Weddings, birthdays, anniversary parties and family reunions are popular summer celebrations. Whether you are trying to plan an out of the ordinary event or would like to give an unusual but useful gift, here are some green ideas that will be remembered.

Start with sending invitations by email with a note encouraging printing on reused paper. Keepsakes can be printed on special quality recycled paper, but most just need the details until they get to your activity. Reused paper, paper printed on one side, is also great for cutting and stapling into memo pads for your party planning lists.

Buy local. All great events include wonderful food. If you are the provider, select foods that are locally grown to cut down on shipping costs that raise the price. Check in advance at the local farmers markets and special order breads, fresh fruits and vegetables. Proceeds help local families and less money goes into all the marketing and transportation hands that mass merchandised produce goes through.

When possible, buy direct from the farm. Since we don’t grow coffee in Osceola County, you may be interested in purchasing fair trade certified shade grown coffee at your favorite local coffee shop or by internet to support growers in their home countries.

Fair trade certified means that an outside organization has identified that the farmer is getting a fair price for the product rather than being exploited as cheap labor. Shade grown coffee is the traditional method that preserves tree canopy and supports a variety of birds and wildlife while producing a fine coffee crop. Some brands of coffee, such as Coffee for the Birds, also support conservation and education with each purchase. Some Universities and businesses have opted to serve only Fair Trade Certified coffee to encourage social justice in other countries.

Be a smart consumer and look for minimal packaging when you shop. Bulk purchase items such as paper products, vegetables, fruits, noodles and chips to reduce packaging. More boxes and bags means more storage space and more garbage to dispose of.

Look at the market for products that can be bought by the pound instead of the package to reduce the amount of foam trays or extra plastic bags to be disposed of. When you get items in trays, be sure to store them for reuse around the house or at the local youth center for crafts. When you get more than you need, recycle them at a local store. Grocery stores such as Publix have bins for recycling plastic and paper bags as well as foam egg cartons and trays.

Bigger may be better. When serving drinks, individual serving size containers are convenient but create lots of waste. Save yourself money and reduce trash loads after the event by serving drinks from large bottles or jugs. If you want to spend a little money for a memory, order reusable souvenir cups or mugs made especially for the occasion as a take-home keepsake.

Plan for recycling at your event. Guests will recycle if it is made convenient. Clearly label boxes, barrels or garbage cans to accommodate soda cans and water bottles for recycling. If you are hosting the event at a local hotel or conference center, confirm with them in advance how they deal with recycling on their property. If they don’t, you can choose another facility or go green and take care of it yourself. The local scout troop or church will really appreciate your efforts as they turn your trash into cash.

Go green for gifting ideas. Think of special gifts that provide memories without the expense. Give a gift of family time with a jigsaw puzzle or tickets to a special sporting event. Give a gift of savings with a basket of compact fluorescent light bulbs in mixed sizes with our UF/IFAS book on energy conservation.

Make a scrap book of pictures or stories of your favorite times together. Reuse old cards or pictures from magazines for a recycled touch. Re-gift a sentimental treasure of yours in reused newspaper, a fabric tablecloth or
decorated brown paper bags. Colorful scarves make reusable ribbons.

For the person that has everything, make a donation to a special organization that you support in the honorees name. Your gift can help a local conservation group, land trust or an international cause and the honoree doesn't have to dust it.

Landscape plants, containerized vegetables or fruit trees are gifts for any occasion that keep on giving. Be sure to include care and planting tips available from the UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension office. Call 321-697-3000 for free fact sheets or information on ordering helpful garden and landscape care books.

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