

# Bridal

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# How to pick the perfect wedding dress



**P**lanning a wedding requires making many different decisions. The choice of wedding attire is among the most crucial decisions that couples must make. Whether the wedding is traditional or customized to suit couples' personalities, brides and grooms want to look their best when they say, "I do."

Many brides-to-be spend a significant amount of time looking for their ideal wedding dresses. What defines the right gown depends on personal preference and is unique to the person doing the search. For example, a dress that sets a fairy tale scene for one bride may not necessarily align with the tastes

of another. According to Bridal Atelier, the average bride-to-be tries on try three to seven dresses before finding the right one. The following tips can help those shopping for dresses find a look that makes their big day even more special.

## 1. Don't get hung up on perfection

Many brides get caught up as they search for the one dress they consider perfect. No dress is likely to check every box. Getting hung up on a desire to find a dress that has it all may make it hard to see the beauty in other dresses. Remember, with the talents of an experienced tailor or seamstress, most dresses can be tweaked to

See **DRESS** on Page 4



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*When in doubt, defer to the experts at bridal shops who have experience choosing dresses that brides are inclined to love.*

## DRESS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

suit your vision of the ideal gown.

### 2. Consider the season

Getting married during the hazy and humid days of summer is an entirely different experience than tying the

knot during the heart of winter. The fabric of the wedding dress should complement the season, whether it's lightweight and breezy for a warm day, or more substantial and cozy when darting to the ceremony in snowfall.

### 3. Flatter your figure

Chances are brides-to-be know which cuts and styles are most flattering. Mimic those style choices

in the wedding dress. If you want to take focus off of full hips, choose a basque or asymmetrical waistline. Gowns with substantial straps or higher necklines may be better if you have a larger chest. Sheath and mermaid style gowns are options if you are confident with your figure and want to show off your curves.

various straps and sleeves can be very appealing.

### 5. Arrive with a firm budget

Weddings can be costly. It's important to set a budget for the wedding dress just as you will with other expenses. There are plenty of dress designers across a wide spectrum of price points. A willingness to consider and ultimately purchase a less costly dress can help you stay on budget.

### 4. Try a bit of this and that

Don't go into a wedding dress appointment with firm parameters. Although you may have a ball gown style in mind, after trying on other options something with a less voluminous silhouette may actually catch your eye. Many brides also automatically defer to strapless gowns, when

Browsing through magazines and looking online can provide wedding dress inspiration as well. Also, when in doubt, defer to the experts at bridal shops who have experience choosing dresses that brides are inclined to love.

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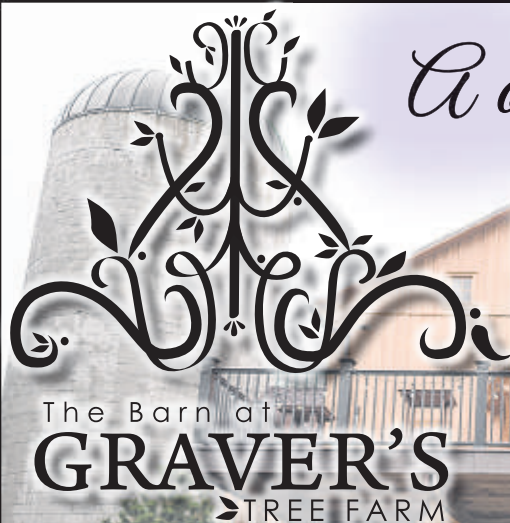
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## Tips to help master your guest list

**W**eddings are such momentous occasions that it's no wonder couples want to share their big days with as many people as possible. Though a wedding where all friends, family members and acquaintances are in attendance may be a dream scenario, reality often calls for a more carefully curated guest list.

Data from The Wedding Report indicates that the average cost of a wedding is slightly more than \$20,000, though that figure could be substantially higher, or even lower, depending on where couples tie the knot. Both

The Wedding Report and The Knot report that a wedding venue and catering make up a significant percentage of the overall cost of a wedding, with some figures indicating that these expenses account for around 65 percent of the final price tag. The number of guests couples will host on their wedding day will affect which venue they book and how much food and beverages they'll need to satisfy guests. Couples who hope to stay within budget can consider these tips as they try to build a guest list that won't break the bank.

