here because you want to get your research done before the ring is on your finger, awesome! Take a moment and give yourself a pat on the back for caring enough about the earth to learn how to go about a green wedding.

I want to preface this guide by saying I worked as a wedding photographer for a decade in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois. I've photographed over 100 couples and thus have seen a lot of different types of weddings, and in turn, have seen first-hand the amount of waste that is produced from the average wedding day. Even then, when I wasn't the conscious consumer I am today, it raised a red flag in my mind.

I also want to preface this guide by saying that I am currently planning my own wedding. So to my fellow new brides, **I am learning this stuff right along with you** and I am so excited to share the eco-friendly and zero-waste options you have at your *disposal*, hah, you see what I did there?

The Knot released their wedding industry trends for 2017 and they found on average the cost of a wedding was \$33,391. While the average number of guests has gone down, from 200 to 136, the cost per plate has risen, from \$194 in 2004 to \$268 in 2017. The Knot attributed this dip in guest count to couples setting better boundaries with their guest lists (can we get an amen for that?!) but the rise in spending per plate came from wanting to create a more special and unique experience for each of their guests.



Hi, I'm Kelsey!




What I worry about is that brides and grooms feel pressured to spend this amount of money without realizing they actually do have a choice. I realize this is devolving into a wedding finances pep talk, which is not what this guide is about - but if there are any new brides out there, I want you to know you can spend that \$33,391 on something else if you want. The old adage "this is your day" applies to the money you choose to spend on it as well.

Here's the most important takeaway, **you deserve the wedding day that you both want, free from others expectations.**

Back to the stats. A 130 person wedding on average produces 62 tons of carbon dioxide and 400-600 lbs of waste. These numbers include everything from the wedding invitations to the flowers to the wedding dress.

An opposition arises when you try to have an earth-friendly wedding within the confines of modern wedding culture. We are constantly bombarded by pictures and ideas on Pinterest of perfect personalized weddings with all the trimmings. Then you have the concept of zero waste, which can feel so minimal and bare, making a bride feel like there's very little wiggle room to make it feel special for herself and her guests.



So how do you make your wedding day feel special while holding true to your green living values?

The good news is that there are so many options for making your day feel special while still achieving an earth-conscious wedding. Once you understand the basics of having a green wedding then you can choose your own adventure from there.

In this guide, we will go over the options you have from finding an ethical engagement ring to where you can buy an eco-friendly wedding dress. While we discuss these options, I'll provide you with what I'm choosing for my low to no-waste wedding so that you have some experience to fall back on, plus you know you're not alone as you plan your own big day.



The Engagement Ring

There are so many gorgeous alternatives for ethical and sustainable engagement and wedding rings. The ethical issues you face as you decide on rings are much of the material used to make them comes from war-torn regions where child slave labor is used to mine the alloys and gemstones. This where buzzwords like conflict-free and fair-mined come into play, meaning companies have vetted parts of their supply chain to ensure there are no human rights issues at stake.

I'm going to share a few companies that I personally vetted who ultimately passed the test as my fiancé and I were deciding on a ring.



ROSADOS BOX

Love & Promise Jewelers launched Rosados Box in 2011 as unique jewelry collection that focuses on pieces that are American designed and handcrafted, with gems that are solely conflict-free and/or fairly traded, while using recycled alloys. Rosados Box has been featured on Etsy, Pinterest, BuzzFeed, Glamour, MODwedding, Weddingbee, Who What Wear, and Bridal Guide to name a few.

They are committed to creating, promoting, and delivering products that are only guilt-free. They use biodegradable solutions for cleaning their jewelry, they recycle their paper, metals, and plastics whenever they can, and all purchases come with a recyclable box and reusable/recyclable tote.



SHARON ZIMMERMAN

Sharon sells on Etsy. She is an incredibly talented independent jewelry designer based out of San Francisco with a San Francisco Green Business certification. She uses moissanite and recycled gold to handcraft her rings and they are exquisite.

So what is moissanite? While diamonds are carbon, moissanite is a silicon carbide. Moissanite has strong covalent bonding, which is what makes it awesome for gemstone replication. Moissanite is all lab-grown, so no ethical human rights issues at stake here, and Sharon sources her moissanite from a lab in North Carolina called Charles and Colvard and they use solar power for their lab.



