



Weddings

Spring 2016

'Groom'ing Tips

*How grooms can
look their wedding day best*

Out & About

Wedding day transportation tips

Smell the Roses

*Helpful hints when
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What to include with wedding invitations

Wedding invitations once followed a relatively standard format that did not necessarily require much thought on the part of the grooms- and brides-to-be. But many couples now take more creative approaches to their wedding invitations, using them to evoke a certain theme or to establish if the wedding will be formal or casual.

But while wedding invitation designs might have become more flexible over the years, couples should still make sure to include certain information in their invitations to avoid being overwhelmed with questions from guests excited to attend the festivities.

- **Date and time:** It may seem simple, but don't forget to include the date and time of both the wedding and reception in the invitation. If there will be a considerable amount of time between the ceremony and the reception, you may want to include a handful of local dining suggestions so guests can grab a quick bite to eat before the cocktail hour.
- **Venue information:** Guests will need to know where couples are tying the knot, so be sure to include the address of the ceremony site as well as a link to its website. The address will help guests find the venue, while the website can prove an invaluable source of information about the venue, which can save couples the trouble of answering questions about the ceremony site that can more easily and quickly be answered by visiting the website.
- **Reception hall information:** Couples whose receptions will be in a different location than their ceremonies should include the same information about the reception hall that they did about the ceremony site. Reception hall information is often listed on reception cards, which can include information on the front and back to save paper and money on postage.
- **Hotel information:** Many couples arrange special room rates with nearby hotels for their wedding guests. Include the names of these hotels, directions to the hotel from all directions, directions from the hotel to the ceremony and reception sites and the various rates for rooms (single room, double room, etc.). If possible, include a link to each hotel's reservation form as well.
- **Reply cards:** Reply cards are included so guests can easily reply to let couples know if they will or will not be attending. Couples with wedding websites can even include a link to their sites on the reply cards, letting guests know they can reply via the website if they so choose.
- **Reception menu:** Many reception halls ask that couples give them a ballpark figure as to how many of their guests will prefer each type of entrée available at the reception. Include menu options within your invitation package, ideally on your reply card, so you can easily provide this information for your vendor.
- **Wedding website information:** If you did not already include a link to your wedding website on your save-the-date cards, include that information within your invitation package. Wedding websites will answer many of your guests' questions for you, so don't forget to make this valuable tool a part of your wedding planning.



DESTINATION WEDDING *planning pointers*

Destination weddings continue to be popular among couples tying the knot. In its annual Real Weddings Survey, multiplatform wedding resource The Knot found that 24 percent of the nearly 16,000 brides and grooms who participated in the survey and married in 2014 had destination weddings, the second year in a row nearly a quarter of all survey respondents acknowledged taking their vows away from home.

Destination weddings often benefit from picturesque landscapes and idyllic backdrops during ceremonies and bridal party photo sessions. But there are some things couples should consider before they decide to tie the knot in a faraway land.

Paperwork

Whether you're getting married in your current country of residence or overseas, you must allow time for paperwork to be processed. Wedding license applications may not be processed as quickly on a remote island as they are in a major American city, so be sure to get a firm grasp of the application process and its timeline before opting for a destination wedding. In addition, some countries may mandate that personal documents,

such as birth certificates, be translated into the official language of the country where couples will be tying the knot, and such translations typically must be conducted by approved translators.

Requirements

Some countries may allow couples to tie the knot the moment they step off their planes, while others have residency requirements that can be as long as several weeks. If your budget is tight or your work schedule is inflexible, then try to find a country that does not require you to spend several weeks within its borders before you can legally marry there.

Wedding planner

Many couples who choose destination weddings ultimately get married at a resort, and such resorts typically have wedding planners or coordinators who are well versed in local laws and customs governing wedding ceremonies. Such professionals can make it easier for couples to navigate the sometimes complex laws regulating destination weddings, and their services are often included in resort wedding packages. If no such service is included in the hotel package,



consider hiring a local wedding planner to make the process go more smoothly.

Engagement period

Couples hoping to have a destination wedding should expect to have a longer engagement than those getting married closer to home. The longer engagement period gives guests more time to arrange for travel and couples more time to navigate the requirements of getting married overseas. When sending save-the-date cards to guests, include brochures on the area where you will be getting married so guests can see what the area has to offer.

Buy local

Many couples choose destination weddings because they are attracted to the local culture in a given place. When planning your destination wedding, embrace this culture by choosing local foods, flowers and entertainment. Not only will it make your big night more unique and authentic, but also buying local will save you money and benefit the environment at the same time.

Destination weddings are significant undertakings, but couples can ease some of their workloads by taking certain steps to make the planning process go more smoothly.

Did you know?

Many people feel the type of flowers chosen for wedding ceremonies symbolize different things. While some couples may make their final decision on wedding day flowers based cost, they may be surprised to know what different flowers have traditionally symbolized. For example, according to TheKnot.com, a multiplatform resource for all things nuptial, roses have long been considered a symbol of beauty and love. Writers and poets alike have long relied on roses as metaphors for emotion, beauty and true love. Lily of the valley is another popular flower that's more than just a natural beauty. Though lily of the valley is one of the more expensive flowers couples can choose for their weddings, some legends link the flower to happiness, while followers of England's royal family no doubt remember that lily of the valley was the flower chosen by Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton for her 2011 wedding to Prince William.



Green can be the new color in wedding wear



Weddings are full of traditions, many of which aim to ensure the good luck rains down on couples for years to come. Many of these traditions revolve around wardrobe choices. Veils are worn and bouquets are carried to ward off evil spirits, and couples may borrow sentimental items from their parents and other family members.

While some couples may be focused on the time-honored tradition of something old and something new as well as something borrowed and something blue, many others may be seeing weddings in an entirely different hue: green.

Green weddings are on the rise, and couples can embrace various strategies to make their big days more eco-friendly.

- Explore eco-couture designers. Brides need not compromise their eco-conscious ideals for gorgeous designs. Many established and up-and-coming bridal gown designers rely on sustainable materials and practices to craft beautiful gowns. Brides-to-be may not have to look far for a dress that matches their commitment to the environment. Deborah Lindquist, Sanyukta Shrestha and Daughters of Simone are just a few of the leading eco-couture designers.

- Consider a vintage gown. Wearing a vintage gown is recycling at its best. A woman will have her chance to look amazing, and she can breathe new life into a classic wedding dress. Family members can be the first people to seek out when looking for a vintage gown, as one never knows what an aunt or grandmother is hiding in a keepsake chest in the attic. In addition to helping brides save money, wearing a vintage gown can give the person lending the dress a feeling of pride and inclusion in the festivities.

- Guys can don classic attire, too. Grooms-to-be also can embrace vintage attire, although styles from some eras will be less forgiving. Otherwise, gentleman can borrow a suit or wear a shirt or sentimental item, such as an embroidered handkerchief, from a father or another male relative. If there are few options, renting is certainly a green idea, as a rented tux will be more environmentally friendly than purchasing your own tuxedo that figures to get little use after the wedding.

- Choose sustainable fabrics. Certain fabrics are derived from eco-friendly resources, such as sustainably grown fiber crops or recycled materials. Organic cotton or linen are options, as are many other sustainable textiles. Individuals can purchase fabric and have a tailor or seamstress craft a custom wedding gown or suit, if desired.

