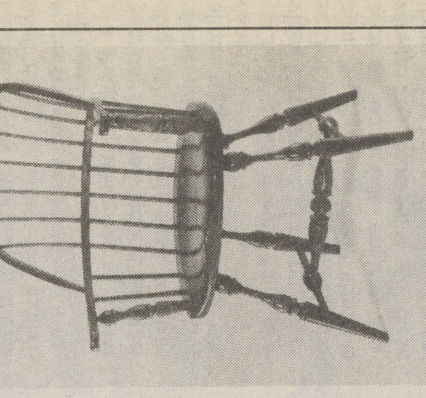


Casual everyday china tops the gift list for many couples, but everyone's needs - and wants - are different.

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Gift list should fit your lifestyle

ter at two or more stores for the same items, make sure you update the registries at each store once the presents start coming in.

Most wedding gift consultants agree that it's important to register early since many friends and relatives want to use that list to buy engagement and shower gifts.

What do you register for? Well, the most common items still include formal and everyday dinnerware, glassware, serving accessories, flatware, table and bath linens, cutlery (yes, even knives), cooking equipment and appliances.

Before heading into the stores, you can create your own initial checklist with categories like formal dinnerware, glass/bar ware, and flatware; the specific pieces you want, such as dinner plates, serving bowls, platters, place knives, and the like; the manufacturer; and the quantity.

If you already have basics you and your fiance love and are looking for out-of-the-ordinary places to register, how about a hardware store? Tool boxes, snow blowers, step stools, and cordless electric drills may be things you know you need but haven't gotten around to buying for yourself.

Or, visit a furniture store and list some accessories like lamps, area rugs, window treatments and clocks. Or, finally, if you and your fiance share a hobby or sport, register at stores that sell the equipment you use - whether it's camping gear, gardening tools or diving paraphernalia.

What if you have the basics and yearn for the good stuff - the fine china and crystal, the sterling-silver flatware? How do you select what is to be an investment of a lifetime when you've always dined

on chunky crockery and stainless-steel flatware? Where crystal is concerned, go for a simple pattern if your dinnerware and flatware are going to be more ornate. In turn, if your dinnerware is going to be less complicated in style, you can add flair with more ornate crystal.

For entertaining you'll need more than water, wineglasses and a set of champagne flutes. Iced tea, highball and old-fashioned glasses, as well as a set of brandy snifters, will round out the set. You don't drink brandy or highballs? Well, they can be used for a number of other beverages and even dessert.

Fine lead crystal should have a clear ringing sound and will be heavier than glass. Since it is handmade, there may be some flaws like shear marks or tiny bubbles, but these flaws should be minimal.

Porcelain or bone china? Flat-rimmed or scalloped? Solid color or floral? There are so many choices available in selecting fine china that you can make yourself crazy trying to decide. A piece of fine dinnerware is translucent when held up to the light and resonates gently when tapped. Currently, floral motifs are the most popular, but plain china banded in gold or silver is always stylish.

When selecting a pattern, think about how you like to entertain. Will your table linens clash with an English country design or mesh beautifully? Do you like a soft touch and clean lines or something with more heft?

Whatever you decide, you will probably want a five-piece setting that includes a dinner plate, salad/dessert plate, bread and butter plate, a cup and saucer. And don't forget to add serving pieces to your registry list.

You'd think the toughest part of receiving gifts is writing the thank-you notes after the wedding. But as most brides know, the path to getting what you want is paved with advanced planning and forethought. Those bridal gift registries weren't designed for nothing, after all.

Despite the diverging trends in the kinds of gifts we like to give and receive, there are some basic approaches that will help both you and your friends and relatives.

The first thing is for you and your fiance to establish together what you need and want. Do you need both everyday dinnerware and fine china? Do you already have basic housewares and want to opt instead for electronics or labor-saving devices?

Before you visit the stores, take inventory of what you already are happy with and note what the gaps are. It's also important to know in advance color schemes, the level of formality at which you intend to live or entertain and quantities of things like tableware and place settings.

Then visit the store or stores of your choice and make use of the bridal registry director. You may need to make an appointment in advance to get the kind of attention you'll need, but regardless, plan to spend a good amount of time getting things settled. He or she can help you figure out what kinds of items you can use based on your lifestyle, make recommendations on specific merchandise and their quantities and advise you on pricing.

This wish list can be computerized at most stores and will be altered to reflect purchases to reduce the chances of your receiving duplicates. Of course, if you register

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