CATBIRD NYC

This is the company my fiancé ended up going with for my ring. Yay! I'll be honest, their name totally hooked me as a cat and bird lover. Based out of Brooklyn, CatBird's jewelry is made in their studio. Every diamond is ethically and responsibly sourced, and more specifically, all of their brilliant cut diamonds in the line are recycled.

They truly go above and beyond all standard industry regulations to ensure that they can stand behind every stone they use in their jewelry. They source their gold chain, wire, findings and castings from vendors who are committed to minimizing the environmental impact of their work. They use a New York City caster who is a leader in using all recycled metals and clean, electric equipment. Most of their vendors purchase either third-party certified recycled metal or fair-mined metal and then make their own alloys to control the process and minimize the number of middle-men in the supply chain. Catbird is also a certified member of No Dirty Gold, an international campaign to clean up the industry.



TRUMPET AND HORN

This company specializes in ethically sourced, eco-friendly vintage engagement rings and vintage ring reproductions. The modern diamond market urges the consumer to think of a diamond as an investment, with an emphasis on buying a brand new stone for your engagement ring. Trumpet and Horn couldn't disagree more! They like to look at diamonds as more of a precious heirloom, to be treasured, loved, and then passed on to the next generation.

All of their newly-made, vintage-inspired engagement rings are created with recycled metals and antique accent stones. Their accent stones are repurposed from broken vintage jewelry. Additionally, they use vintage diamonds and antique colored stones whenever possible. Their vintage-inspired pieces are all American made in downtown Los Angeles. They are deeply committed to reducing waste and reutilizing perfectly good vintage metals, rich in value and history.

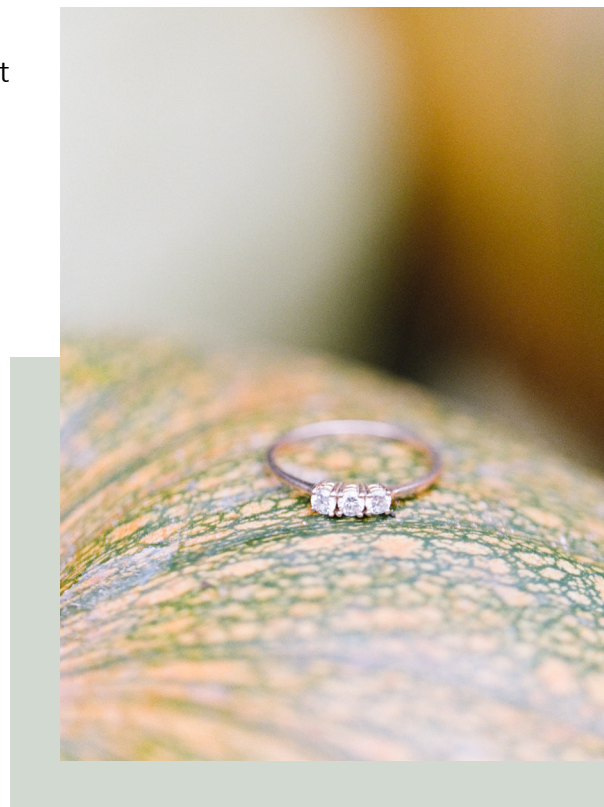


BRILLIANT EARTH

Founded in 2005, Brilliant Earth is the global leader in ethically sourced fine jewelry. Their mission is to make jewelry as beautiful as it can be. They are passionate about cultivating a more transparent, sustainable, and compassionate jewelry industry. They championed the phrase “beyond conflict-free.” Jewelers that offer “conflict-free” diamonds are limiting themselves to the Kimberley Process’ definition, which narrowly defines conflict diamonds as diamonds that finance rebel movements against recognized governments. What this definition leaves out is large numbers of diamonds that are tainted by violence, human rights abuses, poverty, environmental degradation, and other issues. Brilliant Earth goes beyond the usual standard to offer diamonds that have been carefully selected for their ethical and environmentally responsible origins.

The jewelry they cast is also made primarily with recycled and re-refined precious metals.

As part of their continued commitment to reducing their environmental footprint, they redesigned their packaging in 2018. This shipping packaging comes from responsibly managed sources. Brilliant Earth estimates that their new packaging will result in a 35% decrease in paper packaging used in the first 12 months.





