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A rose is a rose, but is it what's right for you?

How can a bride select flowers that will give the perfect look for her wedding?

"The first step in choosing wedding flowers," says florist Barbara Haggard, "is to find a good florist — one who has been recommended or whose window display you particularly admire." Then you can work out answers to the following questions:

- What is your budget? The florist can tell you which flowers will be in season and therefore less expensive at the time of your wedding. Some wedding favorites — gladiolus, baby's breath, roses, mums, carnations, stephanotis, gardenias, cymbidium orchids — are available year-round.

The florist can help you sort out priorities. For instance, if you have your heart set on a long, flowing cascade of orchids for your bouquet, you might have to cut costs in other areas.

Besides the bride's bouquet, you'll need bouquets for your honor attendant and bridesmaids, boutonnieres for all the men, corsages for both mothers, and flowers to decorate the ceremony and reception sites.

- What flowers will best complement your wedding? Give your florist a description of your dress and your bridesmaids' dresses so he can suggest bouquets that harmonize in shape and style.

Besides the classic nosegay or cascade, you could carry a single long-stemmed flower or a loosely tied armful of blooms.

Also, bring along fabric swatches to give the florist an idea of your color scheme. There are so many different flowers, in every hue from dazzling pink to soft sea blue, that you can find the perfect ones to match or complement the dresses your attendants will wear.

- What flowers have special meaning for you? Does your fiancé always bring you daisies? Is the softness of rose petals your idea of the height of romance? You can work these flowers into your plan.

Since every flower expresses a sentiment, what do you want your wedding blooms to say? Yellow lilies, for example, symbolize gaiety; carnations, pure, deep love. The buttercup signifies riches, the hyacinth promises constancy and the arbutus says, "There only do I love."

Stress equality with a his 'n her shower

Even in these modern times, sexual inequality thrives when it comes to the wedding. Not true, you say?

Well, think about the bridal shower. Today the average shower is a party for the bride with mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers and girlfriends in attendance. And the gifts? Things to help the new wife take care of the house.

Where does that leave the bridegroom? To fend for himself, no doubt. No one thinks to give him the implements he'll need to carry out his share of the household chores.

While the bride spends the first weeks of her marriage cheerfully trying out cookbooks and utensils, her husband is scouring the stores for tools, lawnmowers and rakes. Before he can begin sharing the work, he has to find and buy.

What's the solution to this modern-day shower inequality?

The wedding shower for couples. Honoring the couple instead of just the bride, this celebration not only helps the groom get comfortable in his new home sooner, but also makes a lot of sense.

Shower invitations should alert guests to this twist on tradition by simply stating the event is in celebration of Sue and John. Instead of assigning each guest a category like kitchen or bath items from which to choose a gift, you might advise them to buy with the wife, the husband or both newlyweds in mind to ensure that the groom gets his share of the fun.

One household responsibility that's still generally thought of as the man's

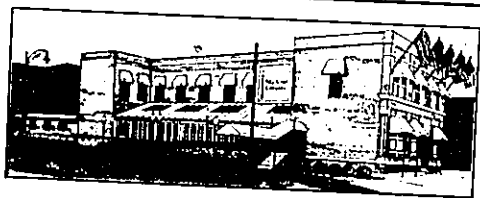
domain is tending bar, so gifts to help him "stock up" would be well appreciated. A wine rack is sure to please most grooms, particularly if it comes complete with a bottle of his favorite vintage. An ice bucket or blender will win favor as a bar basic, while a variety of liqueurs can add a note of sophistication.

For the more humdrum side of domesticity, consider garden equipment or a tool kit. Even an apartment dweller needs a hammer, pliers and screwdriver, and for the first-time homeowner, these basics are absolute essentials.

An outdoor barbecue is one way to encourage a reluctant chef to take on some of the cooking duties. And, if the groom is a gourmet, you're safe with anything from a pasta maker to a spice rack.

If you're not sure how the new couple intends to divide housework, simply give gifts they both will use. A collection of record albums is a thoughtful choice, particularly if you can include the song they've chosen for the first dance at their wedding reception. A year's cable television subscription is an unusual gift, they both can enjoy, even if she's an old movie buff and he's a devoted sports fan — or vice versa.

If guests are at all concerned about the bride sharing her shower with the groom, just ask them to imagine how she'll feel when he says, "honey, come look at the shelf I put up today for our new china."



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