

A Handmade Affair

Simple and Creative Ideas for a Backyard Reception

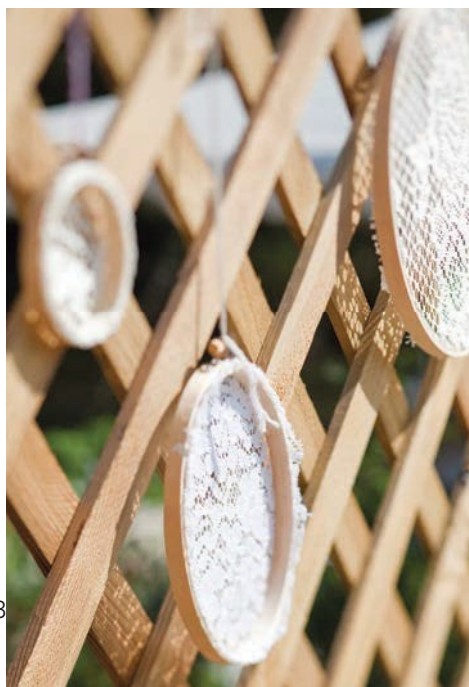
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAMIN HOYLE WILLIAMS
(behindkslens.blogspot.com)



When *Stitch Craft Create* senior designer Courtney Kyle was planning her October 2011 wedding with fiancé Jackie Bowen, she knew a princess ball gown and large church service were not for her. Instead, the pair opted for a humble courthouse ceremony; then, they invited close friends and family to celebrate with them at their home in the northern Alabama countryside for a casual backyard reception.

Simplicity and creativity were the key goals of the event. Courtney invited guests to the reception via one-of-a-kind invitations that she hand-wrote and illustrated herself. In lieu of gifts, the couple asked guests to bring donations for their favorite local charity, which were placed in the bed of an old truck at the party. Courtney created a “thank you” sign to hang over the truck’s gate by cutting letters from yellow felt and then gluing them onto a piece of green duck cloth.

As guests arrived for the reception, they were directed to park by a hand-painted sign created by one of Courtney’s sisters. Bales of hay, potted mums and a vintage-inspired, hand-embroidered “Welcome” sign (stitched by SCC editor Shannon Miller as a wedding gift) greeted guests as they made their way to the backyard.





Guests were sent home with hand-stamped bags containing tulip bulbs.



Make this sign!

The template for this sign is provided at the end of this issue. Hand embroider over design onto taupe linen or cotton, then frame in an 8- x 15-inch wooden quilting hoop for display.

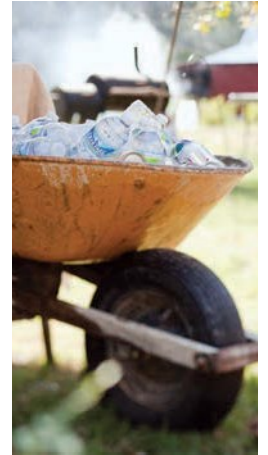
A rented party tent shaded the food and dinner tables, which were covered with burlap tablecloths and inexpensive centerpieces made of stacks of old books, small bottles and vases, yarn-wrapped letters and jars, mini squash and other trinkets. The flowers – mostly daisies and other low-cost stems – were purchased from a local supermarket.

The self-serve buffet was prepared with the help of the newlyweds' parents and sisters. Guests noshed on hamburgers and hot dogs grilled by Courtney's father and neighbor, as well as chili, pie and homemade apple cinnamon and chocolate cupcakes baked and decorated by a friend of the family. Canned and bottled drinks were served over ice in an old wheelbarrow.

"The personal involvement my friends and family had in making it all come together was much more meaningful than if we would have opted to purchase or hire everything out," Courtney says. "It took a little extra work to make it happen, but it was so worth it."

Partygoers were invited to play bag toss and horseshoes in the yard; and as the sun began to set, a fire pit was set just off the patio for all to roast their own marshmallows for s'mores. The patio itself was decked out in twinkle lights, lace-filled embroidery hoops and a handmade yarn-wrapped wreath with felt flowers, which was made before the ceremony with the help of Courtney's co-workers at a craft-themed bridal shower.

"It was the best day; I wouldn't have done it any other way," Courtney says. "All of the handmade touches made my reception truly unique. And a little bonus is that I now have a bunch of little handmade keepsakes from that day that I will keep forever." 



Showered with Creativity

Courtney is a lover of all things handmade, so her two wedding showers were specifically designed for crafty fun. The family and friends shower was centered on "paint-it-yourself" pottery, and guests got to choose a blank ceramic piece and paints to create a unique gift for the newlyweds to keep. At the office, Courtney's co-workers pitched in to help create the wedding décor by wrapping jars and letters with yarn and twine and creating felt flowers in her chosen colors.



The Dress

Paired with a layered pearl necklace and ballet flats, Courtney's reception dress embodied casual elegance perfectly for the intimate but celebratory affair. Her mother Rose Mary made the frock using McCall's pattern #5095 with blush pink, pre-ruffled fabric (www.rufflefabric.com) and a coordinating cotton.