



Cool Davis Initiative – How to Hold a Zero Waste Small Gathering!

Suggestions by Brennan Bird

Here are a few tips from the Cool Davis Initiative on how to host a zero waste Neighbors' Night Out. Even just a few conscious decisions can make a big difference.

Before the Event

Essential reminder: the most successful way to reduce your waste is to avoid producing it in the first place. So, to that end, use these considerations when preparing for your event.

1) E-vite your Guests

Send invitations via email to help save money and paper. Include these zero waste guidelines in your invitation to encourage your neighbors to follow them as well. If you are hand-delivering invitations, print them on the back of used sheets of paper or use post-consumer recycled paper.

2) Prepare Local Dishes that Reduce Packaging and Limit Waste

Prepare dishes with locally grown produce and with ingredients that can be bought in the bulk section. Make sure to bring your own bags and jars to the store. In this way, you'll support local farmers, produce a meal with a low-carbon impact, and create less throw-away packaging. Encourage your neighbors to do the same, and have them "show-off" how little packaging their dish required! To limit leftovers, try to coordinate dishes so that there will be just enough food for everyone.

3) Encourage Drinks that Reduce Packaging

Avoid packaging; recycling seems great but it still uses a huge amount of energy. Aluminum cans are the most readily and efficiently recycled; if neighbors purchase drinks for the event, encourage canned drinks over glass ones. Plastic #1 and #2 containers are the most readily recycled, #3-#7 plastics are more difficult. Bonus points for neighbors who make their own drinks, which requires little or no packaging at all! Serve pitchers of water to avoid plastic bottled water.

During the Event

4) Use Reusable Dishware

Rely on all things reusable; disposable dishware is wasteful, and although biodegradable dishware is better it still requires vast amounts of embodied energy to produce and must be broken down in a commercial compost facility. Use your own reusable dishware and invite your neighbors to help wash dishes

afterwards; or invite your neighbors to bring their own plates and utensils. Use cloth tablecloths and napkins to further reduce the resources your event consumes. If you must use disposable dishware, look for the kind that is “home compostable.”

5) Label Recycling and Compost Bins

Label bins to encourage your neighbors to place the recycling and the compost in the right places. Have a smaller “landfill” bin nearby, for everything that cannot be recycled or composted.

6) Brainstorm More Ideas

Display a white board or butcher paper to capture more suggestions on how to hold a zero waste event. There are a great many ways to reach zero waste. Your guests will enjoy sharing and discussing their ideas about how to adapt and expand these guidelines for other events.

After the Event

7) Invite your Guests to “Analyze” Your Waste

Dump out the “landfill” bin and have your guests gather round and analyze the waste. Discuss why this waste was produced, and what steps could be taken to avoid the waste in the future.

8) Wash Your Dishes in a Water-Efficient Manner

Set out some wash bins with hot water for guests to wash their own dishes. The first bin is for dirty water, the second bin is cleaner water, and the last bin is the cleanest for the final rinse. This helps reduce the amount of water required to wash the dishes, and ensures that everyone pitches in.

9) Compost

Make sure you have secured a place to compost the organic matter. If you don't have your own compost bin, invite a neighbor with a compost bin to take on the extra material. Or, use this event as an incentive to start your own bin (<http://cityofdavis.org/pw/recycle/backyardcompost.cfm>)

10) Leftovers?

Invite your neighbors to take home some of the leftovers—in reusable containers — so that you aren't overburdened with food.

These simple steps can help ensure your Neighbors' Night Out comes as close to zero waste as possible. For more resources on how to live a sustainable lifestyle, please consult the National Resources Defense Council's Guide to Greener Living: <http://www.nrdc.org/cities/living/gover.asp>