- Wear something already in the closet. Couples opting for a casual or civil wedding may have more options with regard to their wedding attire. If your wedding is a less formal affair, consider wearing a suit or dress you already own. Such attire is perfectly acceptable, and you won't be ordering a new dress and having it shipped, which benefits the environment.

Couples interested in keeping weddings in line with their eco-friendly lifestyles can start with the clothing they wear on their special days.

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Factors to consider when hosting an
OUTDOOR WEDDING



Many couples tie the knot outdoors, as nature can provide an idyllic backdrop on such a special day. In many ways, planning outdoor weddings is similar to planning weddings that take place with a roof overhead and four walls surrounding couples and their guests. But there are some distinct features of both indoor and outdoor weddings, and couples planning the latter would be wise to consider the following factors before they commit to a location for their ceremony.

WEATHER

Weather is perhaps the biggest factor couples must consider when planning an outdoor wedding. Outdoor weddings are best held during those seasons when the threat of precipitation is insignificant and temperatures are mild, but it's still necessary to have a backup plan just in case Mother Nature does not want to cooperate. If possible, find an outdoor location that provides access to an indoor ceremony facility in case of inclement weather. If that's not possible, monitor the forecast as closely as possible and arrange for a tent to be erected should rain start to fall. (Note: The cost of such tents can be considerable, so build this contingency into your budget.) If the forecast is calling for chillier temperatures than you had hoped for, email out-of-town guests a few days in advance to remind them to dress warm.

LAWS

Laws dictate what can and cannot be done in open spaces, and couples with outdoor locations in mind should confirm local laws and regulations before they commit to a location for their wedding. Research which permits you might need and if there are any rules or restrictions at each location you are considering. The cost of such permits may be negligible, but the rules may restrict what you can do in a given space and how long you can do it. Discuss these rules with each other to determine if the rules are something both of you can live with.

LOGISTICS

No matter how beautiful a backdrop may be, photos of an outdoor ceremony can be compromised. Couples, along with their photographers, should visit the site in the weeks before their weddings to determine arrangements for the ceremony that will guarantee photos are not compromised by sunlight or shade. Facility managers can probably offer advice as to the best places to hold the ceremony and seat guests, but a run-through at the location with your photographer in tow can help ensure your photos come out perfect.

LOCATION

Proximity to your reception venue and the hotel where guests are staying is another factor to consider if you are planning on hosting an outdoor wedding. A remote location might provide stunning views and privacy, but guests might tire if the ceremony location is far from the hotel and/or reception venue. This should not be too big an issue if the ceremony and reception are held at the same locale, but couples should still look for nearby lodging before booking remote outdoor locations.



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BEAT THE HEAT

during a summer wedding



May, June and July consistently rank among the most popular months to get married. These months typically provide pleasant weather, and if it does rain, it's often in the form of a brief thunderstorm.

But summer weather can be extremely hot, and while a sunny, warm day may be perfect beach days, such conditions are not always ideal for weddings, especially weddings that take place outdoors. If wedding-day weather threatens to be very hot, explore these methods to staying cool.

- Choose a later start time. A late-afternoon wedding may be the way to go in the summertime. The temperature usually drops a bit in the early evening, even though the sun won't set for a couple of hours. That lingering summertime sun allows the bride and groom to enjoy an outdoor ceremony and still take beautiful outdoor photos.
 - Rely on shade and proximity to water. Shade can be your friend when the sun is blazing. If your outdoor wedding is in the early afternoon, keep temperatures under wrap by seating guests beneath umbrellas or inside a tent.
 - Tie the knot near the water. Breezes off of the water also help combat the heat, so a lakeside or beach wedding can make hot temperatures more manageable.
 - Wear breathable fabrics. Opt for lightweight fabrics instead of heavy gowns and full tuxedos for the bride, groom and wedding party. Cotton and linen allow air to flow through clothing, helping people to stay cool. Light colors also will help deflect the sun. Bridal gowns made of chiffon, silk or satin may feel luxurious and help tame the heat.
 - Have beverage tables. Keep canisters of cold beverages at the ready so guests can easily quench their thirst. Fresh lemonade, iced tea and water with a few sprigs of mint can help guests ward off dehydration.
 - Make fans and hand these out to guests. Homemade fans of thick cardstock and popsicle sticks can keep guests comfortable. Such cards can double as thank-you messages or ceremony programs.
 - Tailor the reception menu to the weather. A large, heavy meal may not be what guests are hoping for when temperatures are especially hot. In such situations, provide some cool, light fare, such as chilled salads or cold soups, as first courses. Sorbet can be a cool palate cleanser, and grilled meats and vegetables will make for a satisfying, light main course. Ice cream cake may be a decadent option in lieu of more traditional wedding cake.
 - Choose hairstyles and makeup wisely. Brides may prefer up-dos to keep hair off of their necks and allow for breezes to cool their bodies. Rely on makeup primers and powdered foundations so that makeup does not melt in the heat. Waterproof cosmetics are advisable so that perspiration won't cause makeup to run.
- Summer weddings are preferable, and couples can take several steps to make sure they're both beautiful and comfortable.

Grooms:

Look your wedding day best



Weddings are a chance for couples tying the knot to be the center of attention. All eyes will be glued to the bride and groom on this special day, which makes it even more important for couples to look their collective best.

Brides might garner most of the attention on a couple's wedding day, but dashing grooms also will get their share of attention. As a result, grooms must be just as diligent as their blushing brides with regard to grooming and appearance on their wedding days. To look picture-perfect, grooms may want to include these grooming tips in their wedding day preparation.

Hair

Schedule a haircut with a professional stylist roughly a week before the wedding to get your hair shaped and trimmed. Although trendy hairstyles may show off creativity, keep in mind that photos last forever, and it's often better to stick with a classic cut. A barber or stylist may suggest styles that best suit your face shape and hair texture. Above all, the haircut should be neat. Resist the urge to wash your hair every day before the wedding. Allow some natural oils to build up and make your hair shine in a healthy way.

Shaving

Shaving is another thing grooms

must consider. If you have a beard, make sure it is clean, combed and trimmed. Men who shave the day of their weddings may find their skin is sensitive and irritated, which can lead to redness. Unless your facial hair grows especially fast, shave the evening before.

This is a good time to splurge on a professional shave with a straight razor at a barber shop. A hot shave from a professional will produce a close shave with the least amount of irritation when done correctly.

Hands

Grooms also may want to book a manicure. Keep in mind that salons will do men's nonpolish manicures and pedicures, and they can be well worth the investment. Photos of entwined hands or close-ups of the ring exchange will have guests zeroing in on your fingers. Have hands look their best with clean, shaped fingernails and trimmed cuticles.

Skin

Get plenty of sleep the night prior to the wedding. Being well rested will help reduce puffy eyes, dark circles and sallow skin. It will also



put you in a more positive mood, which can help you enjoy the day even more.

The day of the wedding, shower using water and a mild soap. Avoid any skin irritation by patting your face and body dry, rather than rubbing it with the towel. Moisturize your skin to avoid dry patches.

Stores sell many moisturizers geared toward men's needs, often in unscented or more masculine fragrances.

Reducing shine is key for wedding day photos. Rely on face and hair products that will not add unnecessary sheen to your

skin or hair to avoid making you look greasy. Matte hair waxes and sprays will tame tresses. Also, ask your fiancé to pick you up a package of blotting tissues if you are prone to oily skin. These absorbent, typically rice-paper sheets will remove oil from your face and keep sheen to a minimum.

