

FOOD + WINE

GO for the GREEN

EVENT PLANNER **MERRYL BROWN'S**
EARTH-FRIENDLY PARTIES



A typical Brown-styled table decked out with ground-ready greens and repurposed materials.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Recycled toys found at Homestead Antiques in Carpinteria serve as containers for live herbs; "repurposed antiques add a charming element to my events," says Brown; her signature look. OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM: Fruit rinds and used coffee filters were composted at the end of the party; from her collection of garden artifacts.

SANTA BARBARA LOVES TO MAKE MERRY, but parties are often environmentally unfriendly affairs, consuming loads of energy and creating mountains of waste. So what's an ethical sybarite to do? Merryl Brown has the answer—she founded Merryl Brown Events this year to combine her experience organizing local events with her passion for sustainability. A Santa Barbara resident for the past 17 years, she has chaired galas at Lotusland and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and hosted a corporate party that drew thousands. A master gardener with an adoration of nature, she was also a prime mover in establishing the Healthy Snacks in the Garden and organic gardening programs at Montecito Union School.

At a recent child's birthday party—also a lesson in eco-friendly living—Brown balanced traditional elements of kids' celebrations with her commitment to sustainability. Fresh-cut, organically grown watermelon, cantaloupe, and grapes straight from the farmers market were served on unbleached coffee filters, which doubled as cunning and effective compostable plates. The fruits of Brown's labor were visible, and edible—the spoons used to devour the ice cream were, in fact, homemade organic sugar cookies, and the white cupcakes with vanilla buttercream frosting rested on green fig leaves. After the sweet treats were gobbled up, for a fun group activity, the children transferred the lettuce, chard, basil, parsley, eggplant, and tomato plant starts that served as organic centerpieces to the garden. From the elegant paperless invitations to the inflatable bouncer that drew 50 percent of its power from a solar generator, every element combined creativity with conservation. And the lesson didn't stop there. The party favors?



Beautifully illustrated packets of vegetable seeds that the guests could take home and plant in their own gardens. “I take pride in sourcing as much as possible from local businesses and farms,” she says, “and sorting through the waste stream to ensure that trash is disposed of properly.”

While she excels at preparing organic cuisine and meticulous organization, all of Brown’s ventures are infused with her signature down-to-earth style. She incorporates rustic reused antique artifacts—such as old toys from the early 1900s and recycled food tins—into the decor by planting them with live cuttings and artfully arranging them on the tables as centerpieces. Linen napkins are tied with recycled braided garden twine. Using assorted antique china rather than disposable dinnerware creates less waste and imparts a more personal look. Repurposing her collection of props, she hangs still life paintings of sunflowers on posts to add a splash of color.

Whether it’s a wedding, private party, corporate event, or fund-raiser, “I like to bring elegance and a sense of fun to everything I do,” says Brown. “I want everyone to see just how beautiful sustainability can be.” ■



MERRYL'S TIPS

FOR EARTH-MINDED ENTERTAINING

INVITATIONS Not ready to go paperless? Local graphic designer **Lorie Bacon**, 805-682-3949, creates original works with soy ink on recycled paper.



DECOR After an event, give flowers to a senior care facility or hospital, or donate potted herbs and veggies to local schools’ organic gardening programs. Opt for biodegradable paper goods from **Isla Vista Co-Op**, 6575 Seville Rd., Isla Vista, 805-968-1401, islavistafood.coop, or tableware made from sugarcane fiber or potato starch.

FOOD Buy locally grown food at places such as **Mesa Produce**, 2036 Cliff Dr., Santa Barbara, 805-962-1645. Refer to the **Ty Warner Sea Center’s Sustainable Seafood Program’s** website, sbnature.org/seacenter/sustainableseafood_partners.php—one partner is the **Santa Barbara Fish Market**, 117 Harbor Way, Santa Barbara, 805-965-9564, sbfish.com. Consider organic and fair-trade truffles from **Chocolate Maya**, 15 W. Gutierrez St., Santa Barbara, 805-965-5956, chocolatemaya.com.

BEVERAGES Local organic and biodynamic wineries—such as **Ampelos Cellars**, 805-736-9957, ampeloscellars.com, and **Demetria Estate**, 805-686-2345, demetria-estate.com—are committed to sustainable agriculture and winemaking. Serve certified organic, fair-trade coffees and teas from **Green Star**, 805-683-2555, greenstarcoffee.com.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE! Trash your trash—buy only what you need and minimize the use of disposable products. Donate leftover food to **Casa Esperanza’s Community Kitchen**, 816 Cacique St., Santa Barbara, 805-884-8481, casa-esperanza.org, which serves meals to the homeless. Reuse decorative items that you already own—a considerable cost savings. And finally, don’t forget to recycle!