

Eco-Corner ~ Summer BBQ, The Green Way

Did you grill over the Fourth of July? The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that 60 million Americans have BBQs on the Fourth. These millions of BBQs **release some 225,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide**, burn the equivalent of 2,300 acres of forest and consume the same amount of energy as the city of Flagstaff, Arizona, uses in a year.

And those are just the stats for Fourth of July cookouts. With environmental consequences like these, what's a griller to do? Well, Darci Palmquist, editorial manager of The Nature Conservancy's website and its monthly eNewsletter, has learned to make compromises on her green intentions.

Take food, for example, we know buying local, organic and sustainably raised meat is better for the environment, but when it comes time to stock up, many let their wallet rule. Which can mean shopping at the nearest big-chain grocery store and buying packages of cheap hot dogs. Learn from the mistakes so many of us have made as well as the things we have done right—and make sure your summer cookouts aren't environmental disasters. So, here are the top ten ways to GREEN your BBQ party, in no particular order:

- 1) Use reusable or biodegradable plates and utensils. If you can't find those, at least go for products made from 100% recycled materials. Remember that your biodegradable plates will need to be cleaned before going in the compost bin—ketchup, hamburger grease and other non-veggie food matter doesn't compost.
- 2) Fill up pitchers of water, homemade lemonade and iced tea instead of buying huge quantities of personal-sized beverage containers.
- 3) If you take need of tip #2, you'll need to provide cups. If you use plastic or paper cups, provide markers at the drink counter so people can write their names on their cups—and therefore not use more than one.
- 4) And even if you follow tip #2, you're likely to have beer and other individual-sized beverages in a cooler. Encourage recycling by putting out easily identifiable bins—you'll find fewer bottles and cans smeared with ketchup in the garbage.
- 5) Use gas, propane or electric grills, which aren't perfect but burn more efficiently and cleaner than charcoal or wood. If you have a charcoal grill, make sure you burn natural lumps, not briquettes, and don't use more than you need.
- 6) Grill locally grown veggies! One of your guests can bring vegetables from their gardens. While local doesn't necessarily mean organic, small farms are often more likely to be more sustainable and pesticide-free.
- 7) Going vegetarian has been shown to be much better for the planet than eating meat. But if you do eat meat—or your guests do—don't compromise here. Spend the extra money to invest in organic, sustainably raised wieners and hamburgers.
- 8) Encourage walking, biking or carpooling to your party. If you live in a rural area, help coordinate carpooling for your guests. Neighbors can walk or bike over.
- 9) Make sure mosquitoes don't drive your guests away. Before the party, take a look at prime mosquito breeding grounds—clean out rain gutters, check other spots with standing water and mow your grass (with a reel mower, of course). Even better, help the mosquito-problem year round by installing a bat house in your yard. One of our neighbors has done that, and the kids love watching out for the bats.
- 10) Don't forget the little things. Choosing organic condiments, reusable napkins instead of paper ones, e-vites versus mail invitations, homemade decorations over store-bought and other details will help round off the finishing touches of your green BBQ.

Check out the website, nature.org and get their monthly eNewsletter, Great Places, for more ideas.

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