· Accept input. Parents may no longer foot the entire bill for their chil-

See **LIST** on Page 7



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# LIST

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

dren’s weddings, but couples who are accepting some financial help from parents must also accept Mom’s and Dad’s input regarding the guest list. Even if parents’ desired guests do not ultimately make the cut, it’s best to respect their wishes and consider who they want to invite. Couples who are financing their own weddings without outside help need not feel beholden to invite anyone who does not meet their invitation criteria.

· Make a preliminary list without regard to budget. Couples can have fun making preliminary guest lists without considering their budgets. A preliminary list can serve as a solid starting point, and couples may even realize that their list is within budget. Once the preliminary lists have been created, couples can categorize guests (i.e., distant cousins, coworkers, etc.) and then work together

to determine if any categories can be eliminated from the invitation list. For example, couples who may be going over budget with their guest lists can each agree to remove distant cousins from their prospective invitees.

· Seek advice. Many couples face difficult decisions regarding their wedding day guest lists, so it can be helpful to speak to a recently married friend or relative to see how they handled paring down their guest lists. Some might have done it by category, while others might have limited guest lists to local friends and family. When taking this approach, couples can speak to friends about how they approached handling people who were not on the final list of invitees.

· Throw a less formal party down the road. A less expensive backyard barbecue within weeks of tying the knot can serve as a less costly alternative to a large wedding reception. Couples who take

this approach can keep their wedding day guest lists to a minimum, but invite everyone they hope to see to a post-wedding day backyard barbecue or pot luck picnic so they can celebrate with every-

one they love.

Curating a wedding day guest list is no small task. However, couples can try various approaches to keep a guest list more manageable and less expensive.

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# Helpful tips for writing wedding vows

**T**he exchange of wedding vows is a key component of a wedding ceremony and sometimes helps to ensure the marriage is binding in accordance with the faith of the participants. Vows also may be exchanged in service of tradition. According to the wedding resource Zola, vows are not a legal necessity for marriage and some cultures do not use them. Still, many couples like to recite vows during their weddings.

Couples have various options pertaining to the vows they share. In religious ceremonies, vows may be predetermined as part of the requirements and rituals of that faith and religious texts. Individuals also may choose to read romantic verses from poetry. Another option is to write one's own vows.

When drafting vows, here are some guidelines to follow.

- Utilize a template. Scour the internet for resources on writing vows. You'll likely find sample vows or even templates where you can fill in information if you do not know where to begin.

- Utilize memories of when you met. Your vows can include special anecdotes or stories of time



spent in the early days when you first knew this was the person with whom you would spend your life.

- Explain who this person is to you. Tell the audience what it is about this person that has you smitten. Is he or she your partner in crime? Confidante? Best friend? Or all of the above?

- Share what you are pledging. Write out exactly what you are vowing to your special someone. Be definitive and draw from your personal experiences. For example, "I vow to support you each time you adopt another shelter dog." "I promise to not hog the covers." "I vow to warm your toes on cold evenings." Make it personal, heartfelt and humorous.

- Say you'll be there. At the heart of vows is a promise that you'll be around no matter what

life throws at you. This is a safe sentiment to include in your vows, and likely one your future spouse and other guests will come to expect.

- Keep things brief. There is no need to write a novel for your vows, which may reassure you if you're nervous about the right wording and speaking in front of an audience. Outline the most important points you want to share and build on those sentiments.

- Reflect on the future. Wrap up your vows by noting your excitement about what the future may bring, whether that is a family, travel or another adventure.

Wedding vows are traditional components of many weddings. Couples easily can write their own vows to personalize the ceremony even further.

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# The wedding party lends helping hands

It's been said it takes a village to raise a child, and it also can take one to plan a wedding. Despite most weddings only filling one day, many, many weeks of planning and various tasks are involved in creating magical and memorable events.

Bridal parties can prove invaluable during the wedding planning process and the wedding day if couples utilize their talents. According to the wedding resource *The Knot*, a typical wedding party consists of roughly four to five people on each side. That means around 10 individuals can provide extra help a happy couple needs. Here's how the wedding party can assist future newlyweds.

- Assisting with choosing vendors
- Helping to pick out attire
- Putting together invitations
- Planning and hosting parties, like the engagement party, shower, and bachelor/bachelorette parties
- Helping the bride and/or groom dress
- Participating in photography sessions
- Serving as moral support for the couple, and helping to tame nerves or serving as a sounding board

Two members of the wedding party may go above and beyond the others in their roles. These include the maid/matron of honor and the best man, traditionally. However, there are no rules dictating that a bride needs to have a woman as her close attendant nor the groom a man. These roles can go to whomever the couple desires, regardless of gender, and



the title can reflect couples' choices.