The Wedding Dress

There are so many options for choosing an eco-friendly and ethical wedding dress. The first option I want to mention is buying it secondhand and then donating it when you are done. This means the dress can continue to serve its purpose without becoming landfill-bound after just one wedding.

This is what I did and I'm so pleased with my choice, I saved a ton of money too! There are definitely enough ethical and sustainable fashion companies to purchase new from too. The following companies are my favorites I've discovered.



REFORMATION

Founded in 2009, Reformation uses natural or recycled fibers that are rapidly renewable, plant-based, and have a potential for circularity, specifically TENCEL which is a sustainably grown and harvested eucalyptus based fiber.

Reformation celebrates femininity with dress designs that accentuate a woman's natural curves for the most elegant and flattering looks. I also love their commitment to responsible production practices, and for their green building infrastructure which minimizes waste.



ONCE WED

This company is a huge secondhand wedding dress website where you can shop gently used dresses for your big day. They have great cost effective options too. Once your wedding day is over, you can sell your dress back to them, which is circular fashion at its finest!



RENT THE RUNWAY

I love this site and have rented dresses from them for big events in the past. You feel so luxurious while it also being circular and inexpensive.



MINNA

A made-to-order dress company that sews dresses from vintage fabrics and certified organic materials. Their sister company, [Indie Brides](#), is another great option for the more alternative bride. Indie Brides specialize in

using the same types of materials at a cheaper price because the dresses are more of a cocktail style and use less material.



CHRISTY DAWN

Based out of California, every piece in the collection is handmade by a local artisan using recycled fabrics to lessen their environmental footprint. They have a feminine boho vibe, which I totally adore.



THRED UP

This was my saving grace! I purchased my dress secondhand. Originally it was from Lola. I saw the style on Pinterest (dun dun dun!) and fell in love. I went back and forth - I felt sad knowing if I bought it new it would be benefitting a clothing company that is the epitome of fast fashion, but I was hooked on this dress. So I was delighted to find it on ThredUp a few months ago. Once our wedding day is over, I plan on donating it when I'm done.





Wedding Invitations

So let's talk invitations next. Obviously sending paper save-the-dates and wedding invitations all over the country has a carbon footprint, fortunately there are so many ways to make more conscious choices when sending out invites.

First is to simply send out an evite. Thankfully, this becoming less and less taboo. Many free wedding websites have an RSVP feature now where guests can respond by entering their email and tell you what they want for dinner too. It's pretty slick. Just note that older guests may not have the means to RSVP online, so consider sending them a paper invite. I'll include a few evite options as well as sustainable paper options that I fell in love with.



PAPER CULTURE

This is the company we ended up choosing. We sent out just one invite, no save-the-date for us. It was important to me to share a few of our gorgeous engagement photos with family and friends and design our invite myself, because, duh, I love design.

The best aspect of Paper Culture is all of their paper is 100% post-consumer recycled and they plant a tree with every order. You can dedicate your tree-planting to a loved one as well, which I think is super sweet. They are a California Certified Green Business and their motto is, "they design for trees because they fear a world without them."



ARTIFACT UPRISING

This company also uses 100% post consumer recycled paper. To help reduce waste in their community, they partnered with Azure Furniture Company to use reclaimed mountain beetle pine for their wood calendars, albums, and block prints. To date, they've reclaimed over 250,000 feet of fallen pine in the Rocky Mountain Forests. Everything ordered from Artifact Uprising is also made in the US.



BOTANICAL PAPERWORKS

Using seed paper is such a beautiful and organic way to personalize your wedding invites for your guests. Botanical Paperworks has seed paper varieties that include everything from wildflowers to tomato seeds. These are on the more expensive side, so they are a perfect fit for smaller and intimate weddings. Psst, they even sell [biodegradable confetti!](#)



GREENVELOPE

Founded with the mission to create digital invitations that would provide all of the elegance of traditional invites without any of the waste, Greenvelope helps brides and grooms be more eco-friendly. You can select a curated design and personalize it as needed. You can import contacts, track RSVPs, and get sent automatic reminders so you stay on schedule. Their designs are gorgeous and the pricing is reasonable.



ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

Look for 100% post consumer recycled paper on other major printing websites, like Minted, Snapfish, and Shutterfly. It might be hard to find these options at first, but I've found that you have to select them as your specific paper option when you are designing your invite.



The Wedding Registry

Paul and I have been living together for five years now, and honestly we have everything we need. I already own the legendary wedding gift of all wedding gifts - the KitchenAid mixer (which I love). As I thought about putting together our registry, I knew we didn't need more stuff. As conscious consumers and minimalists, we decided the best thing for us was to do a cash fund style registry. The following websites are some of the best options I've found for setting up a cash registry, but don't fret, I've got gift-based registry options coming your way as well.



ZOLA

We ended up using Zola as our wedding website and cash fund organizer because they take zero percentage from your cash fund gifts. There is a credit card processing fee of 2.5%, but you can opt to have your guests cover that if you like. They are by far the best cash fund registry site I've found.

What else I love is that you can personalize your own cash funds. With our situation, we explained to our guests we have all the items we need and what we really want on our wedding day is the means to take our honeymoon to Hawaii, work on our house, or do fun outdoor projects. So we put together these cute little categories like "Help us refinish the hardwood floors" or "Kelsey's curb appeal flower fund" where guests can pick and choose what they are helping us with. You can transfer the cashfund gifts to your bank account at any time and there are no transfer fees either.

Zola also has pre-designed cash fund categories like honeymoon airfare or couples massage. You can pick and choose so easily what you want to put up in your registry, it's almost like shopping!



BLUEPRINT REGISTRY + THANKFUL REGISTRY

What if you and your significant other do need those typical wedding items to get a new shared living space off to a sustainable eco-friendly start? Another option you have is to completely design your registry from scratch and add all your favorite eco-friendly wish list items yourself. The perfect sites to do this on are Blueprint Registry and Thankful Registry. Blueprint is totally free, unless guests do contribute cash, which they are charged 2.5% extra plus a credit card processing fee. With Thankful it's a \$30 flat fee with no extra hidden costs.



TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES

Some great fair-trade websites offer free wedding registry and my personal favorite is Ten Thousand Villages, a fair-trade shop that impacts the lives of 20,000 makers in 30 developing countries. They have tons of beautiful fair trade decor, dinnerware, and textiles.



DONATE INSTEAD

Lastly, you can have guests donate to a non-profit in your name instead of opting for a registry. This is such a wonderful way to give back and inspires others to do so as well.

Wedding registries can unknowingly generate a lot of waste with packaging materials and obviously the carbon footprint of shipping items.

Registries also can feed into that "FOMO" feeling of needing all the typical wedding registry gifts that new couples have gotten for years. Take a moment and ask yourself if you two really need it. Exercise your conscious consumer muscles!



Wedding Photography

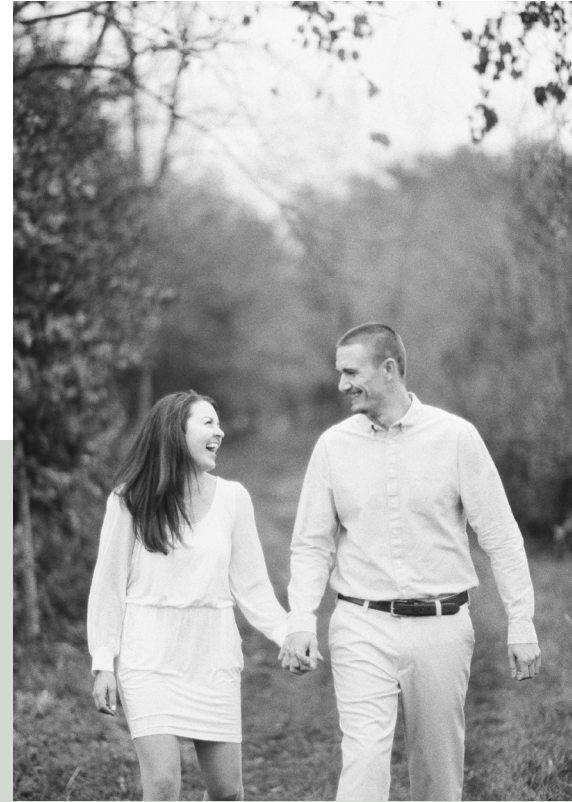
While I maintain a purely digital business from a photography standpoint, I actually went with a wedding photographer who shoots on film (she photographed all the beautiful photos you see in this guide!).

