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Spring Bridal SHOWCASE

WEDDING CENTREPIECES WITH SUBSTANCE

(NC)—Extravagant wedding centrepieces can be nice, but aren't necessary. You may have attended a wedding where the centerpiece impaired guests from talking with each other or from seeing what is happening on stage. Or perhaps the centerpiece had so many elements that you wondered how the couple could afford them. If you're preparing for your wedding, consider creating centrepieces that reflect who you and your spouse-to-be really are, without breaking

the bank.

For the eco-friendly couple: sticks and stones. Forgo the regular bouquet of flowers and arrange sticks, stones, and pillar candles to create a calm, organic feel at the table.

For the do-gooder couple: promote your cause. In lieu of centrepieces, make a donation to a charity that you and your spouse-to-be support. Create small placecards at each table that explain why you support the charity and what the money

will provide. Organizations like Christian Children's Fund of Canada can give you some ideas on gift items that help impoverished children around the world (www.ccf-canada.ca/GiftCatalogue).

For the "love-y-dove-y" couple: poetry and photos. Showcase your favourite romantic quotes and poems with framed photos from your childhood, teenage years, and adulthood. You can put different photos at every table to get your guests to move around and mingle.

For the contemplative couple: books or DVDs.

Select two books, documentaries, or DVDs that you and your spouse-to-be enjoy or that convey a certain message.

Wrap the two items in a ribbon and give them away as a prize to guests at each table towards the end of the night.



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Spring Bridal SHOWCASE

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN A BRIDESMAID IS PREGNANT

Brides-to-be thinking of asking a pregnant friend or family member to be in the bridal party should know such a request is common. Recent findings indicate that around half of all weddings

now have at least one member of the bridal party showing off a baby bump -- sometimes it's even the bride herself.

Barring a medical condition, there is no reason a

pregnant woman can't be in the wedding and fulfill her obligations, so feel free to invite that special someone to be in the wedding. There are just a few things to consider to help make it easier on everyone involved. Think over these things.

* Gowns: One of the things brides and bridesmaids often fret about is the gown they will be wearing. While nonpregnant members of the bridal party won't fluctuate much in weight from the day of their first fittings to the wedding day, a pregnant woman is growing

with new life within her from the moment of conception. This will have to be taken into consideration. Some maternity designers create bridesmaid dresses for pregnant women, but they may not exactly match the other gowns in mind. Ask the bridal store if alterations can be made to a standard gown, including ordering a much larger size, adding elastic panels or another way to ensure the gown will stretch over a growing belly. Also, be considerate and choose a gown in an empire waist style so that it is flattering for the pregnant bridesmaid.

* Shoes: While pregnant, some women's feet swell. Having strict restrictions on footwear can make a pregnant woman uncomfortable. Low heels or ballerina slippers can be comfortable and fashionable. The other members of the bridal party may also thank you for choosing a sensible shoe.

* Breaks: Many activities during the wedding are bound to be tiring. But someone who is pregnant may feel it more than others. Ensure your mama-to-be has ample time to sit and rest. Also, try to have planning meetings near a restroom where she will be comfortable.

* Nonalcoholic drinks: From bachelorette parties to the wedding itself, be sure there are plenty of nonalcoholic and decaffeinated drinks she can enjoy. Pregnant women need to have a lot of water to meet the physical demand of pregnancy as well.

* Travel: In the latter months of the pregnancy,

many doctors advise against air travel. Spending long hours in a car may be uncomfortable as well. If you were thinking about having the wedding far away, these are things that must be taken into consideration. You may want to revise your plans if your heart is set on having this woman in the bridal party.

* Ceremony: It can be tiring for a pregnant woman, especially one in the last trimester, to stand for a long period of time. If you are having a long, religious ceremony, see if a seat can be arranged so your bridesmaid can sit down when she needs a rest.