The maid/matron of honor is the bride's right-hand person. This person handles many wedding day details, including signing the marriage license and helping the bride get situated before walking down the aisle.

The best man/woman acts as the groom's personal advisor and assistant. This person is a master of ceremonies and presides over the other groomspeople. He or she will be the other signature on the wedding license.

Both of these individuals will provide speeches at the wedding reception and may also offer words at other events throughout the wedding-related activities.

The parents of the couple also will enjoy roles of prominence during the wedding. They can provide support and share their own experiences. They may help offset the costs of rehearsal dinners

or other pre-wedding parties. Parents may share their own special toasts and can participate in wedding day traditions, such as first dances.

Wedding party mem-

bers can ask the couple which tasks they can manage and the bride and groom should feel comfortable delegating to alleviate some wedding planning stress.

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# The pros and cons of two popular reception meal options



**C**ouples planning a wedding undoubtedly know that the food and drinks served at wedding receptions are major factors in how much guests enjoy the celebration. After all, hungry, thirsty guests will not be having fun.

According to the resource *Wedding Forward*, the national average cost per head at wedding receptions in

the United States is \$90. The wedding planning resource *The Knot* estimates that roughly 29 percent of a couple's budget will go toward catering.

With so much money on the line and hungry guests to feed, couples face many decisions regarding their wedding day menus. Among the first questions a catering hall manager

See **MEAL** on Page 11



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*Buffet meals encourage guests to mingle and provides an opportunity to sample different foods.*



## MEAL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

may ask is which type of dinner service couples prefer. Venues typically offer buffet and plated options, and the following can help couples choose which style is for them.

### Plated service

A plated meal consists of all guests being seated and served a formal dinner, which usually includes an appetizer and entrée. A key benefit of this type of meal is that it ensures everyone eats at the same time. Guests sometimes pre-select their food options on the R.S.V.P., which means that catering halls have advanced knowledge of food allergies or special needs. Or they select from a predetermined menu at the reception. Plated dinners are efficient and can keep the wedding running on schedule.

Plated service features only a select number of meal options, which can be a negative for some couples. Guests cannot sample a few other things as they might like with a buffet. More servers are needed for plated service,

so staffing costs may be more for this option than they are for buffet service.

### Buffet service

A wedding reception buffet features various foods in chafing dishes at a single centralized buffet station. While guests sometimes serve themselves, typically waitstaff spoon portions onto guests' plates. There tends to be more variety with a buffet, and this option may feel more relaxing as well. Buffet meals encourage guests to mingle and provides an opportunity to sample different foods.

Some people don't relish carrying dishes of food back to tables and risking spillage on formal clothing. Buffet also is less formal than a plated dinner. Buffets may even be more costly, since catering halls need to have a greater amount of food ready. There may be long wait times for buffet as well.

### Additional options

These are not the only meal services available. A new trend for weddings is food station service. This is similar to a buffet, but has different stations situated throughout the

room to avoid bottlenecks. Food stations can be themed, with Mexican offerings at one station and French delicacies at another.

Some couples choose to eschew traditional diners altogether. In the event of a wedding that takes place early or late in the day, a brunch or even a simple cocktail party with passed bites may be preferable.

Couples should consider food service as they plan their weddings, and choose an option that fits their wedding budgets and visions.

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# Pointers for post-wedding brunch

**A** post-wedding brunch is a nice way to wrap up a wedding weekend and gives a newly married couple a chance to spend more time with close friends and family, particularly if the couple isn't immediately leaving for the honeymoon. A brunch is the perfect way to send guests on their way with a few extra hugs and full bellies.

A brunch is not a necessity by any means, but it is a nice gesture and a good way to wrap up a wedding weekend. Couples who plan on hosting brunches can consider these tips.

- **Delegate:** The happy couple already has a lot of details on their plate to ensure the wedding occurs with minimal hiccups. A parent or member of the bridal party may want to take on the task of planning the brunch to alleviate stress on the newly betrothed.

- **Funding:** There are no hard rules about who will pay for the brunch, but typically it is the person who hosts it. Couples may want to set aside funds in their budgets for the brunch, or parents of the couple may want to contribute.

- **Timing:** Seeing as it likely was a late evening prior, the brunch should



occur as late as possible in the morning, with 11 a.m. or noon a good start time so everyone has a chance to sleep in and recuperate.

