

entertaining

WEDDING SHOWER

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hosting a wedding shower

There are many different ways to throw a wedding shower. The guest list can be large or small, single-sex or coed. The atmosphere can be formal or casual. But at its heart, a shower is about friends and family coming together to honor the bride-to-be with gifts and memories that will last a lifetime. As a host, there's no greater gift you can give to a loved one than a thoughtful and momentous party.

Once you've offered to host a shower, the first step is to discuss the event with the guest of honor (or guests, if it's a couples' shower). Gather information on taste and preferences, then make the key decisions: the date, time of day, location, theme (if any), and guest list.

In the pages ahead, we'll show you how to throw a "desserts and coffee" wedding shower for 20 guests. Inspired by the lavish afternoon teas of the Victorian period, this party is traditional without being frilly. It can take place in a house or garden, and can easily be scaled up or down for more or fewer guests. We offer recipes for elegant **desserts** and **drinks**; pretty ideas for **invitations, decor, and favors**; and fun, creative **activities** the bride is sure to love. We've even included a **time line** to help you make it all happen.

— Michele Adams and Gia Russo

PHOTOGRAPHY: JONELLE WEAVER

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Berry Bread Puddings

Double Chocolate Raspberry Cake

Pound Cake Squares with Berries

Chocolate Mousse with Raspberries

delectable desserts

Our menu, designed to be served in the afternoon, consists of several bite-sized desserts plus a pretty cake. The classic flavors of chocolate and berries are recurring themes. A rich **chocolate mousse** is layered with raspberries in elegant goblets. **Berry bread puddings** are a perfect match for a cup of coffee or tea. Tiny squares of **pound cake** are brushed with butter and broiled, then topped with whipped cream and colorful berries. And an easy **chocolate chocolate-chip layer cake**, decorated with a fudgy frosting and raspberries, makes a striking centerpiece.

The desserts are displayed on a buffet table. (For tips on decorating the buffet, see **the look**.) When arranging them, take advantage of their variety of shapes and sizes. The goblets of chocolate mousse can be grouped together and strewn with rose petals. Try setting the colorful squares of pound cake on a rectangular tray — these can be placed on the buffet or passed around. The cake is best displayed on a tall stand, and a tiered dessert stand can hold individual portions of bread pudding or other treats. Don't forget to leave room for a stack of dessert plates, napkins, and silverware at one end of the table.

This menu serves approximately 20 guests. If your party is smaller, simply cut out one or more recipes. If you're expecting more people, an easy way to augment, without spending days in the kitchen, is to add purchased sweets such as a bowl full of truffles. You could also ask some guests to make and bring their favorite desserts.



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[The Best Café au Lait](#)[Pretty Petal Punch](#)[Sparkling Raspberry Lemonade](#)

selections for sipping

For this afternoon party, we chose light, nonalcoholic drinks that would complement the desserts and look lovely on the buffet. A pink **punch** of guava juice and ginger ale is always a hit, and looks charming served in a large bowl with rose petals floating on top. Refreshing, colorful **sparkling raspberry lemonade**

can be displayed in beautiful glass carafes or pitchers, and vodka can be served alongside for those who want a stronger drink. (For 20 people, we recommend making three batches of the lemonade.) Both are easy to prepare and can be mixed ahead of time — simply add ice and the sparkling water for the lemonade at the last minute.

In addition to cold beverages, a coffee and tea bar, perhaps set up on an adjacent table, will pair well with the dessert menu. For guests who want a soothing cup of tea, set out hot water, a variety of regular and herbal tea bags, milk, sugar, honey, and lemon wedges. For coffee, our **café au lait** is much more delicious than regular American. Strongly brewed coffee and warm milk are frothed together, and condiments such as cinnamon, cocoa powder, and orange zest are offered alongside. You may want to make several batches, including one decaf. Insulated carafes for both the coffee and hot water can be rented at party supply stores.

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Icebox Cookie Favors



Roses glued to a Styrofoam ball make an elegant decoration above the buffet.



the look of love

For this dessert shower, we chose a traditional yet understated design theme in shades of pink and taupe. Pink has long been associated with weddings, and the addition of taupe adds a modern touch. To create a consistent mood, we used this palette for the invitations, buffet, and favors.

Come One, Come All

For subtle, feminine invitations, try printing the text onto white cards with scalloped edges and gluing a tiny pink embroidered flower appliqué (available at craft stores) to the top of each. Tuck each into a white envelope, and hand-write the addresses.

Setting the Scene

We recommend throwing this intimate shower in a living, dining, or family room or, in warm weather, in a garden or on a terrace. Decide where you'll put the buffet, then arrange the furniture so there's enough space near the food and drinks for guests to mingle, and some seating near a table for the presents.

There's no need to provide a chair for every guest: A mix of chairs, benches, sofas, and floor cushions will look attractive and create a casual, relaxed environment where guests can perch during present-opening. Add some side tables, coffee tables, and foot stools on which guests can set their plates.

Now the fun begins — showing off your creative talents with decorations. For the table, look for inspiration at local yard goods stores, where you'll find many inexpensive fabrics that can easily be stitched together in place of expensive linens. We created a homemade table runner with rose-colored fabric trimmed with taupe satin ribbon (see a photo), and layered it on top of pale pink fabric. We draped pale pink tulle above the buffet, and punctuated it with an easy but impressive rose ball. To make the ball, cut the stems off four to five dozen roses and use a glue gun to attach the rose heads to an eight-inch Styrofoam ball. Once the ball is filled with roses, attach a ribbon to the top with glue and T pins.

A Parting Gift

Last but not least are the party favors — a great way to thank your guests and leave them with a wonderful remembrance of the shower. There are as many types of favors as there are ways to present them. We took round wood boxes found at a craft store, filled them with crinkled tissue strips and buttery **icebox cookies**, then tied a pink satin ribbon around each box to seal it. Place the boxes on a tray near the door so your guests can take them as they say their good-byes.

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fun and games

The key to creating a relaxed, festive atmosphere at a shower is striking the right balance between planning and spontaneity. For instance, since one of the main activities is present-opening, you'll probably want to make sure that this happens before it gets too late, in case any guests have to leave. And if the bride intends to send thank-you notes, having someone record each gift and who it's from can be a huge help to her. But there's no need to stick to hard-and-fast rules or a rigid schedule — you can adapt as you wish to fit your preferences and the personality of the bride.

A planned activity can be a great icebreaker, especially if not all the guests know each other. We like to keep the games casual and fun. One of our favorites is a contest to see who knows the bride the best. Before the party, create questionnaires with questions such as: How did the bride and groom meet? Where will the honeymoon be? What's the bride's favorite food? Pass out the questionnaires when guests arrive, and then ask the bride the same questions, while each person scores her own questionnaire. Award a prize such as a gift certificate to a nail salon to whomever answers the most questions correctly.

Another way to involve guests is to create something for the bride to take home as a memento. Buy a pretty scrapbook with removable pages and mail a page to each guest several weeks before the shower. Ask each person to personalize her page with photos of her with the bride or couple and a personal note, and to bring the page to the shower. Collect all the pages and present the book to the bride at the shower. The memories in the book will be enjoyed by the bride for years to come, and this activity can also prompt storytelling and interesting conversation among the guests.