Smile

Make sure your teeth have been thoroughly brushed and that you have used a minty mouthwash so you're primed for that first kiss. Many grooms also opt for whitening treatments prior to the wedding so they have a dazzling smile.

On their wedding days, grooms will likely be photographed more than any other time in their lives. That means putting extra effort into personal grooming to look their best.



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When to visit these honeymoon hotspots

A honeymoon provides a welcome retreat for couples after months upon months of budgeting, planning and ironing out the details of their weddings. On their honeymoons, couples get the chance to escape the pressures of everyday life and simply enjoy being alone with each other in special locations.

Honeymoon vacations can be expensive, and many couples want to ensure they get the best value for their trips. A honeymoon that is overshadowed by inclement weather can make this once-in-a-lifetime trip memorable for all the wrong reasons. While not every hiccup can be avoided, couples can plan their honeymoons for those times of year when specific locales experience their best weather.

- **Jamaica:** Couples tying the knot in the earlier part of the year may want to honeymoon in Jamaica. With average temperatures in the 80s year-round, Jamaica makes for a great honeymoon destination. January through April see less rain than other times of the year, and keep in mind June through the end of December is hurricane season.

- **Australia:** People opting to get married in the winter in the Northern Hemisphere might want to escape the cooler temperatures and shorter days with a honeymoon south of the equator. Australia and New Zealand are beautiful spots to visit and enjoy summer when those in the Northern Hemisphere are mired in winter.

- **France:** Paris and other

French cities can be enchanting to visit any time of the year, but locals advise honeymooners visit in September when the climate is quite comfortable and tourism is minimal. Spring is another great time to visit France, especially for those people who want to spend plenty of time outdoors.

- **Mexico:** Areas of Mexico, such as popular Cancún and Cozumel, tend to stay warm all year long, but they can be particularly hot in the summer. Spring brides and grooms may want to venture there before the summer season is in full swing. Couples might want to avoid vacationing in certain areas in March, as students visiting for spring break may compromise the romantic atmosphere honeymooners are hoping for.

- **Hawaii:** Spring and summer can be ideal times to visit the islands of Hawaii, as the weather can be beautiful and travel tends to be less expensive during these times of year. Rains increase as autumn sets in, and Hawaii often sees the bulk of its vacationers during the winter, meaning higher costs and bigger crowds.

- **Italy:** April through June and September through October are some of the best times to visit Italy. Be aware that Venice tends to be misty and damp during the late fall and early spring. Italy, especially southern Italy and Sicily, can get quite hot during the peak summer months.

Weather and tourism should be considered as newlyweds choose where to go on their honeymoons.

Easy ways to trim wedding costs

Couples planning their weddings realize pretty quickly just how expensive weddings can be. Depending on where couples tie the knot, the costs can stretch into the tens of thousands of dollars, leaving many young men and women to scramble to find ways to trim costs without trimming quality.

Many couples look for ways to cut wedding costs, and couples facing that very dilemma should know that there are several ways to save money but still host the wedding of their dreams.

Guest list

Guest lists can consume a significant portion of couples' wedding budgets. When compiling the guest list, couples should keep in mind that guests will need save-the-date cards, invitations, catered meals (including cocktail hour, dinner and dessert), drinks, and gifts (including hotel gift bags and wedding favors). So the cost per guest will be more than just the per person cost of the meal couples negotiate with their caterer. Couples who can pare their guests lists down to just family and close friends can save a substantial amount of money without affecting their ceremonies.

Reception

A couple's wedding reception also will chew up a lot of their wedding budgets. But there are ways to reduce the costs of receptions, too. Couples planning on having a morning wedding can shift their receptions from the evening to the afternoon, when the cost per meal will be considerably less. Afternoon receptions also can be alcohol-free, saving couples even more money. If a nighttime reception is a must-have, choose a limited cash bar instead of an open bar. Limited cash bars often provide guests with free beer and house wine while guests who prefer liquor or mixed drinks must pay

for their own libations. If you are planning an outdoor wedding reception, you may even be able to provide your own alcohol, which can save considerable amounts of money.

Couples also can trim reception costs by choosing the least expensive meal package. Packages often differ greatly in price but are not always so different with regard to their menus. If you find the packages offered by your venue are similar, choose the least expensive option.

Arrangements

Floral arrangements are a big and potentially expensive part of many couples' weddings. The bride needs her bouquet, as do her bridesmaids. In addition, many couples decorate their ceremony space with flowers, and of course reception table centerpieces typically include flowers as well. When working with your florist, request in-season flowers, which will cost considerably less than exotic flowers that are out of season. In addition, let your florist know your budget and ask that he or she recommend flowers that won't break the bank.

Gifts

While it's become customary to prepare gift bags for guests staying in hotels, couples should not go overboard with such gifts. Gift bags need not include more than a snack, a bottle of water and a homemade thank-you card. Couples also should not break the bank with regard to reception gifts, which have also become a standard offering. Keep such gifts simple and inexpensive, even opting for homemade gifts if you and your future spouse are skilled with crafts.

Wedding costs can be eye-opening for couples preparing to walk down the aisle. Fortunately, there are many ways to cut costs without cutting quality.



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Tips for toasting the bride and groom

Wedding toasts are a tradition that many guests and wedding participants look forward to. An opportunity for maids of honor and best men to express their feelings about the bride and groom, wedding toasts often touch on the heartfelt and the humorous while shedding light on the relationship between the happy couple and the men and women they have chosen to play such significant roles at their wedding.

While guests might enjoy wedding toasts, best men and maids of honor may be nervous about honoring the brides and grooms in such public settings. That anxiety is perfectly normal, especially for those who have never before been asked to serve as maid of honor or best man. Those tasked with toasting the newly anointed husband and wife can consider the following tips to make the task a little easier.

- Keep it brief. While there might be many things you want to

say, try to express yourself as concisely as possible. Convey your relationship with the bride and/or groom, but avoid lengthy histories that might come off as rambling. While personal anecdotes that shed some humorous light on your relationship are great additions to wedding toasts, avoid going into too much detail when telling such stories, focusing instead on the parts of the stories that illustrate your feelings and generate a few laughs.

- Avoid being too formal. Even the most formal wedding can benefit from a toast that veers more toward the spontaneous. While you want to thank the parents of the bride and groom for hosting

the wedding and the guests for being on hand to celebrate, don't feel as though you need to be especially formal. Giving a less formal speech also may help calm your nerves.

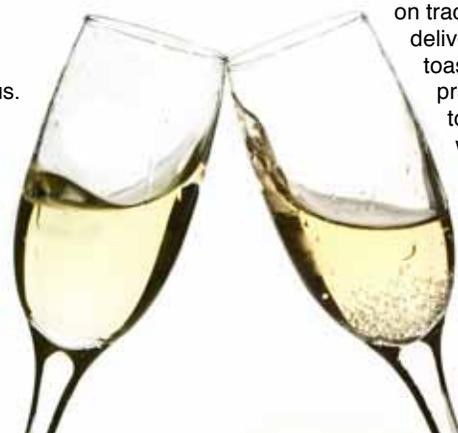
- Practice, practice, practice. Practice your speech ahead of time so you are not reading from cards or notepads during the toast. Reading from a piece of paper is less likely to engage the audience than if you are speaking to them directly and sharing some heartfelt thoughts about the bride and groom. It's alright to hold onto some cue cards to keep you on track as you deliver your toast, but practicing your toast as the wedding draws near will boost your confidence and make you more

comfortable once you have the microphone in hand.

