

Entertaining with Flair

What's your style? Bright and bold buffets? Subdued and sophisticated sit-downs? Or, backyard picnics? Here's how to decide what you'll need for small get-togethers and big bashes.

By Lisa Arcella

A bridal registry is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to start your married life off with all the tools you'll need to entertain friends and family—or to sit down for a special dinner for two! To get the gifts you really want and will use for years to come, give some thought to what works best for your lifestyle.

Do you both prefer your parties casual and carefree? Does the thought of a formal dinner party leave you cold? There's no rule that says you have to ask for a set of expensive china. If you are likely to be more informal entertainers, you can register for items that fit the bill.

On the other hand, if elegant and sophisticated appeals to you, then you should opt for fine china, glassware, silver and linens that reflect your taste. Here's a list of the basics to consider before you register, no matter what your style.

TABLEWARE

Most couples register for eight to 12 place settings of their chosen pattern. Casual china typically comes in sets of four with each place setting including a dinner plate, salad plate, soup/cereal bowl and mug. Fine china is sold, generally, in individual place settings with each one including a dinner plate, salad/dessert plate, bread-and-butter plate and cup and saucer. Don't forget to add soup or pasta bowls to your list if you will be wanting them.

Many china companies are now offering pattern options, so feel free to mix and match patterns as you like. It's still best, though, not to mix formal and everyday china sets.

LINENS

If you plan on setting a formal table, a good tablecloth and napkins are necessary to achieve that finished look. Formal place mats or chargers (large plates that sit under a dinner plate) can be added to get a layered look. For informal get-togethers, placemats and coordinated napkins in any variety of styles, colours or weaves can add fun to your table.



FLATWARE & CUTLERY

Register for the same number of place settings as you have established for china. Settings are usually sold in five-piece units. Also consider asking for matching "hostess" items in your pattern, such as serving pieces and a cake server. Don't overlook a set of good steak knives and a carving set (including sharpener) that you'll be pleased to bring to the table when you entertain.

GLASSWARE

Ask for more glasses than dishes, since glasses, unfortunately, are likely to break. For formal settings, glassware or crystal should include wine glasses, water goblets, champagne flutes and old-fashioned glasses for mixed drinks. Do you and/or yours drink beer instead? Think mugs in addition to champagne flutes.

COOKWARE

Many manufacturers have starter sets to take the hassle out of setting up a home. A basic set should include saucepans and skillets with interchangeable lids and perhaps a Dutch oven. Other good basics for your kitchen include a roasting pan, casserole dishes, mixing bowls, cake pans and cookie sheets.

APPLIANCES

Every kitchen should have a coffee pot and teapot, a toaster, a mixer and, perhaps, a blender. If you already know that you really like to cook, there are plenty of items to consider adding in this category, from espresso machines to crock pots to food processors—and even bread machines.

EXTRAS

The items on the checklist are there to help you get started. But if you both would love some really good camping or sports equipment, computer software or a camera, add those items when you register. There is life outside the kitchen!