* Declined invitation: Some pregnant women will jump at the chance to be in the wedding, while others may realize their limitations and prefer to attend only as a guest. Have another person

in mind in case your bridesmaid invitation is declined, and do not hold it against the person if she feels she won't be able to commit during her pregnancy.

* Patience: Although all eyes are generally on the bride on her special day, having a pregnant bridesmaid may garner a share of "oohs and aahs" and attention for her as well. It's a humble bride who can share her spotlight for a while. And remember, the "something new" at your wedding may be that new baby who is on the way!

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SAY "I DON'T" TO TRAVEL DISEASES AT DESTINATION WEDDINGS

(NC)—Destination weddings are becoming increasingly popular among Canadians. However, what brides, grooms, and their guests need to remember is destination weddings come with health risks not prevalent in Canada. The good news is many travel diseases can be prevented with a little preparation.

For the bride and groom, there are so many fun things to

plan—beach ceremony, music selection, colour themes, etc.—that they may put their health by the wayside. For their guests, they may feel most of the trip-planning is done for them so they can just hop on the plane when the time comes. There is, however, one planning step that should be a priority for the whole group to avoid potentially getting sick. Canadians should always make time to visit their

family doctor or a travel health expert prior to departure.

"A physician will clearly explain what health risks are prevalent at their intended destination and how to help protect against them," says Dr. Jay Keystone, travel medicine specialist and Director of Medysis Travel Health Clinic in Toronto. "Since there are so many misconceptions out there, this advice can be invaluable—for exam-

ple, malaria is one disease many Canadians don't realize they can contract down south."

Malaria is spread through the bite of infected mosquitoes and symptoms include fever, headache, chills, tiredness, muscle aches, and vomiting. In general, it is a curable disease, but without treatment it can lead to more serious problems and can sometimes be fatal.

There are medications

available that can help protect against malaria and some can even be started just days prior to departure. Also, avoid mosquitoes from dusk to dawn as that's when they're most actively feeding.

Use insect repellent with



DEET and wear light-coloured, long-sleeved clothing in the evening.

HOW TO SAY, 'THANK YOU'

It is customary for the bride- and groom-to-be to show their gratitude to all of the people who will make their wedding day special. Weddings today feature people who have roles that go beyond the traditional, like interior decorators and musical soloists. It's important to remember to thank everyone who contributes to the celebration.

Thank-you gifts should be something thoughtful and enduring. Avoid fad or gag gifts. These gifts should be presented at a pre-wedding occasion. It's customarily done at the rehearsal dinner.

Crafting personalized remarks is a nice way to call attention to the unique tasks of each wedding participant. Don't simply pass the gifts out in one fell swoop. This way the gift will have more meaning through a personal message.

Don't let thank-you gifts be forgotten. Start thinking of gift ideas early on and plan for any extra time for engraving or other personalization.

Groomsmen

When selecting gifts for groomsmen, think about a gift they would like but probably wouldn't buy themselves. This can be cuff links, a fine watch, money clip, or a high-quality wallet. Feel free to splurge a little more on the best man.

Bridesmaids

Traditional gifts for bridesmaids are different

types of jewelry. Monogrammed stationery, a spa treatment, or another pampering session. As you have with the best man, feel free to bestow a little more thanks on the maid of honour with a more lavish gift. Younger bridal party members can get a similar gift, but one in scale with their ages.

Clergy

Many couples choose to make a financial donation to their house of worship. Additional tipping or monetary gifts for musicians, altar boys/girls, etc. can also be a thoughtful gesture. A donation toward an officiant's vestments may also be

appreciated.

Parents of the Bride and Groom

The couple may choose to bestow a gift on their parents, which can be especially meaningful if the parents are taking care of the financial responsibility of the wedding. Jewelry or fine gifts in similar scope to that of the bridal party are good ideas. Consider engraved picture frames that can house a wedding portrait down the road.

Others

Readers, soloists, ushers, etc. can be given a small token of your appreciation, like a gift card or a personalized memento.

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GETTING ENGAGED IS JUST THE BEGINNING ... NOW WHAT?