- Stay appropriate. Humor adds a lot to wedding toasts, but make sure to clean up any humorous anecdotes so they can be shared with all wedding guests, including kids. In addition, avoid stories that, while humorous, may end up embarrassing the bride and groom.

- Share well wishes. Before you raise your glass and ask guests to do the same, express some heartfelt well wishes for the bride and groom. Doing so is a fitting end to a tradition that's meant to highlight the special relationship brides and grooms have with their maids of honor and best men.

Maids of honor and best men making their first wedding toasts may be nervous in advance of the big day, but there are ways to calm those nerves and deliver heartfelt, memorable toasts that will be remembered for all the right reasons.



Dance lessons can be helpful prior to a wedding



Apart from their initial nerves during their wedding ceremonies, many couples feel comfortable having all eyes on them for the majority of their wedding days. However, some couples get a bit of stagefright when dancing as husband and wife for the first time.

First dances and parent-child dances are popular wedding reception rituals. The couple's dance serves as their first act as a married pair, often occurring at the onset of the wedding reception. Father-daughter and mother-son dances may take place at different points in the evening.

Some people relish the idea of having the spotlight on them, while others are nervous about dancing in front of a crowd. While couples need not look like contestants on "Dancing With the Stars" to pull off a successful first dance, taking dance lessons prior to the wedding can teach men and women some key moves and help calm their nerves.

Couples may want to begin dance lessons a few months before their wedding day to get acclimated to the experience. The more lessons couples take, the more comfortable they will likely be when it comes time to cut a rug.

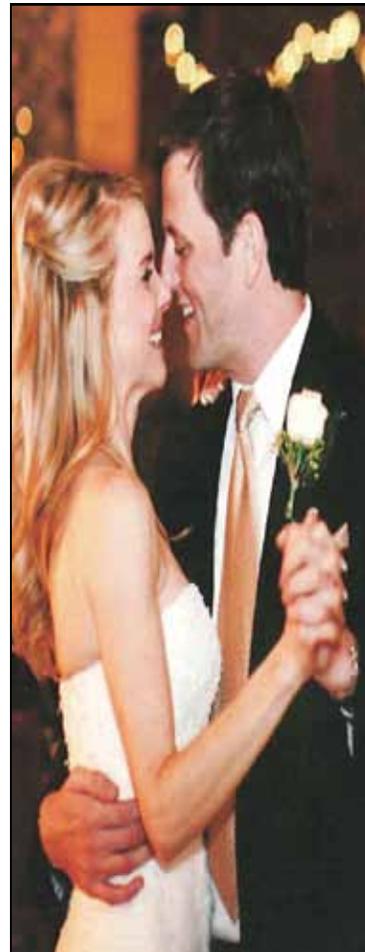
Private dance lessons may be more effective than group

lessons, as they enable one-on-one interaction with instructors, who point out any missteps immediately and correct form on the spot. Instructors also may suggest which routines couples should embrace and which they may want to avoid.

Preparation can stem nervousness and help couples feel more confident on the dance floor, even if their dances last only a few minutes. The goal of dance lessons is for couples to become better dancers, but improved skills on the dance floor is not the only thing couples can take from dance lessons.

- **Exercise:** Dancing is an excellent form of exercise that can help couples build up their endurance. In addition, the cardiovascular benefits of dancing can help couples shed a few pounds prior to their wedding days.
- **Stress relief:** Planning a wedding is not always easy. Having a night of the week devoted to some fun couple time can help relieve some of the stress couples may feel when planning a wedding.
- **Enjoyable memories:** Taking dance lessons as a couple is something couples may look back on fondly long after they have tied the knot and cut their first rug as husband and wife.

Dance lessons can help couples calm their nerves as their first dance approaches.



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How to arrange the best outdoor wedding photos

Photography is a great way for couples to capture all the special moments that occur on their wedding days. Long after the final piece of wedding cake has been consumed, wedding albums remain to remind couples of all those moments that made their big day so special.

Photography preferences differ from couple to couple, but when weather permits, many brides and grooms prefer to take photos outdoors. Mother Nature

can provide some awe-inspiring backdrops, and such beauty comes at no extra cost.

Couples using professional photographers should share their image preferences with their photographers, especially if outdoor photography is desired. Photographers may have to do a little more work to achieve great outdoor photographs, even visiting a site in advance of the big day to scout areas that can produce great photos. Scouting and preparation can involve

seeing the landscape, examining the way the light shines on photo subjects and getting an accurate light reading on a meter to adjust flash accordingly. Photographers also will need to ensure there are no obstructions that will appear in the background of the photos.

It's also important for photographers to select locations that have shade. This way they can adjust the amount of light needed, rather than having to contend with the photo washing

out from too much sunlight.

There's much a photographer can do in production to fine-tune photos, but the couple can help things along. Bring along some powder or makeup to touch up between photos. Warm weather can cause shininess or beads of sweat on the skin. A light dusting of powder can tame shine, while any remaining moisture can be blotted away with a towel.

Although brides and grooms may think clouds on their wedding days are a harbinger of bad luck, overcast conditions can actually contribute to better photos. A healthy blanket of cloud cover can produce richer colors and pleasing shadows, making photos even more appealing. If the clouds are just passing, photographers may wait until a cloud passes over the sun to provide just the right amount of light filter.

Couples may want to change into comfortable footwear as they traverse the landscape to get into perfect portraiture locations. This will help keep their fancier shoes clean, and photos can be cropped to hide feet.

Bring along some refreshments when posing for photos, as it can be tiring. Couples can take frequent breaks as the photographer adjusts his or her camera for the next shot. Staying hydrated will keep skin looking supple and ensure that everyone feels refreshed when it's time to return to the party.

Not every family member will be able to join the happy couple for outdoor photos. Elderly relatives or those who have mobility issues may find it difficult to stand in the sun or make their way across certain landscapes. Arrange for indoor photoshoots with guests who can't handle the outdoors.



Outdoor photos can look beautiful when couples are in the hands of accomplished photographers.

Helpful hints when planning floral arrangements

When planning their weddings, couples may find themselves becoming experts on subjects they previously never gave much thought. Thanks to the cost of weddings, today's couples must make each decision carefully, and that may result in hours of research and discussion.

One of the big decisions couples must make when planning their weddings concerns their floral arrangements. The right floral arrangements won't break the bank but will add substantial aesthetic appeal to ceremonies and receptions. It can be difficult for couples to achieve that balance of cost and look on their own, so the following are a few helpful hints for couples when choosing their wedding day floral arrangements.

Work with a florist you trust and like.

All florists are not the same, so finding one you can trust and will enjoy working with can make all the difference. Many couples have little or no experience with floral arrangements prior to planning their weddings, so it can calm couples' nerves

to work with someone they trust in such situations. Florists with significant wedding experience will no doubt make a host of recommendations based on couples' budgets and preferences, so couples might be more inclined to listen to that advice if they are working with someone they trust. Ask relatives, friends or coworkers if they can recommend any florists whose wedding work they are familiar with.

Choose in-season or native flowers.

