



Mother's Day

Dreading another Mother's Day filled with unwanted cards, flowers and chocolates? **Claire Nelson** discovers that many mum's are hoping for something a little different and more eco-friendly this year.

Mother's day has become a regular holiday in our calendar year, but has the real meaning of it become buried in the annual plethora of chocolates and cards? What can we really do show appreciation for our mothers?

Where it all began

The tradition of Mother's Day began in 17th Century England and Ireland, when mothers were honoured during the end of Lent. After weeks of denying themselves luxuries or treats as religious penance, families would gather together on the fourth Sunday (known as Mothering Sunday) for a Lenten feast. On this day, the mother of the household would be given special gifts and cakes and her vital role in the family would be celebrated. In the UK, we still celebrate Mother's Day on the fourth Sunday of May.

However, modern Mother's Day, as we recognise it now, was the brainchild of American woman Anna Jarvis, who wanted to create a day for each family to pay homage to their mother. Unfortunately, over time it has become what is known as a 'Hallmark Holiday', and is now so commercialised that even Jarvis herself has become opposed to it. The barrage of cards, flowers and chocolates we are encouraged to buy in order to show our mother that we love and appreciate her has overwhelmed the true meaning of the day itself.

Baby eating carrot © Monkey Business - Fotolia.com; Green splobdge © gosphotodesign - Fotolia.com; Bowl and jars © Elena Schweitzer - Fotolia.com; Spoon fed baby © AVAVA - Fotolia.com

So when the fourth Sunday in May comes around, what are we doing to honour our mothers? Are we merely buying cards and chocolates out of obligation and commercial routine? How many of us have ever asked our mothers (or stepmothers, foster mothers or grandmothers) what is truly special to them? The fact is we can do so much more to show appreciation for the woman who raised us. And it doesn't have to cost a thing.

The true meaning

For Sarah Fitton, an artist and mother from North Yorkshire, having some quality time with her seven year-old son George is the ultimate Mother's Day gift. 'I like the idea of [Mother's Day] but it's never anything major. I just like having a special day for George and I to spend time together... puddle stomping on a walk, snuggled up with a DVD, or making/painting/creating something together. Sod the chores... just spend some time together doing what makes you happy. It's about sharing time and experiences.'

When children have grown up, moved away from home and become adults (and parents) themselves, the desire for quality time doesn't disappear. Spending time with family will always mean more than a beautiful bouquet of roses, yet often we forget this simple fact.

Elizabeth Smith, from Cheshire, whose daughters have grown up and left home, agrees that Mother's Day has become far too commercialised. 'I feel a bit sad that I don't have my own Mum any more. Seeing my daughters would make it an absolutely perfect day; but I know they love and appreciate me and all I'd expect on Mothering Sunday would be a phone call.'

A little time

So if quality time and communication are the real signs of appreciation, why do we stick to the tried and true routine of breakfasts in bed, flowers, cards, and chocolates? Is this what mums really want?

Suzanne Moore, a newspaper columnist from London, is put off by the commercialism of the day: 'I resent the Hallmark sentimentality. Motherhood is a joy and a mess - one day of flowers and chocolates is an insult.' However, she appreciates that Mother's Day is important to her children, explaining, 'I have to stay in bed to be brought cold, weird breakfasts by my youngest,' and her older children make an effort to take her out for dinner.

These sweet tokens and gestures of love will always be appreciated, and it is a delight to spoil the people close to us. But we must be careful not to let these gifts become the mainstay of Mother's Day. Rather than giving something expected, offer something genuinely meaningful. Instead of spending money, spend time. Arrive with homemade afternoon tea, organise an impromptu walk (perhaps with a picnic), rent some of her favourite movies to watch with her... In short, find out how she likes to spend her leisure time, and spend it with her.

The alternatives

If you can't visit your mum, then call her for a chat, or write her a letter. My own mother still talks about the text message my strapped-for-cash brother once sent her, telling her 'I am always here if you need me.' Those little words meant so much.

After all, ordering flowers is easy enough, but how difficult is it to say, I love you Mum? For many of us, this might not be a sentiment, which is comfortably spoken out loud, but that is why it will always mean so much.

As Sarah Fitton explains, 'People too often make the mistake of thinking that money is our most valuable commodity but it isn't - it's time. Remember what it's really about... a mother, creating a child, for which you would do, give, sacrifice anything for and really embracing that, even if just for a day.' 🙌

