



In many countries there is no such thing as a bridal shower.

In the United States, it seems that most brides are given at least one -- and sometimes more -- of these affairs. Showers devoted to kitchen gadgets, lingerie and miscellaneous gifts are common.

The bar shower has become quite popular with guests helping the bride and groom to stock their wine and liquor cabinets. Very often these are co-ed affairs, moving away from the traditional all female showers.

IN THE PAST, showers were usually held at lunchtime, or in the early afternoon, but with most young women working today, a late afternoon or early evening affair is a wise choice. Whichever time of day you choose, a tea party is still one of the nicest settings for a shower.

But don't just stop at serving tea and cake. With the wide variety of premium teas available on the market, you can have lots of fun with tea tasting.

Have each guest bring two or three teacups, along with her shower gift. Collect a number of pretty teapots and provide delicate pastry or tea sandwiches.

The hostess might brew three or four varieties of tea, each with its own distinctive and characteristic flavor, and have guests sample them.

IN ORDER TO APPRECIATE the rich flavor of fine tea, there's only one correct way to brew it.

• Preheat an earthenware or China teapot by rinsing with hot water.

• Add teabags or loose tea to the pot.

• Bring freshly drawn water to a rolling boil, then pour over the tea.

To extract full flavor from the tea leaves, let stand for length of time recommended on package and stir before pouring.

In considering gifts for the bride-to-be, you might keep in mind the entertaining she'll be doing once she sets up her new home. With the increasing popularity of tea-drinking among people under thirty, chances are she'll be serving tea to many of her guests. She'll appreciate a pretty teapot, or tea set.

If you want to be less conventional, you might present her with an antique tea strainer or a tiny teaball for a single cup of tea. With any of these, a welcome addition would be a selection of fine teas.

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