What are the issues with traditional film versus digital photos? When physical rolls of film are processed, they use a handful of toxic chemicals that are then rinsed away with water. Photo processing labs are supposed to ensure that those rinsed chemicals don't wind up down the drain and are required to dispose of them properly, so this is first and foremost a question of **trust**. Do you trust that a processing lab is doing the right thing? I am choosing to trust in our situation.

There is a new breed of eco friendly darkroom chemicals coming on the market too, mainly comprised of ascorbic acid, i.e. vitamin C. I'm excited to see what happens in the industry from a non-toxic environmental standpoint.

On the flipside, digital is not perfect either. The manufacturing process of digital cameras includes a lot of toxic chemicals and rare earth materials that have to be mined. As with gemstone and alloy mining, the mining industry has a lot of issues - both environmental and human rights based. So no one is perfect. All you can do is make an informed decision and stand by it!

If you plan on printing albums and whatnot, all the companies I mentioned previously for printing wedding invitations are perfect candidates.





The Wedding Caterer

Food waste and disposable dinnerware are the two biggest contributors to wedding day waste. The easiest way to combat this is to simply not have disposable dinnerware at your wedding. Choose a caterer that rents silverware, glassware, table clothes, cloth napkins, etc. so that your guests' dining experience is as reusable as possible for the next wedding.

Another thing to consider is choosing a caterer that utilizes local food and benefits local farmers. Ask where they source their ingredients from when you are shopping around.

If your caterer uses wholesale food items, ask if they would be willing to purchase organic and non-GMO options for your wedding day. Just know that this will come with a higher price, but most caterers will be willing to work with you because they want your business.

To combat food waste, many caterers donate leftover food to food banks or shelters. Ask your potential caterers if this is something they practice.

We are getting married in a fairly remote area where there aren't a lot of options in terms of caterers. We could opt to have a caterer drive in from the nearest city, which is about two hours away, or we could benefit a small local business.



The only downside was the small local business purchased wholesale food only and they used disposables.

Instead of accepting defeat, I asked politely if they would be open to using organic wholesale options and she gave me a resounding yes. Then I asked if she would be open to me finding compostable options for dinnerware, because we can bring it all home and compost everything on our farm. She said yes again.

Then to my total surprise when we had our tasting, she had ordered a bunch of eco-friendly compostable options for my fiance and I to choose from. I was so overjoyed. So the last option is ask your caterer if they don't have reusables would they would be open to compostable options instead.

Some of the best single-use compostable options I have found are [Verterra](#), [EcoDesign](#), and [Green Paper Products](#).

Be sure to circle back with caters on single-use items like plastic straws, paper napkins, and plastic garbage bags. I'm going to decline the use of straws and paper napkins, and instead have cloth napkins for our guests. Then for garbage bags I'm going to bring my own [compostable bags](#) to collect food waste and compostables in. Once we get home, they are going straight into our compost pile.

You may not have the luxury of a compost pile at home, so check in your area for industrial composting facilities that offer drop off using [FindAComposter.com](#).





Wedding Florals

Flowers are often shipped hundreds of miles before they reach your bouquet, leaving you with an incredibly high carbon footprint. Unless you do your research, many of the flowers you choose for your arrangements are sprayed with pesticides and herbicides. Once your wedding day is over, most of the arrangements are tossed in the garbage.

Some of the other alternative routes you have are to find a local flower farmer and purchase directly from them. You can seek out local farmers at a farmers market and arrange to pick up florals day-of or the day before. This ensures that the flowers were grown locally, plus you can ask the farmer if they use pesticides. Remember to keep them in the fridge to preserve them!



Another option is to use other elements of nature beyond flowers. For our wedding, we are going to use pine boughs and ferns that we will harvest off of my parent's land up north. I plan on bundling these with burlap and twine for bouquets, then sticking them in mason jars for centerpieces at our tables.

If you decide to go the traditional route and hire a florist, arrange to have the florals composted once your big day is over. You can use [FindAComposter.com](https://www.findacomposter.com) and drop off off your florals so they don't wind up in a landfill.

