One common approach is a theme shower, which determines the kinds of gifts guests give and offers a fun way to personalize the shower.

A few suggestions follow; of course, you can go with any theme that fits the bride and the shower's hosts - or no theme at all, other than having a good time.

Wine and ... (cheese/beer/music/cigars, etc.):

This shower can round out the couple's collection of wines and whichever add-on they like best. Guests should bring a bottle of wine and/or whatever else is requested - fine cheeses, a case of microbrew beer, a favorite CD, or a box of cigars.

Tea party:

This shower is great for helping the couple stock up on goodies for their morning coffee, afternoon tea, or evening mug of cocoa. Presents might be nice teas, coffees, mugs, coffeemakers or coffee grinders, packages of fancy cookies, serving trays, teapots, or teacups.

Around the world:

For world gourmets or travel enthusiasts. This party lends itself well to a cocktail party with hors d'oeuvres from all around the world. Gifts might be international foods or wines, travel accessories, CDs of world music, or beautiful books on travel and other cultures.

The great outdoors:

This shower supplies the adventurous couple with presents to help keep them moving in the wilderness. The invitation should indicate what activities they like to do but, as always, should not suggest gifts. Depending on what the couple enjoys doing, guests might bring them camping equipment, fleece blankets, matching ski hats, or golf clothes, to name a few.

How does your garden grow?

For the gardening couple, this party will nurture their green thumbs. The garden shower theme makes for a nice garden party or tea party. Guests can bring gifts like tin watering cans, garden tools, packets of flower and/or vegetable seeds, bird feeders, or sets of his-and-hers garden gloves.

Tools and gadgets:

Especially great for coed parties, this shower supplies the couple with fun tools and gadgets for the house. Think Brookstone meets Home Depot: gifts might be a travel alarm clock, a mini blow torch for crème brûlées, or an all-in-one toolkit.

Entertainment:

The idea here is to provide the couple with entertaining things to do. Gifts might be DVDs, CDs, movie tickets, museum passes, restaurant gift certificates, puzzles or games, books, journals, or magazine subscriptions.

Room of the house:

Guests are asked to bring a gift for a specific room of the house. Most rooms are fairly self-explanatory, although I did once get stumped by the home office; a nice desk set, a cool paperweight, an assortment of beautiful note cards, or a pair of picture frames could all see you through.

Hours of the day:

Guests are given an hour of the day for which to buy the couple a present. 8 am guests might give a set of egg cups or a juicer, while 8 pm guests might give a CD of dinner music or a set of beautiful candles for the dinner table.

Months of the year:

Guests are assigned a month of the year and buy the couple a present appropriate to that

month. Guests with January might give cocoas or matching cashmere socks; a guest with July might give a picnic basket or croquet set.

Letters of the alphabet:

Guests are allotted a letter of the alphabet and buy the couple a present with that letter. Guests given the letter S might bring presents such as a collection of gourmet salsas or a gardening spade and seeds.

Bed and breakfast:

Guests are asked to bring gifts for the kitchen or bedroom. This is a great shower to throw as a brunch! Gifts should be for use in the bedroom or kitchen but can go beyond the obvious items if you're feeling creative, such as a set of books for bedside reading or a poker set for playing a game around the kitchen table. Just be sure your explanation makes sense, so it's clear you're still playing along.

Lingerie party:

Not for the faint of heart! The idea here is to keep the spark alive in the bedroom. A word of warning: Choose your audience carefully with this one. All kinds of lingerie, from negligees and bra and panty sets to chemises and camisoles, slips, garters, and fancy stockings. If you're not comfortable buying the lacy stuff, cozy pajamas, robes, or slippers are always a welcome alternative.

Spa shower:

A shower to indulge and pamper the senses. Gifts should pamper the bride and groom, such as bubble bath, scented candles, massage oils, or robes.

More theme ideas are available in the Planning Your Wedding section of Etipedia.

From *Emily Post's Wedding Parties: Smart Ideas for Stylish Parties, from Engagement to Reception and Everything in Between* by Anna Post