- **Ease:** The brunch planner should make it easy on himself or herself by finding a venue that is close by. Sometimes that venue may be a lodging location if the couple arranged for overnight accommodations. For example, if overnight guests stayed at a hotel near the reception site, that hotel may have a small conference or party room where brunch can be held. The brunch planner can work

with the hotel staff to cater the brunch; otherwise, find a nearby restaurant that specializes in breakfast or brunch foods that is convenient to most.

- **Invites:** For those with big budgets, anyone can be invited to the wedding brunch, but it may be more manageable if it is restricted to only close friends and family, or only those who opted for the overnight wedding accommodations.

- **Gifts:** There is no need to offer another favor at the wedding brunch. However, if any favors from the wedding were left behind, they

can be displayed at the brunch in case any guests forgot to take theirs.

- **Duration:** A 2- to 2 1/2-hour brunch is sufficient.

- **Food:** Brunch implies a mix of breakfast and lunch treats, which can include bagels, muffins, omelets, waffles, cold cuts, and quiches. While cocktails like mimosas or bellinis may be offered, they're not necessary after a night of indulgence. In fact, coffee and tea may be more coveted.

A post-wedding brunch is the perfect way to wrap up a successful wedding celebration.



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# Time-honored wedding traditions

Weddings are special events that celebrate two individuals' love for one another. Weddings bring together friends and family to witness couples share vows and devote their lives to each other.

Wedding guests recognize that certain components are commonplace in ceremonies and receptions. Perhaps you were once a ring bearer or caught the bouquet? There's a rich history behind the traditions that feature prominently at many weddings. Here's a look at traditions past and present and the meaning behind these customs.



## Marriage

The custom of marriage can be traced back thousands of years to when hunters and gatherers started coming together to form societies and farm land. In order to ensure the success of communities, couplings were developed to produce offspring and maintain households.

## Tie the knot

Getting married is sometimes referred to as "tying the knot." This stems from the custom of "handfasting," which is a common practice among various cultures around the world, and notably in ancient Rome. The bride and groom's hands are tied together for the duration of the ceremony, not to be released until the wedding is made official. This isn't something you see too often at modern weddings, but can be something unique couples may want to consider.

## Bridal bouquet

A bouquet of beautiful flowers is held by the bride on her wedding day. Roses, orchids, peonies, and other

fragrant blooms are often included, but in ancient times brides' bouquets were likely made of herbs. According to the resource Minted Weddings, these aromatic herbs were used to ward off evil spirits.

## Veil

Evil spirits also were the basis for the wearing of bridal veils, as they were utilized to hide brides from these miscreants. Veils now are more style than substance.

## Bridesmaids

In ancient Rome, bridesmaids were tasked with protecting the bride. They wore the same dresses as the bride to confuse evil spirits from finding the soon-to-be-betrothed and cursing her. Today's bridesmaids are less decoy and more helper. They may wear similar dresses to the bride and one another, but they aren't trying to fool any spirits.

## Tossing rice

Rice and grains were long regarded as signs of prosperity and fertility, according to the gifting company Personal Cre-

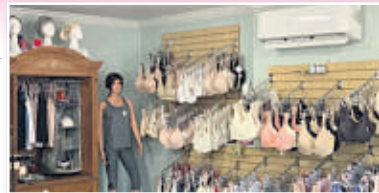
ations. Therefore, couples were showered with rice to ensure their good fortune. Consumption of uncooked rice has been proven to be detrimental to some wildlife, so rice has now been widely replaced with bubbles or birdseed.

## Cutting the cake

At the reception, many couples link hands and make the first cut in their wedding cakes. Wedding Wire says it's a tradition

that around 80 percent of wedding couples partake in. It is believed this tradition symbolizes the couple's first official task performed together, and marks the promise to support and take care of one another throughout the marriage. However, in the past, brides were responsible for cutting the wedding cake alone and distributed slices to guests to aid in fertility, according to Baking-Nook.com.

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# Songs tailor-made for father-daughter dances

**W**eddings can be as novel or traditional as couples prefer. Couples who go the traditional route will undoubtedly include certain spotlight dances in the reception.

The father-daughter dance is a staple of a wedding reception. According to the experts at Fred Astaire Dance Studios, the history of father-daughter dances can be traced back decades. The dance once was one last nod to Dad before the bride's husband became the most important man in her life. Now it's more symbolic of general love and affection.

