

Ditch the balloons and swap the plastic toys for cake: how to have a waste-free birthday party

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- How do people celebrate birthdays in your country?
- What are some ways parties and celebrations can be bad for the environment?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the box in the article. Then use the words to complete the definitions.

avoid	borrow	lend	second-hand shops
balloons	creative	reuse	
biodegradable	homemade	rubbish	

1. _____ are colourful plastic objects, filled with air, that people use at parties.
2. A(n) _____ object is one that can disappear or return naturally to the environment and not hurt nature.
3. Something that is _____ is made at home and not bought from a shop.
4. To _____ something means to use something that belongs to someone else, then you need to give it back.
5. When you are _____, you make new things or have new ideas.
6. To _____ means to give something to someone for a short time.
7. To _____ means not to do something or to stay away from it.
8. _____ are places where you buy clothes or things other people don't want.
9. _____ is material we throw away because we don't want or need it anymore.
10. To _____ means to use something again and not to throw it away.

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. I _____ glass jars and keep rice and sugar in them.
2. You can usually find cheap clothes at _____.
3. My grandmother makes _____ bread every Sunday.
4. I can _____ you my bike for a few days.
5. These paper cups are _____, so they are better for the environment.
6. They put red and blue _____ outside for the birthday party.
7. Please put your _____ in the bin, not on the floor.
8. It's a good idea to _____ sitting in the sun on a very hot day.
9. My sister is very _____. She makes beautiful art.
10. Can I _____ your pen, please? I lost mine.

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21 March, 2025

1 Last year I planned my 40th birthday party. I wanted a nice party that didn't cost a lot of money. Parties often make a lot of rubbish such as food waste and cheap, plastic decorations. But using less doesn't mean less fun. With help from my friends and some creative ideas, I had a colourful garden party with little waste. Here are some ideas for your party.

2 Food Waste and Decorations

3 Plastic or paper plates, cups and forks create a lot of waste at parties. I avoided this by having a 'pot-luck' dinner where everyone brought food to share. We used metal forks and knives and plates that were biodegradable.

Erin Rhoads, a writer, talks about the Party Kit Network. People in your town can lend you decorations and party games. "Planning a party for your child can be very stressful," Rhoads says. "With the kit, everyone can see how easy it is to reuse things at a party."

4 Reuse, Borrow and Rent

5 Think about how to find things without buying new ones. I used things I already had. I put sofas and chairs from my house in the garden. After the party, they went back inside. Before the party, I found a free rug and some chairs. I used old jars as glasses.

6 When I needed more things, I borrowed from friends. If you need to buy something, try second-hand shops first. I got my 1920s party clothes at second-hand shops.

7 Presents

8 I have most things I need, so I didn't ask for presents. But you could ask for food and drinks or homemade presents.

9 Rhoads says a 'fiver birthday' is good for children's parties and helps parents. Each guest gives just \$5 so the child can buy a bigger present they want. Or just ask what the child needs. "There's no point giving a kid a present they'll never use," Rhoads says.

10 Decorations and Party Bags

11 If you make just one change – don't use balloons. Balloons hurt seabirds and turtles. Instead, use homemade decorations from wool, cotton, wood, paper or plants and flowers from your garden.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 21/03/2025

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3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the correct answer (a, b or c).

1. Why did the writer have a party?
 - a. It was their birthday.
 - b. They wanted to show people their garden.
 - c. They wanted to have some fun.
2. How did the writer serve food at the party?
 - a. They got food from a restaurant.
 - b. They cooked all the food.
 - c. They asked people to bring food to share.
3. What is the Party Kit Network?
 - a. an online store for party food
 - b. a shop that sells party decorations
 - c. a place where you can borrow party items
4. How did the writer get furniture for the garden party?
 - a. They used furniture from inside their house.
 - b. They bought new garden furniture.
 - c. They rented furniture from a company.
5. What gifts did the writer want?
 - a. five dollars
 - b. food and drink
 - c. no gifts at all

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4 Key language

a. Find and underline forms of these words in the article.

1. bought
2. decorate
3. funny
4. stress
5. use
6. write

b. Choose the correct form from the previous activity to complete the sentences.

1. What _____ do you want for your birthday party?
2. Let's wash and _____ the plastic cups so we don't waste them.
3. Who is the _____ of that book?
4. We had a lot of _____ at the wedding.
5. Planning a child's birthday party can be very _____ for parents.
6. I don't usually _____ my clothes from second-hand shops.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What is the best party you have been to? What did you do, and why was it fun?
- Are there any ideas from the text that you could try for your own parties in the future? Which ones and why?

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6 In your own words

- a. Create a simple 'how-to' guide that shows people how to make parties better for the environment. Choose ONE topic from the article such as food, decorations or gifts. Include:
- a short introduction explaining why it's important
 - numbered step-by-step instructions
 - a list of materials that are needed
 - one helpful tip at the end
- b. Share your 'how to' guides with your class.