

Gift Ideas Blossom For Spring

Americans celebrate moms, brides, grooms and grads with new energy

The events of September 11, 2001, have left Americans searching for ways to honor those who are important in our lives. Spring holidays and celebrations are gift-giving occasions to do just that. Here's a look at some of the top Christian gifts for Mother's Day, graduation and weddings.

MOTHER'S DAY

Anna Jarvis, credited for initiating the first Mother's Day in 1908, may finally see her intention for a nationwide "day of sentiment" honoring all mothers fulfilled this year. A National Retail Federation (NRF) survey shows that consumers overwhelmingly plan to extend the celebration of Mother's Day by honoring someone other than their own mothers.

Three out of four consumers (75.9 percent) said they are planning to give a Mother's Day gift this year either to a female relative other than their own mother or to a family friend. This trend reflects the fact that "traditional" is no longer traditional—more than 35 million stepfamilies exist in the United States.

Consumers spend an average of more than \$100 on Mother's Day activities, according to the International Mass Retail Association. Giving cards is the No. 1 activity among those honoring someone on Mother's Day, followed by giving flowers, taking Mom out to dinner or brunch, and giving gardening items, apparel, jewelry and home fashions.

Hallmark Cards' research indicates that the focus on Mother's Day is pampering or indulging, reflecting, honoring, remembering the importance of family, and acknowledging the power of women. Following Sept. 11, luxury products once deemed too extravagant for many to buy are now considered

small indulgences that give consumers an emotional lift.

"In this time of consumer crisis it's no wonder that the category of personal care products and cosmetics, including 'lotions and potions' that pamper and candles, will see continued dynamic growth," predicts Pam Danziger, president of Unity Marketing and author of the upcoming book *Why People Buy Things They Don't Need*.

Arkansas-based Alda's Forever has unveiled new gifts for moms who want to feel good about themselves. Perfume Euro-Wax Sachet Votives are gossamer sachet bags adorned with beads and filled with six fragranced votive candles. Hang the satin drawstring over a doorknob or in a closet or tuck the bags in a lingerie drawer to enjoy the fragrance.

As the need for a votive candle arises, simply remove a votive from the sachet. Alda's also offers *Fragranced Foaming Bath* in 6- and 9-ounce sizes and "In the Pink" Bath Salts. Each item includes a hangtag with a Bible verse.

This year's greeting cards for Mom range from whimsical to heartfelt and include a variety of artistic styles in addition to various verse and card shapes. Some of the leaders in the inspirational card market are DaySpring Cards, Lawson Falle, Marian Heath Greeting Cards and Leanin' Tree. Cards will be sent to traditional recipients—mothers, grandmothers, wives, daughters and sisters—as well as to less traditional recipients, such as mothers-in-law, aunts, stepmoms and those who are "like family."

Popular Christian artist Audrey Jeanne Roberts makes moms feel loved and appreciated with a collection of gifts available from Inspirio called the "Mom You've Blessed My Heart" boutique. The collection includes a gift book, magnetic notepad, two picture frames and a gift bag.

Newly published gift books for moms of all ages will serve to educate, honor or evoke a smile. *A Grandmother's Touch* (Vine

Books) celebrates remarkable women in the lives of Philip Gulley, Patsy Clairmont, Sheila Walsh and others. Two books from Harvest House Publishers speak to new moms: 365 Things Every New Mom Should Know (a devotional) and Dear Child of Mine (a journal). A humorous three-book series called Mama Says from Rita Maggart (Tyndale House Publishers) passes along wisdom using Scripture, illustrations and wit.

Other winning titles include: When Mothers Touch Heaven by Joy Haney (New Leaf Press), A Love Like No Other by Elisa Morgan, Mothering by Heart by Robin Jones Gunn and Stories for a Mom's Heart by Alice Gray (all from Multnomah Gifts); Bear Hugs for Moms and Promises for Moms from the New International Version (both from Inspirio); and 10 Things I Want My Daughter to Know by Annie Chapman (Harvest House).

