

Homespun Vows

Do-it-yourself weddings add personal touch to special day

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SPECIAL WRITER

In a different era, do-it-yourself weddings might have implied "cheap" or "inferior" — but not in the age of Martha Stewart, who has made it fashionable to be handy.

Pick up any issue of Stewart's quarterly Martha Stewart Weddings for inspiration. The Winter 2000 issue, for example, includes a report about how the magazine's food editor made a friend's wedding cake, as a gift. In the same issue Stewart also mentions that she, with her mother, made her very own wedding dress.

Of course, not all of us would want to do either of these. And I was more bohemian bride than Martha wanna-be, but still, the woman emboldened my fiancee and me to think that we could create a distinctive event by making at least some of the wedding elements ourselves (with much help from family and friends).

Why do it yourself? Besides incorporating a very personal feel to the event, doing things yourself can create more memorable, and perhaps, better effects than someone else could.

A word of caution: Doing things yourself may just spur your creativity, which can lead to some pretty untraditional results. We hesitated early on when a wedding planner book warned us that "Breaking away from accepted conventions may confuse your guests, and could even make them feel uncomfortable."

We decided that our guests were up to the challenge. Here are a few ideas to help put your own signatures into your wedding:

Please come

Who can resist a playful wedding invitation?

A photo-postcard can provide just the right hint of the festive celebration to come.

For the front, find a few good pictures of you and your fiancee together, perhaps in a celebratory or amusing pose. Have a copy center, such as Kinko's, make postcard-size color copies of them on heavy stock paper. (Some good quality home or office printers might do the job, too, if you have digital photo images.)

For the back, cut a sheet of heavy paper to postcard size and use rubber cement to glue it to the photo copy. Photo labs or office supply stores also sell stickers that serve as photo postcard backs.

The invitation's text will have to be brief and informative. We announced

the date, time and place of the event and included our phone number, e-mail and Web site addresses for RSVPs.

Mail the cards as you would a postcard, or, if you choose, in an envelope with an RSVP card and return envelope. Either way, your guests will be tickled with a picture of your smiling mugs to remind them of your blissful event to come.

Hint: Check your text's ink for smudges. If it does smudge, a local art supply store should sell a coating that will protect the type during its trip through the mail.

A favorite thing

Favors can be one of the nicest ways to show appreciation to your guests — and they can also be among the easiest things to handmade. Unless they will be made of perishable matter, favors can often be fashioned fairly far in advance of the wedding.

I was fortunate enough to have a sister who is a glass artisan. For our favors, she made small, glass picture frames that doubled as place card holders at our reception dinner.

We took several group photographs throughout the wedding weekend. Later we ordered wallet-sized copies (small enough to fit in the frames) of one of these images and sent a copy to each guest or couple who attended.

Hint: Check with friends who are artisans to see what objects they can create for your favors. A Web search for wedding favors can also help generate myriad ideas that any non-artisan can create, from magnets to keepsakes.

Picking your posies

Even if a florist arranges some of your flowers, hand-made bouquets or centerpieces can add a personal touch to your celebration.

First, find a flower market near to your wedding site. An Internet search can help locate an out-of-town market place. Consider what kind of flowers and greens you want — and then check with vendors to make sure they will be available on your wedding day, or the



Ceremony success: Without a high-cost wedding planner or the craft mastery of Martha Stewart, bridal couples can still put together a spectacular event given time, talent and a little extra thought.

day before. Try to order them beforehand, if possible.

Then, gather some materials that will help you assemble the floral decor. Helpful elements include some bolts of fine ribbon; floral wrap tape and cloth wire (available at a craft store such as Frank's Nursery and Crafts); boutonniere pins (find them at a florist or craft store); a good set of pruning shears and some vases or clay pots.

The trickiest part may be the timing since flowers are highly perishable, so, for a friend, should go to the market the day before, or the morning of your wedding, to pick up the flowers.

Then there is assembly. If you have available friends and family, the task shouldn't be too arduous. My sister's partner, along with my mom, used their creative energies and decorating skills

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