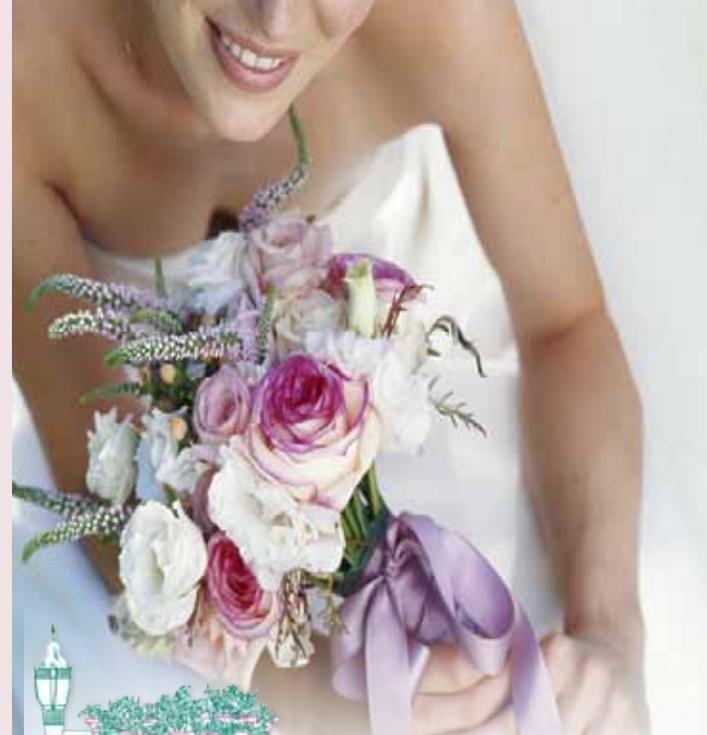
Couples working with tight budgets may want to choose in-season flowers or those native to the area where they will be tying the knot. In-season and native flowers won't need to be ordered or shipped in from afar, which can be costly. In-season and native flowers tend to be more abundant as well, and the greater their availability the less couples are likely to pay for them.

Repurpose floral arrangements. Another way to save on floral arrangements is to repurpose flowers throughout the day. Once bridesmaids no longer need their bouquets, use them to decorate gift tables or cocktail

areas. Floral arrangements on display during the ceremony can be removed once you have both said "I do" and moved into the reception area where they can be enjoyed through the night. Go over any repurposing you plan to do with your reception hall manager prior to your wedding day so he knows where and when to move the arrangements.

Go big. Some flowers simply bloom larger than others, and choosing such flowers may help you save money since you won't need to buy as many flowers as you would if you were to go with smaller blooms. Once you find a florist to work with, discuss your options with regard to doing more with less. Many florists embrace the challenge to be creative within a budget, so you might just be surprised and impressed by what they come up with.

Floral arrangements can set the mood for a wedding ceremony and reception, and even couples with little or no experience choosing arrangements can end up with stunning displays.



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Finding a hotel for your out-of-town guests



Wedding planning can seem overwhelming at times, but couples also tend to have a lot of fun when making preparations for their big day. Whether it's sampling various cuisines for their wedding reception or researching potential honeymoon destinations, couples have much to look forward to as they delve deeper into their wedding planning.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of wedding planning is finding lodging for out-of-town guests. Hotels come in all shapes and sizes, and visiting various hotels and seeing what each has to offer can be fun. As couples set out to find lodging for their out-of-town guests, the following factors should be taken into consideration.

Number of guests

Even if you have yet to pare down the guest list, you may have an idea of how many guests you hope to invite to your wedding. Peruse your preliminary guest list to determine how many of those potential invitees may need lodging. Some hotels won't offer discounted room blocks without a minimum number of guests, so try to find a hotel or hotels that can accommodate your group size and still offer a discount on their usual rates.

Location

Location bears considerable weight when choosing a hotel for your out-of-town wedding guests. If you are tying the knot in a large city, guests are less likely to rent cars for the weekend, so look for a hotel with access to restaurants and other attractions your guests can enjoy while they are in town. If your ceremony and reception are in a more remote location, then try to find a hotel that's nearby so guests do not spend the bulk of their time behind the wheel while they are in town. If you simply can't find a hotel that's close to your ceremony and reception locations, then arrange for bus transportation so guests can get to and from the reception safely and soundly.

Amenities

Out-of-town guests will have more free time on their hands than the bride- and groom-to-be, so consider the amenities each hotel you visit has to offer. On-site exercise facilities, pools and outdoor lounge areas all can help guests fill the hours before the wedding and enjoy some rest and relaxation. In addition, hotels with on-site restaurants or those next door to restaurants can provide convenient places for guests to eat and meet up with fellow guests.

Cost

Like location, cost is a significant consideration when choosing a hotel for your out-of-town guests. Whether such guests are driving or flying in, the cost of travel is already hitting them in the pocketbook, so finding hotels that offer budget-friendly rates for wedding parties should be a priority.

Finding a hotel for out-of-town wedding guests is an enjoyable element of wedding planning. Couples should consider a host of factors before making their final decisions.



Last-minute wedding pointers

Couples may find the last few weeks before their wedding days are filled with anticipation. As the big day draws near, it's understandable if couples are a combination of excited and anxious. The excitement stems from tying the knot, while the anxiety might be spurred by the desire that everything goes off without a hitch.

While those last few weeks before a wedding day can be hectic, it's important that couples stay focused and remember to perform a handful of tasks as their big days draw closer.

- Speak to your vendors. Vendors play a big role at weddings, so it's important that couples contact their vendors to confirm wedding schedules and ensure vendors have directions to the ceremony and reception locations, if necessary. Couples will be busy on their wedding days, so they may want to provide the phone numbers of their maids of honor and best

men so vendors can reach them should something go awry or need to be addressed while couples are preparing for the ceremony.

- Write some checks. Many vendors expect final payment a week or two before the ceremony, and it's imperative that couples make these payments on time. Revisit all of your contracts to determine when the final installments of each vendor's payment is due. Pay via check so you have a record that the final payment was made.
- Confirm rehearsal reservations. Contact your ceremony venue as well as the restaurant where your rehearsal dinner will be held to confirm the time of the rehearsal and your dinner reservation. When confirming these details, it's also good to make sure all bridal party members and family who will be attending the rehearsal and subsequent dinner have transportation to and from each

venue.

- Prepare visitor bags. Many couples like to leave visitor bags for their guests at the hotel where the majority of their guests will be staying. The weeks leading up to the wedding is a great time for couples to prepare these bags and arrange for their drop-off with hotel personnel.
- Drop off personal items at the

reception venue. Couples who have chosen to use personalized toasting glasses, cake servers and other personal items at their wedding receptions should drop such items off in the week leading up their weddings. Arrange this dropoff with your contact at the reception venue, at which time you also can confirm any additional details about your reception you might want to inquire about.