Cross Gifts continues its yearly release of necklaces for mothers. This year's "Our Two Hearts Entwined" necklace is handcrafted in sterling silver or 24-karat gold over sterling silver and features two interlocking hearts with intricately designed filigree accents. The pendant, displayed in a gift box with a poem, is symbolic of the unbreakable bond that mothers and daughters share.

GRADUATION

This year's approximately 5.2 million graduates represent a 1 percent increase over last year's graduating class. The U.S. Department of Education forecasts that the number of graduates will grow each year through 2007, with most commencements occurring between mid-April and mid-June.

Greeting cards and money are the most popular gifts. Monogrammed gifts help mark the event for years to come. The Lost Coin Parable Bracelet from Alda's Forever is a sterling silver bracelet with a coin design inspired from an actual coin dating back to biblical times. The card that comes with this bracelet shares the meaning behind the Lost Coin Parable, which highlights the significance we have in Christ.

The back of the coin is stamped with the Bible verse from Luke about the parable. The back can also be engraved with a name and date of salvation or graduation. The company also offers a silverware pen and business card holder.

Gift books are also a popular choice for those grads accustomed to hitting the books. Life After Graduation from Brownlow is new this year, as are God's Words of Life for Students from the New International Version and You, God, & Real Life: A Survivor's Guide (both from Inspirio).

Other gifts to help decorate a recent high school grad's dorm include: Blue Mountain Arts' 16-month calendar Always Believe in Yourself and Your Dreams, Inspirio's "Give Thanks to the Lord" wooden picture frame, and a collection of gifts from Dicksons that combine the prayer of Jabez with a theme of columns and ivy.

WEDDINGS

With more than 2.5 million marriages taking place each year, selecting a gift for a bridal couple is a task people face with regularity. Those who are getting married do a great deal of gift buying, too—for their attendants and others who are involved in helping their special day go smoothly.

The trend in gifts for brides and grooms is toward practical items. Families are spending more time at home and want to surround themselves with things that help make their lives peaceful, simple and beautiful. Home accents with a marriage theme include: Gracewords flatware by Anne McCracken, five-piece place settings with inspirational words inscribed on the handle; a "Marriage Takes Three" throw from Dicksons; and "Peace Be to This House" soap and candle from Alda's Forever.

Christian artists Sue Skeen and D. Morgan use their talents to create framed wedding prints for Cottage Garden Collections. Skeen's "Heart of Love" and Morgan's "Man and Wife" each contain an inspirational verse and sell for around \$40.

Remember, when giving framed art as a gift, to inscribe a message, date and signature on the back.

Two collections of decorative pieces from Inspirio were popular during the recent Atlanta Gift Show. The "Two Shall Become One Wedding Boutique" collection includes a gift book, memory book, photo album, mini photo album, photo frame and gift bag. The second collection, "To Love & To Cherish Wedding Boutique," features a photo frame, candleholder, photo album, gift book, mini photo album, journal and cross.

Thoughtful gifts for those who choose to be a part of the special day include Friendship Balls in beaded shimmer bags and Friendship Ball pendants, both from Alda's Forever. Each silver-plated hinged ball comes empty so it can be filled with special tokens for the occasion. Pendants in regular and petite sizes open to reveal six small pictures frames that can be filled with pictures of bridesmaids.

Items to help the bridal couple prepare for the special day include silver cake plateaus for wedding cakes from Alda's Forever; and wine flutes, cake toppers, candleholders and a penholder for guest books, all based on Dreamsicles cherubs from Cast Art Industries.

Experts on etiquette and southern hospitality Ann Platz and Susan Wales provide an easy-to-follow guide for planning the perfect wedding in *Social Graces for Your Wedding* (Harvest House). Details include proper addressing of invitations, seating arrangements for divorced parents and suitable timeframes for sending out thank-you notes.

Celebrations with family and friends that once seemed mundane have taken on new meaning following September 11. Why not bless the moms, brides, grooms and grads you know with a unique gift to show your appreciation and support during the special times in their lives?

Rhonda Sholar is a former editor of Inspirational Giftware magazine.