

Flowers help make the day

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How to get your ideal wedding arrangements

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In Bloom

If you haven't yet participated in that terrifying social exercise known as planning a wedding, you might have missed the fact that January has virtually become wedding convention month in Toronto. With the bumper crop of this year's nuptials just five months away, there are several big shows this month for brides and their harried mothers.

While some Toronto florists have stopped doing weddings (the word "bridezilla" often pops up as a reason for opting out), others are full of helpful advice for making sure the flowers, at least, go off without a hitch on the big day.

First comes the free consultation. Karina Lemke of Posies Flower Shop, who is featured this season on Life Network's *Rich Bride/Poor Bride* and is a fave of Cher and Kate Hudson when they're in town, suggests seeing two or three florists, a year in advance if possible. "See all your potential florists the same week so you know that you are accurately comparing what each can offer you," she says.

Lisa Priestap of Florigens Design recommends bringing in fabric swatches of dresses and pho-

tos of favourite floral arrangements. "I even love it when people bring in pictures of things they don't like, so I get a sense of where they're going."

Budget is key, too. It is helpful when prospective clients have a dollar figure in mind, says John Schell of Garden's Path: "An approximate budget guides me in my suggestions and advice."

For the bridal bouquet alone, expect to pay from \$145 to \$200. That will buy a hand-tied arrangement of fresh flowers in season. If you're looking for peonies in December, it'll cost a whole lot more, since they come from Australia at outrageous prices. "I try to steer brides away

FLORISTS 'HATE IT WHEN YOU STEAL ALL OUR GOOD IDEAS'

from that," Ms. Priestap says. "I find them not as big and luscious as our own flowers in season." Mr. Schell agrees: "What will the beauty of spring be, if we can get all the spring flowers readily available throughout the year?"

Ms. Priestap's brides either go for the romantic look, with blowsy peonies, scented freesias and creamy roses, or the edgy look, with such sophisticated flowers as calla lilies in one strong colour. If the bridesmaids' gowns are a hot raspberry pink, she'll tone them down with a cool-coloured bouquet featuring gorgeous char-

treuse flowers such as viburnum. For late summer, Mr. Schell loves the big bold blossoms of dahlias.

While bridal magazines such as *Martha Stewart Weddings* are a source of inspiration, Ms. Lemke warns: "Be prepared for sticker shock when you present an apparently simple bouquet featured on one of those glossy pages, which often use obscure and pricey flowers."

Ms. Lemke will be exhibiting at The Wedding Co. bridal show at the Carlu this weekend, an event she highly recommends. "It is the best venue to see stylish and sophisticated wedding designs." (See theweddingco.ca for show details, or call 416-597-0143.)

Florists must condition flowers perfectly, since that hand-tied arrangement is expected to last for hours without wilting. Says Ms. Priestap: "Conditioning the flowers properly is really key. But we'll always send the bouquets packed in an inexpensive container with a little water where they can be set between pictures, if it makes people feel more comfortable."

Two weeks before a relative's late May wedding, in an extremely hot spring when everything was blooming early and wilting fast, I picked hundreds of stems of lily-of-the-valley just when the buds were showing colour, crammed them into vases covered loosely with plastic bags and placed them in a basement fridge. The morning before the wedding, I drove them to the bride's house where she and her bridesmaids were having a hen

party, assembling dozens of reception-table centrepieces. The lily-of-the-valley blossoms opened perfectly for the big day.

On that note, Ms. Lemke says "If you think you can do it yourself and save a little money, consult with a florist but be honest. We hate it when you steal all our good ideas and never call back — and then we run into you at our wholesalers! So talk to us and hire us to do the stuff you're not entirely capable of, such as bouquets and boutonnières. Then let us advise you on basic, easy-to-

make centrepieces."

And Mr. Schell reminds brides to let designers do their thing: "Once you have found your florist and are confident with his or her work, give them a bit of freedom in their creations. I always try to get the whole feel and colour theme from my bride, then I ask her to leave some of the smaller details to me." When the moment arrives, he wants the bride, too, to be blown away by the beauty of her bouquet. "It is your day, after all."

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