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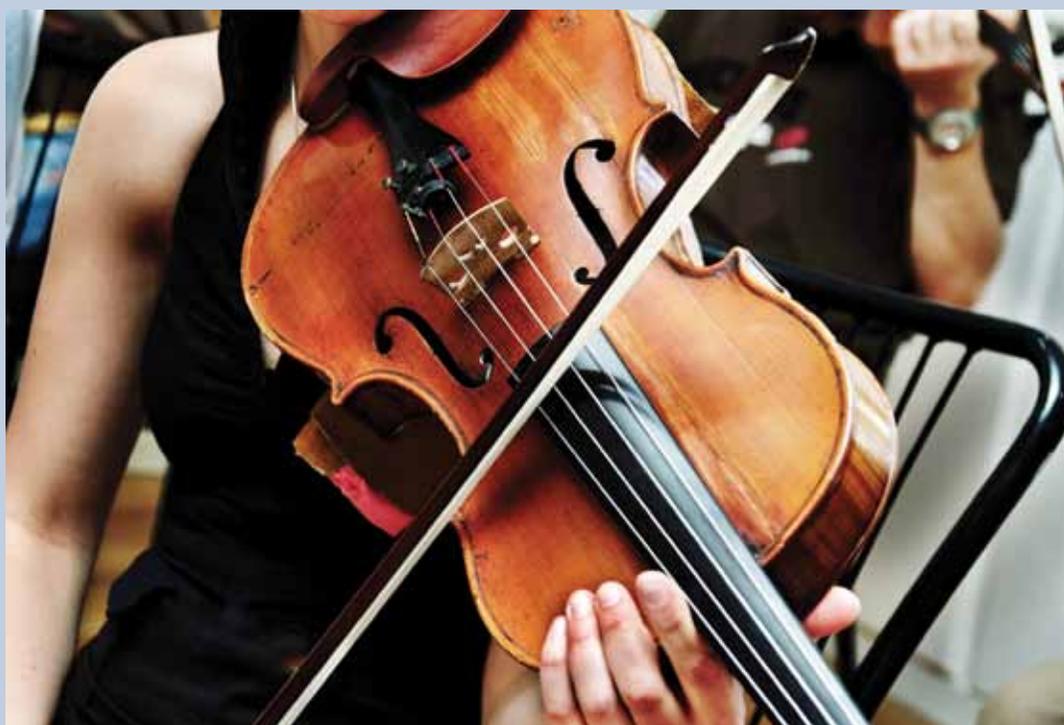
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Customize your ceremony

to give it a unique touch



Steeped in tradition, weddings have featured many of the same components for centuries. Those about to tie the knot may feel somewhat limited in their ability to shape their weddings into unique celebrations of their relationships and love for one another. Although it may not seem like there are many opportunities to put your own stamp on the wedding, there are plenty of ways to do just that.

When looking to personalize your wedding ceremony, determine if there might be anything blocking you from doing so. For example, if yours will be a religious ceremony, there may be certain rites that need to be followed. Secular ceremonies may offer more opportunities to customize.

Vows: Vows are one of the easiest ways to put a personal



Incorporate some custom elements into wedding ceremonies give them unique flair.

touch on your wedding. You can select the words you want to exchange during the ceremony as well as any readings during the service. Work with your officiant to narrow down particular phrasing or sentiments that fit with your vision of the wedding and relationship.

Participants: Wedding party members fulfill certain roles during the ceremony, but they are not limited to those tasks alone. Consider asking wedding party members or other friends or family members to take on specialized roles in the wedding. They may be able to do certain readings, escort guests to their seats, light candles, or sing and participate in other ways.

Musical interludes: Choose music that connects with your personalities as a couple rather than selecting standard songs merely because they are the

easier route. Work with the organist or other musicians and request that they perform or play musical pieces that you enjoy.

Candle lighting: Many couples like to incorporate candle-lighting components to their ceremonies. Lighting unity candles blends two families together into one in a symbolic way. Other couples choose different traditions, such as mixing two different-colored sands in a new vessel, to represent the joining of two lives together. You can consider these types of additions for your wedding ceremony or come up with your own unique tradition.

Impart a special touch to a wedding ceremony in any number of ways. Doing so will help set this special day apart in the minds of guests and make it even more memorable to look back on as a couple.

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Changing your last name

While many brides opt to take their husbands' surnames upon tying the knot, over the years the popularity of such a decision has ebbed and flowed. Recent years have suggested the practice is once again gaining steam.

A 2011 study published in *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* indicates that younger brides are more likely to embrace the tradition of taking their husbands' names in marriage. According to the study, women who married between the ages of 35 and 39 were 6.4 times more likely to keep their maiden names than those who married between the ages of 20 and 24.

Many brides view taking their spouse's name as the natural transition from being a singleton to being a married woman. Other brides prefer they share the same last name as their future children, making the choice to take their husband's name a logical decision. Some brides feel having the same last name as their husbands helps them feel more like a family.

Changing one's name also may make it easier to deal with various issues. Finances, travel and even parenting concerns may be easier when women take their husbands' last names than when they don't.

But some brides still prefer to keep their maiden names or hyphenate those names with their husbands' surnames. Some may view changing their names as sacrificing their personal identities, while others may want to hold on to a family name they are proud of. Interesting names also can be hard to give up. Brides who find taking their husband's



Although a large percentage of women still change their last names upon getting married, many carefully weigh the pros and cons of such a change before making their final decisions.

name would be a tongue-twister may prefer to forego this tradition.

Very often women who occupy positions of prominence in their professions keep their maiden names, feeling that taking their husbands' names will affect the cache they have built up thus far. Women uncertain of what to do in such situations can keep their

maiden names professionally and still change their names legally.

Changing one's last name is a personal preference and a decision that couples should discuss together. Discuss the decision well in advance of the wedding so that both parties are aware of each other's feelings on the subject before tying the knot.

Post-wedding day tasks to tackle

Couples who plan their own weddings might enjoy a satisfactory exhale once the knot has been tied and the last rug has been cut. Once guests head home and couples depart for their honeymoons, much of the work is done. But there are some lingering tasks for couples once they return from their first trip together as husband and wife.

• **Thank-you notes:** Thank-you notes are perhaps a couple's biggest task upon returning from their honeymoons. Such notes should be sent to all guests who attended your wedding as well as those who could not attend but still gave gifts. Carve out some time in the weeks immediately following your honeymoon to write personalized thank-you notes, mailing them all at the same time so guests do not feel slighted if their note arrives weeks after another's.