(MS) -- Are you one of the thousands of couples who got engaged over the holidays? This is the time for you and your soon-to-be to get everything you ever wanted -- whether you're starting from scratch, upgrading, expanding or replacing. Turn a

whole bunch of mismatched mine and yours into a lifetime of ours.

"When it comes to registering, relax, take your time and have fun," recommends Audrey Stavish, a Bridal and Gift Registry expert at Bed Bath & Beyond. "Most brides up-

date their registries online and go into the stores many times. There aren't any rules that you must follow. Choose items that are right for you and your soon-to-be. Go through the registry process together and have fun!"

Here are some additional tips to make wedding planning a breeze:

Plan Ahead: Start a bridal registry as soon as you say "yes." That way guests will have lots of options for engagement gifts and showers. Periodically update your registry by adding more products if you need to, even after the wedding. Be kind to procrastinators.

Do the Math: Experts advise registering for 2-3 items times the number of guests you plan to have. Close friends and family will rely on your registry for special events leading up to the wedding -- such as engagement parties, bridal showers, and holidays! Your guests will appreciate having lots of choices when they shop for you. Be sure to refresh your list regularly as gifts get purchased.

Register Now, Because You Won't Buy it Later: You may think you will ... but you won't. Now is the time to let others get you the stuff you'd never buy yourself. Your friends and family might even get together to purchase a higher priced "group gift."

Dream Big: Register for gifts in a range of prices and categories. This will

give guests and group givers lots of options to choose from.

Remember the Rule of Three: When it comes to setting your table, if you choose bold patterns for your china and flatware, pick a more simple style of glassware. Prefer intricate stemware? Pair it with simpler patterns of china and flatware. So, it's bold/bold/simple or simple/simple/bold.

Visit a Store: It's in YOUR best interest to visit a store and schedule an appointment with an expert consultant who can help you with your gift selections and share great tips like "The Rule of Three," what cookware you will need to prepare your favorite dish, what knife to use when and much more. When making your selections, it's important to touch the towels, heft the flatware, see everything in person!

C'mon Back: Most couples don't make all their selections in a single spree. Plan on making multiple visits.

Once you've set up your registry, take advantage of Bed Bath & Beyond's Bridal Toolkit(R), the complimentary wedding planning tools available at bedbathandbeyond.com, including your own Personal Wedding Web site, budgeter, task manager, guest list manager, gift tracker and even a seating arranger. This way, all of your information can be stored in one convenient place.

Congratulations and best wishes on your engagement. Now get registering and let the gift-giving begin.



LOOKING FOR THAT PERFECT WEDDING GIFT?

(NC) — Scrolling through a wedding gift registry to find a memorable present for the bride and groom can be a stressful challenge when you've waited too long and the only items left are either forgettable or extravagant. The key to finding a meaningful gift is to pick something that surpasses simple daily use and inspires the hearts of the wedding couple long after they open it. One of the hottest trends right now is to make a donation to charity as a symbol of the couple's love. Here are some tips on donation gifts:

Make sure they will like it— If you know the couple relatively well, you'll have an idea of the causes that they support, whether it's fighting child poverty, violence against women, or animal cruelty. You may also want to check their personal blogs, Facebook or MySpace pages for links to their favourite charities.

Illustrate who they

are— If the bride or groom is in the teaching or medical profession, think about getting them something that expresses that passion. Websites like www.ccfcanda.ca offer a range of unique donation options like buying books and pencils for classrooms overseas or providing medical supplies to a poor community.

Share the love— It's not uncommon for newlyweds to want to share the warmth of their newfound love. Supporting a child in need is a wonderful way to do exactly that. For the price of a wedding gift, you can sponsor a child for a year in the name of the new couple. Sponsoring a child through organizations like Christian Children's Fund of Canada gives couples the opportunity to write and even visit their new little loved one. Couples will value the symbol of love and compassion your gift represents in their new life together.

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