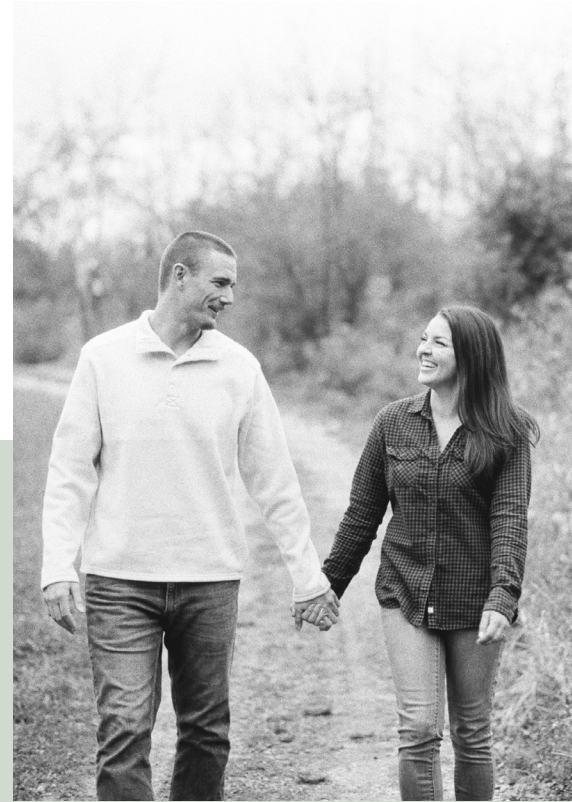


The Wedding DJ.

The issue with DJs and keeping things eco-friendly is that often they will bring disposable dance props like glow sticks, plastic flower leis, noisemakers, etc. All of these items are considered single-use and then thrown in the trash at the end of the night.

If you are considering a DJ, specifically request for no party favors during the reception to keep landfill-bound items at a minimum. Explain to them that you are working towards having a green wedding and it's important to you not to create unnecessary waste.

For my own wedding we are opting to not have a DJ. We found an amazing rental company that gives you speakers for your ceremony and your reception, plus the package comes with a sound guy who will help you troubleshoot any issues the day of. I plan on making separate playlists on my iPhone for the ceremony, the cocktail hour, dinner, and then of course dancing.





Wedding Decor + Favors

The best way to choose wedding decor is to make sure everything you use to decorate with is as recyclable or compostable as possible. Closed loop cycles are the way to go, to learn more about this concept, [click here](#).

Think about sticking to natural materials and elements like glass, stone, metal, wood, and natural textiles like cotton, jute, hemp, or wool are sure fire ways to stay on the sustainable side of things. Stay away from plastic confetti or glitter and opt for biodegradable options instead from [Glitter Revolution](#) and Confetti Bar's [Floralfetti](#).

Then when your wedding day is over, think about donating or selling as much as possible so that it gets a second life and doesn't wind up in the garbage.

As for wedding favors, consider also how recyclable or compostable they will be. Some earth-friendly ideas are [American Meadows Seed Bombs](#), [tiny glass jars of honey](#), or [small bottles of maple syrup](#). We are giving our guests packets of seeds we harvested from our land.

What helps is to stick to things that fall under the consumables category, just be wary of packaging if you are buying things in bulk. A lot of those cute ideas, like smores packs for example, can come wrapped in plastic that has to go straight in the garbage.

Again, think about focusing in on what can be fully recycled or composted when your day is finished. Remember, you also have the option to forgo wedding favors entirely. There's no rule that says you have to do them!





Parting Thoughts

Wedding planning can be overwhelming and stressful, my best advice is to remind yourself that it's just a big party at the end of the day. You get to decide what you do at your big party, and I hope this guide has inspired you to try something a bit more earth-conscious!

By choosing a more eco-friendly wedding, you can unknowingly inspire other future brides. Take a moment to imagine the ripple effect one green wedding can have on a family or a group of friends. By choosing some of these alternative options with your special day, you illustrate to your loved ones what's important to you both.

I would be lying if I told you I haven't been met with funny looks when I talk about some of our green wedding plans, but it's important to us. When I look back on our wedding, I want to feel that not only was our relationship celebrated, but our values too. We want to be the change we wish to see in the world. I invite and encourage you to be the change you wish to see as well.

xoxo, Kelsey