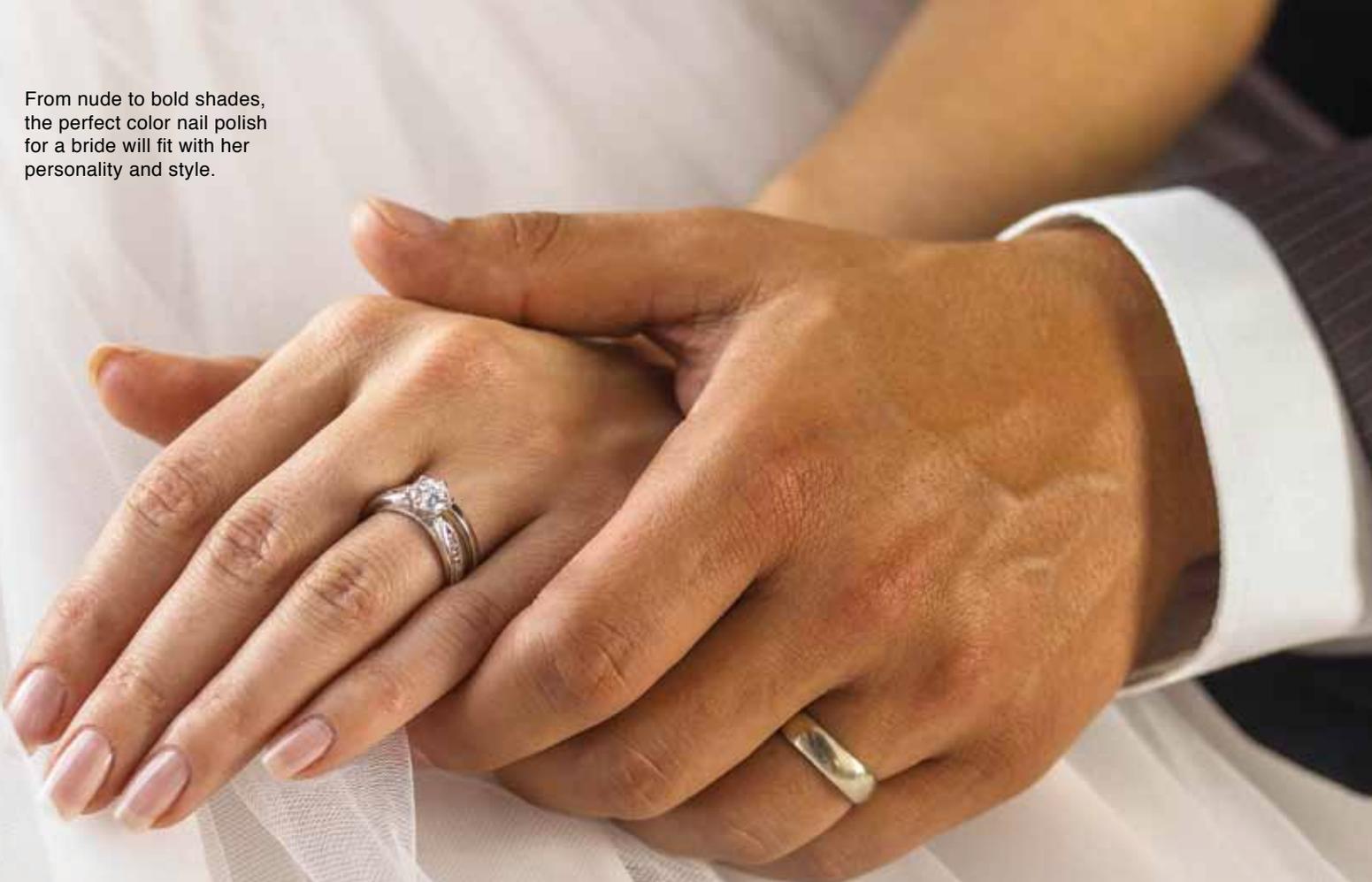
• **Cake:** If you were unable to do so before leaving on your honeymoon, return to your wedding reception venue to pick up any leftover cake. Many venues will store leftover wedding cakes in their freezers for a reasonable amount of time until couples return from their honeymoons, but make it a point to pick up your cake as soon as possible. It's customary to eat leftover cake, if you have any, on your first anniversary.

• **Vendor reviews:** Many vendors now rely on Internet reviews from past customers to help grow their businesses, and it's a nice gesture for couples to offer their reviews once they have returned from their honeymoons. Chances are you relied on such reviews when choosing vendors for your wedding, so return the favor by writing reviews and helping future couples find reliable vendors who can help make their weddings special.

• **Dress:** New brides who want to keep their dresses as keepsakes or preserve them as heirlooms should have their dresses cleaned and professionally preserved when they return from their honeymoons. The earlier you do this, the easier it is to remove any stains that might have developed during your wedding.

• **Gift returns:** Newly married couples often receive repeat gifts or gifts they never put on their registries that they simply have no use for. Return such gifts as soon as possible so your home is not overwhelmed with clutter. Upon returning gifts, you also can do a little shopping, as you will have money to spend. In addition, many stores give newly married couples discounts on registry items that went unpurchased, and the day you return gifts is a great opportunity to cash in on such discounts.

From nude to bold shades, the perfect color nail polish for a bride will fit with her personality and style.



Nail color the finishing touch to wedding day preparation

Certainly a bride's gown receives its fair share of attention on her wedding day, especially in those first moments when she proceeds down the aisle to her soon-to-be spouse. But another part of the bride's ensemble will be scrutinized ... her hands. Wedding guests will be anxious to see the wedding ring, and photographs of the couple holding hands typically are included in the wedding album. A bride's hands need to look as polished as the rest of her wedding day ensemble.

Luckily there are no established rules when it comes to wedding day nail polish. Colors can range from neutrals and traditional shades to shades that are brighter and more exotic. Some brides like to wear blue nail polish, which gives them flair and completes the requisite "something blue" tradition. Not sure what to choose for your wedding day color? See if one of these suggestions fits your style.

Nude colors

Brides may want to downplay their nails and not let them detract from their rings or gowns. Using nude colors will help achieve this. Nudes can include blush pink, off-white and beige-toned nail polish alone or in combination, such as with a French manicure. Some brides choose to go with clear polish and let their natural nails shine through.

Glitter

For a bit more pizzazz, brides can have their nails done with a nude or clear color enhanced with glitter. The glitter will add a bit of sparkle that can complement the shine of wedding rings and any embellishments on gowns or veils. An alternative is to have tiny faux gems imbedded into the polish near the base of the nail where it meets the cuticle.

Nail Art

Polish can be enhanced further

with nail appliques or painted-on designs. It's common for nail art to only appear on one nail of each hand, and it's usually reserved for the ring finger. As people admire the wedding ring, they also can grab a peek at some fun and flirty nail art designs.

Bold and Beautiful

Brides who really want to make a statement can select a bold color for their nail polish. Coral and deep pinks can be a stark contrast against a white gown and add a bit of drama to a bride's look. Brides also may want to coordinate their nail colors to the theme of the wedding. A blue or teal shade for an ocean-side wedding or a lavender shade for a spring wedding amid tons of blooms can look beautiful.

It pays to have nails professionally manicured so that fingers will be flawless. A manicure also provides a little pampering before the demands of the wedding day set in.

How to successfully negotiate with wedding vendors

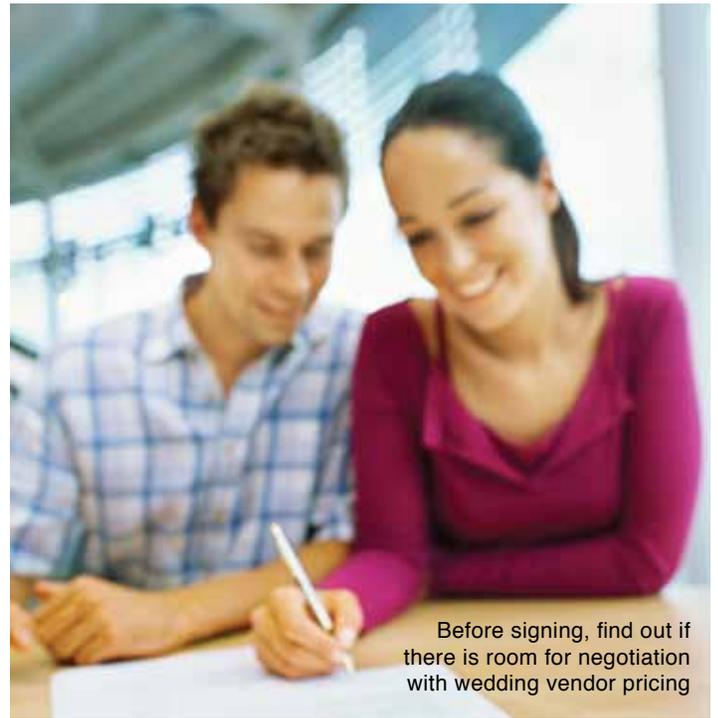
The average wedding tends to be one of the most costly ventures in a couple's life together. Many couples seek ways to cut costs, and negotiating with prospective vendors is one way to do just that.

