



Green Sense 06-29-14

Celebrate a Greener Independence Day

Summertime is a great time to get together for food and fun. Planning a greener gathering is easy; and once you've got the re-useable accouterments, you'll have them for future get-togethers.

Cloth napkins, washable plates - whether of plastic or melamine - unbreakable plates and cups are your best bet. Check for dishwasher safe and run full loads with the energy-saving air dry option for the best savings. Utensils are easy, since regular utensils don't break, even if dropped on a hard surface.

If you don't host a lot of parties and buying enough re-useable plates is going to leave you with a lot of plates you'll nearly never use, consider compostable plates and then make sure your guests have a special container for the compostables. That includes food scraps, and you can even add the paper napkins. It's not ideal to compost meat or dairy in backyard compost bins, so try to avoid adding animal products to your compost. Note that 'biodegradable' does NOT mean compostable.

Since Reading has such an extensive recycling program, you can also try the plastic disposable plates. Be sure they have a recycle symbol (the chasing-arrows) and then once rinsed off they can be recycled. Plastic utensils are not recyclable, so consider keeping to the re-useable type for utensils.

Food options can be more sustainable simply by reducing the amount of meat at your get-together. Meat production is energy (and water) intensive and so cooking vegetarian can really green up your party in more ways than one. Grilled, marinated vegetables are delicious, especially when they are fresh from a local farm or garden!

New England summers are a great time to find locally grown vegetables, which supports the local economy as well as decreasing the impact of transportation for our food. Buying locally is also a great way to better educate yourself on what you're putting into your mouth. Buying organic food where possible will decrease potential exposure to pesticide residue, and because they also don't use synthetic fertilizer, buying organic reduces the environmental impacts of fertilizer manufacture and use.

Speaking of grilling, there will be millions of barbeques lighting up this Fourth of July, and with that, there's a wide variety of grilling options. There are some more sustainably-produced charcoal briquettes available - including charcoal made from industrial scrap wood, or lump charcoal rather than briquettes (briquettes usually have additives).

Propane is generally better than generic briquettes, as it produces about half the emissions (not to mention that you won't need lighter fluid). But lump charcoal made

from wood along with a charcoal chimney rather than lighter fluid, can also have less of an impact than the old standby briquettes.

Are you into party lights? Consider getting some LED solar lights, a great way to add some ambience without impacting your electricity bill. Just set them out in the sun for the day and when dusk falls, you'll have the perfect lighting for a summer evening. The lights can continue to cheer up your evenings well into the fall.

It's hardly a Fourth of July without fireworks. Fortunately, some fireworks manufacturers are working to create less polluting versions, including perchlorate-free fireworks and compressed-air launched fireworks. To reduce noise and pollution, Disney patented an air launch pyrotechnics system, which was put to use in 2004. The company later opened the patent on the system so that others could use the technology for "greener" launching of pyrotechnics. We need to encourage the use of these newer technologies.

After your gathering, comes clean up. As a well-informed green consumer, you'll have minimal trash since you've avoided disposable plates, napkins, cups, and single serving packages in favor of washable utensils and bulk-sized beverages containers. The reward for this responsible behavior is trivial trash, compost-in-the-making, and some fantastic grilled vegetables in the fridge for sandwiches and wraps.

This year, start celebrating a new independence by lowering your carbon footprint and helping preserve our great nation for generations to come.

By Reading Climate Committee members Gina Snyder and Michele Benson