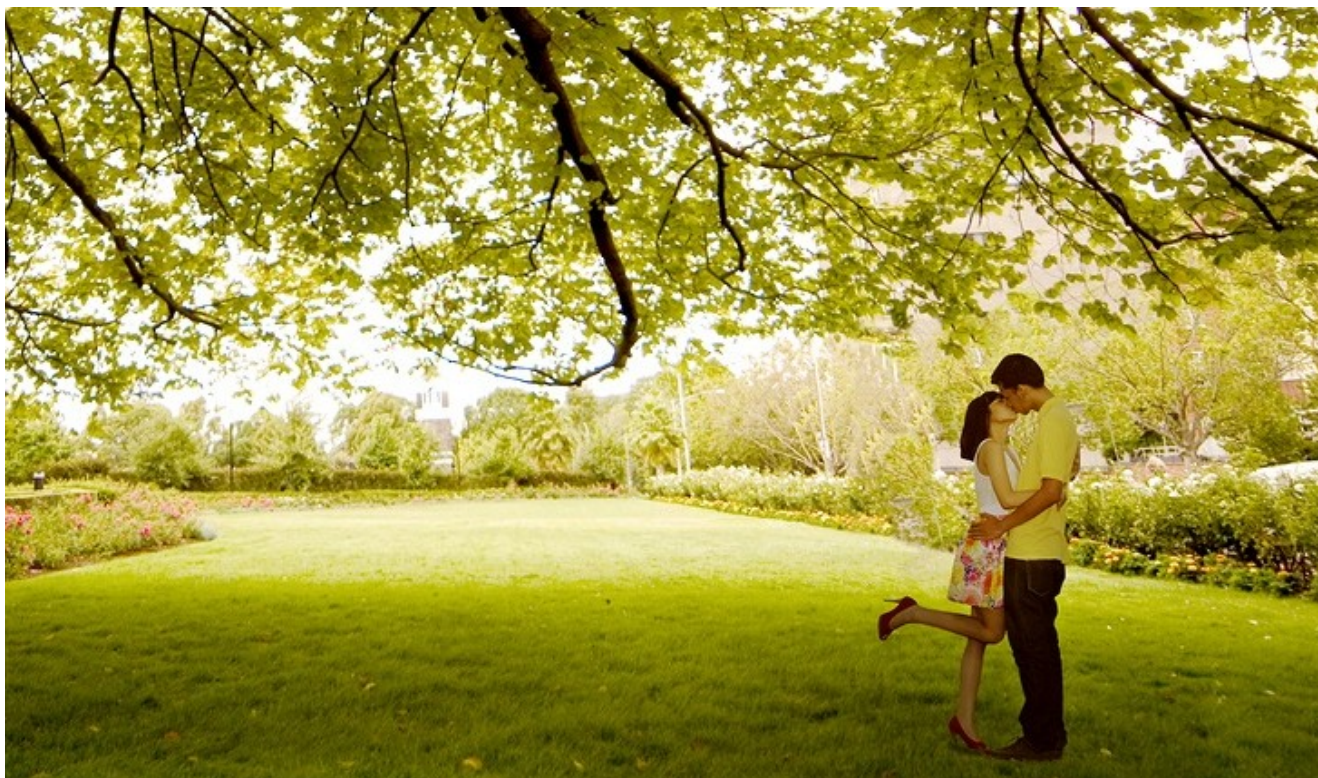


Mastering the Art of the 'Plus One'



By Sarah Gooding for GalTime.com

The summer is upon us, and it has brought a new love interest with it! Your mind is drifting off to clear skies, beaches and breezy summer dates – we know. However, if you're in your late 20s or early 30s, you may have found the summer months becoming suspiciously less and less about lazing in the sun and spending endless afternoons on your favorite patio. Your coveted weekends out of the office are becoming increasingly filled with wedding showers, bachelorettes and of course, the big day itself. Luckily your invite to the next wedding includes a Plus One, but there are also some major unknowns that come along with the first wedding you and your new guy attend together. Will he have fun? Will you have to babysit

him the whole night? Will your friends and family like him? What if you're the Plus One? Will he be attentive? Will his friends and family be inclusive? Will he feel he needs to be by your side all night?

As the Dating Coach for PlentyOfFish, I receive many letters from our female users asking for dating advice; particularly when a relationship is first taking off. In light of wedding season, here are some tips that will ensure your first wedding together won't be your last:

If he's the Plus One:

Introduce him to your friends before the wedding. A wedding shouldn't be the first time your new beau is meeting all of your friends and family members. The focus of the day will be on the bride and groom, not getting to know new people. Plan a casual get-together before the big day and use it as an opportunity for your friends to get to know your new guy and vice versa. If a wedding is not the first introduction, it's still a nice gesture to host a dinner party for all your friends and their significant others who will also be attending the wedding. This is simply another opportunity for your date to get acquainted with your friends and feel like he's part of your close-knit group.

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Ask your best friend's boyfriend or husband for help. The last thing you want to do is look after your date all night. He likely won't be a fan of this either. An easy way to ensure you're not babysitting your date but also not leaving him alone for too long is to enlist the help of one of your guy friends, preferably the significant other of one of your close friends. They'll likely be spending time together in the future (if things work out) so they'll have an incentive to get to know each other, too. While you're enjoying yourself on

the dance floor with all your best girlfriends, your date can engage in some needed guy talk while bonding over drinks with a cool, new dude.

Don't force your date to dance (or do anything for that matter). If your date doesn't suggest a dance, don't force it. You want him to feel comfortable and he may not be the time to show his moves until at least a few months in. Aside from dancing, be careful not to force anything on your date at a wedding. Try to avoid asking 10 different people to take your picture or suggesting he try to catch the garter if you can sense he isn't into it. You don't want him feeling pressured to be the perfect Plus One or that you are much more serious about the relationship than he is.

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If you're the Plus One:

Offer to contribute to the gift. According to etiquette, unless your name is on the invite, you don't technically need to contribute to the gift. That said, it's a nice touch to at least offer. You are getting a nice dinner and a beautiful night out of the deal. If he declines, offer to pick out a nice card instead.

Mingle. The last thing you want is for your date to feel that he needs to stay by your side all night. This is likely an exciting night for your date and a chance for him to catch up with all of his close friends. Don't sulk in the corner or attach yourself to his hip. Show him you're outgoing, independent and can make friends with anyone. All it takes is a 'Hello, I'm _____. How do you know the groom?' A little liquid courage also doesn't hurt.

Blend in with the crowd. You want to be on your best behavior at wedding, particularly when you don't know the bride and

groom very well. For one night only, do your best not to stick out from the crowd or embarrass your date. When it comes to attire, stay away from pants and anything white. Also, while drinking is usually part of most weddings, be careful not to drink too much. You wouldn't want to have to cut your night short.