Too often couples overlook haggling for better prices because they may be intimidated by the process or simply want to plan the most memorable day regardless of cost. Many vendors build some wiggle room into their prices, and the key for cost-conscious couples is to find the right strategy to unlock that lower price.

- Explore your options. Weddings are big business for vendors, and the competition is stiff. Visit a variety of vendors and compare their services and prices prior to making any decisions. This will give you an accurate range of costs and information for future negotiations. Vendors may be willing to match competitors' prices, so knowing what the photographer down the street charges can provide you with some negotiating leverage.
- Dress modestly for meetings.

It's tempting to want to dress to impress, but very often wedding vendors judge potential clients by their appearances. If you walk in with a designer handbag and driving the latest model luxury vehicle, a vendor may get the impression you have extra money to spend. While you do not have to play the pauper, dress modestly so your appearance doesn't hurt you at the negotiating table.

- Never take the first offer. A good business person will tell you there always is room for negotiation. Avoid the loaded question of "What can you spend on this?" by the vendor. Instead, let them bring up a price first, and realize that this first quote can almost always be negotiated down. Inform the vendor that you would really like to work with them but he or she needs to lower the price. See if they can offer a different package or provide a discount.
- Negotiate the big-ticket items first. Discounts on big-ticket items, such as the reception venue, will save you the most money. For example, you will save more by getting 20 percent off at the catering hall than if



Before signing, find out if there is room for negotiation with wedding vendor pricing

you save 20 percent on your wedding gown. Once you free up extra money, you may find you don't have to negotiate as hard with smaller vendors.

- Walk away if need be. Always have a Plan B in place. This way if you tell a vendor that their price is too expensive and you have to pass, you really have a fall-back option. Some vendors will sweeten the deal, but others will actually let you walk out the door. And remember, you're more likely to get a better price by being amenable and well-mannered than making threats or arguing.

• Some deals aren't actual discounts. A vendor may be able to work with you by offering additional services in lieu of actually taking money off of the price tag. Extra photo prints, a dessert bar and an extra hour of time in the limousine may seem like great deals, but that's only the case if you truly need these bonuses. Even if it's a great deal, you're still spending more than you had hoped.

Wedding prices can be overwhelming. However, negotiating for lower prices is always an option for cost-conscious couples.



Creating a wedding reception playlist

Many elements combine to make traditional wedding receptions special. But many veteran wedding guests would agree that the right playlist once guests hit the reception hall dance floor can turn an ordinary wedding reception into something far more memorable.

The majority of couples choose between a live band and a disc jockey to provide the music for their wedding receptions. Entertainment is often one of the more memorable aspects of a wedding reception, as the right band or disc jockey can help to establish a jovial mood that makes it easy for everyone to have a good time.

Couples can leave their wedding reception playlists to the professionals, but they should also know that they have a say in which songs are played. In addition, couples can have a “no play” playlist that prohibits certain songs they dislike from being played. When mulling the musical choices for your wedding reception, consider the following advice.

- Begin by making a list of your



favorite songs. Make this list during different days and at different times and moods so you get a good cross-section of your favorite tunes. But remember not every song is a good fit for a wedding reception. Melancholy songs or those that include suggestive lyrics are best left off the playlist.

- Aim to get as many guests on the dance floor as possible. Well-known songs and upbeat

dance music will inspire more guests to cut a rug than lesser known tunes you may be fond of. Music that spans the decades and various genres will appeal to guests from all age groups, encouraging dancers young and old to cut a rug.

- Avoid songs that are difficult to dance to. Some songs just are not meant to be danced to. If your favorite songs fit that bill but you still want to hear them

on your wedding, ask the DJ or band to play them during the cocktail hour or while everyone is eating dinner.

- Give the music vendor some leeway. Disc jockeys and bands have no doubt performed at many a wedding before yours, and they may have a better feel for crowds than you do. Let them know they have some leeway to play songs that did not make it onto the playlist if guests seem to be avoiding the dance floor. That professional expertise is why you hired them, and it can make for a more memorable night for everyone.

- Don't stress out about the music. The playlist can set the tone for a positive reception, but don't stress out if you're struggling to come up with songs you want to hear. Your vendor is no doubt capable of creating a playlist that will ensure everyone has fun.

Hiring a band or disc jockey to perform at your wedding reception is a great way to make sure everyone enjoys a fun night. Adding your own favorite songs to the playlist can make the reception even more special.



Responsibilities of bridal party members

Being asked to join a bridal party is both an honor and a responsibility. When asked to take on such significant and meaningful roles, men and women may recognize the honor but be unsure of what their responsibilities are as couples move forward with their wedding plans.

Bridal party roles can vary depending on certain circumstances, but many couples still want their bridesmaids and groomsmen to perform many of the more traditional tasks associated with their roles. The following are some of the tasks bridesmaids and groomsmen can expect to perform in the months leading up to the wedding and during the wedding itself.

- **Maid of Honor:** The maid of honor serves as the bride-to-be's right-hand woman as she plans her wedding and gets ready on her big day. Maids of honor typically go gown shopping with the bride and may even choose or offer suggestions about the color and style of the bridesmaids' dresses. Once a dress style and color has been chosen, the maid of honor will make sure everyone is fitted on time.

A maid of honor will also plan the bridal shower, sending invitations and arranging for lodging for out-of-town guests if necessary. Many brides want the details of their bridal showers to be a surprise, and maids of honor should honor those sentiments when possible. A maid of honor

also plans the bachelorette party, though many brides do not mind being involved in the planning of such parties.

The maid of honor may be asked to help address save-the-date cards and envelopes as well.

Come the day of the wedding, the maid of honor will ensure the bride's day is as stress-free as possible, helping to address any last-minute issues that may arise. Maids of honor may be asked to serve as the legal witness to the wedding and sign the wedding license before the reception. At the reception, the maid of honor will toast the bride.

- **Best man:** The best man is the maid of honor's counterpart, helping to plan the bachelor party and toasting the groom at the reception. The best man also tends to hold the rings during the wedding ceremony, and during the day of the wedding, he will coordinate the groomsmen to make sure everyone is ready to go on time. The best man may arrange transportation for the groom and groomsmen on the day of the wedding and may also return the groom and groomsmen's attire the following day if the newlyweds are departing on their honeymoons.

- **Bridesmaids/Groomsmen:** The bridesmaids and groomsmen serve similar functions, acting as sources of support as couples plan their weddings. Bridesmaids and

groomsmen help to plan the bachelorette and bachelor parties and may also be asked their opinions as couples make decisions regarding their weddings. Bridesmaids and groomsmen must be prepared to take pictures once couples have officially tied the knot. They also must help the brides and grooms with any issues that may arise in the hours before couples become husband and wife.

- **Flower girl/Ring bearer:** Flower girls and ring bearers are often young relatives of the couple, whether they are a young brother or sister or a niece or nephew. The responsibilities of the flower girl and ring bearer are typically limited to the ceremony, during which they will walk down the aisle, either together or individually, before the father of the bride escorts his daughter to the altar or stage.

- **Father of the bride:** The father of the bride walks his daughter down the aisle during the ceremony, and, along with his wife, may pay for the wedding, though many couples now finance their own nuptials. The father of the bride will dance with his daughter during the reception, and some fathers may even share a special toast for the newlyweds during the reception, though such a toast is not traditionally required.

Bridal parties play a big role on couples' wedding days, and those roles are both an honor and a responsibility.