

## Eco-conscious Birthdays

Parents' concerns are growing about their kids' carbon footprints

by Robin Huiras  
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After your child's birthday party fun is over, paper products, destroyed decorations and crumpled gift wrap will overflow the garbage can, countless gallons of gas will have been guzzled by minivans toting guests to and from the event and dozens of the newest plastic toys and electric gadgets will be the property of your precious child.

All totaled, it's a carbon footprint that far exceeds your kid's size fives.

But what's a parent to do—deprive their son or daughter of a quintessential childhood experience? The answer, eco-conscious experts say, is a resounding no.



The key is determining what, exactly, parents want the party to accomplish, says Manda Aufochs Gillespie, who created the green parenting Web site [www.thegreenmama.com](http://www.thegreenmama.com) and teaches green parenting classes at the Chicago Academy of Sciences' Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.

Green can be fun

At [www.greenfeet.com](http://www.greenfeet.com), some earth-friendly items include wooden blocks made out of naturally felled trees, indoor gardening sets made from corn plastics and innovative ecology-themed games, such as the *Xeko* rainforest trading games which is about keeping things being in balance and working together, Richard says. "So you might have animals playing against each other and if you lose an animal, it effects your game and you see how it effects the balance of the rainforest, so it's really about teaching conservationism, but kids don't see it that way."

Despite higher price tags on green gifts, environmentalists urge parents to look at the cost-benefit ratio.