Times have certainly changed from the first father-daughter dances and this tradition no longer carries the same meaning. In fact, despite what the name may imply, father-daughter dances needn't take place with a father at all, especially if he passed away or is not in the bride's life. She can choose any special person, whether a father figure, uncle, brother, mentor, etc. to honor during the dance.

Traditionally the father-daughter dance (and mother-son dance) takes place immediately following the newlyweds' first dance together. However,



some opt to have it after the toasts or before the cake cutting. Couples can make their preferences known prior to the reception and schedule these dances any time they desire, especially since they are frequently preceded by a special announce-

While many brides

prefer to dance to a slow-paced, heartfelt song, this needn't always be the case. In recent years, some daddy-daughter duos have opted to put on shows with humorous dances or even entertaining showcases of fancy footwork to songs of all types. The song should match the vibe of the wedding. That said, certain songs seem tailor-made for the times during the reception when love and gratitude are expressed during these bittersweet dances.

## Country

- "The Man Who Loves You the Most," Zac Brown Band
- "My Little Girl," Tim McGraw
- "Just Fishin'," Trace Adkins

*While many brides prefer to dance to a slow-paced, heartfelt song, this needn't always be the case.*

## Big Band

- "Unforgettable," Nat King Cole
  - "The Way You Look Tonight," Frank Sinatra
  - "Swinging on a Star," Bing Crosby
- ## Indie/Singer-Songwriter
- "You've Got a Friend," James Taylor
  - "Let it Be Me," Ray LaMontagne
  - "Father and Daughter," Paul Simon
  - "Wildflowers," Tom Petty
  - "Constellations," Jack Johnson

## Rock

- "Sweet Child O' Mine," Guns N' Roses
- "When You Need Me," Bruce Springsteen
- "Scarlet Begonias," Grateful Dead

## R&B

- "Ain't that Love," Ray Charles
  - "Daddy," Beyoncé
  - "Dance with My Father," Luther Vandross
  - "Love of My Life," Brian McKnight
- ## Tried and True
- "Butterfly Kisses," Bob Carlisle
  - "Wonderful World," Louis Armstrong
  - "Hero," Mariah Carey
  - "You Are So Beautiful," Joe Cocker
  - "Lullabye (Goodnight My Angel)," Billy Joel

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# Honeymoon planning pointers

**P**lanning a wedding is a tall task, so it's no wonder why so many couples look forward to their honeymoons. After months of planning and then saying "I Do" in front of family and friends, couples have earned a little R&R.

With so much already on engaged couples' plates, it's easy to overlook honeymoon planning. But finding time to plan a honeymoon can ensure the trip is one couples will cherish for the rest of their lives. The following planning pointers can help the trip go smoothly.

- Pick a passport-friendly destination. When it comes to honeymoons, couples' options run the gamut from domestic locales to faraway destinations on the other side of the world. That suggests couples can pick anywhere within their budgets and simply book a trip. However, that's not necessarily true. According to the U.S. State Department, many countries require that travelers have six months of validity remaining on their passports before they will issue a visa permitting them to enter. So couples should look at their passports to determine how long it is until the document expires. If the document expires within six months of their passport expiring, couples may not be able to enter the country they hope to visit. In such instances, couples should ensure they leave enough time to renew and receive their passports.

- Utilize a travel agency. Contrary to popular belief, travel agencies are still around and remain useful resources,



especially for travelers visiting a destination for the first time. Many honeymooners fit that bill, so they can benefit much from working with a travel agency. Couples tasked with planning a wedding already have a lot on their plate, so letting a travel agency take care of the honeymoon planning can ensure a memorable trip without requiring couples to do any legwork.

- Purchase travel insurance. The need for travel insurance has never been more apparent than in the last few years. Since the pandemic began, air travel has been a somewhat risky proposition. According to Flightaware, the first six months of 2022 featured more domestic flight cancellations in the United States than the entire 2021 calendar year combined. International travel could prove an even riskier proposition. Though the potential for cancellation should not deter couples from traveling by air for their honeymoons, the sheer volume of cancellations under-

scores the importance of purchasing travel insurance. Before purchasing a travel insurance policy, couples are urged to read it in its entirety to ensure it provides the protection they're seeking.

- Plan early. With so much other work to do involving a wedding, couples can be excused for putting a honeymoon on the back-burner. But planning early can make

the trip much more enjoyable. The benefits to planning early include more flights to choose from, a wider selection of rooms/lodging options at your destination, and more time to budget for the trip.

Honeymoon planning can be made simpler with a few simple strategies that also can ensure couples enjoy the trip of their dreams.



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