

To Have & To Hold



 **NORFOLK
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To Have & To Hold

Stunning engagement ring alternatives

White diamonds have been the traditional engagement ring stones for decades. While shoppers have experimented with gold, silver, platinum, and other precious metals for ring bands, the star of the show has long been that twinkling, pristine

diamond.

Even though diamonds may be a "girl's best friend," they may not fit every woman's style, particularly the bride who likes to buck tradition and think outside the box. According to Money magazine, the average

engagement ring costs more than \$5,800. In addition to being one of the most expensive gemstones, diamonds have become quite commonplace. Some women even avoid diamonds for moral reasons. Whatever the driving force behind shopping for alternative gems, women who want to set themselves apart from others — and men who want to "wow" their significant others with unique and eye-catching rings — may opt for other dazzling stones.

- **Moissanite:** This crystal naturally occurs in meteorites and is nearly as hard, dense and scuff-resistant as a diamond. Some feel moissanite offers more brilliance and fire than diamonds. Moissanite is a white-colored stone, so it can mimic the look of a diamond. And since it can be made in the laboratory at a fraction of the cost of even lab-made diamonds, it's a frugal option. A nearly flawless one-carat moissanite gem can cost less than \$1,000.

- **Lemon quartz:** This is the trade name for a lemon-yellow stone that is a variety of color-enhanced transparent quartz. Quartz is turned into this sunny hue through an artificial gamma ray irradiation

process. Like other quartz gemstones, lemon quartz is considered to be very durable and is therefore suitable for all types of jewelry.

- **Sapphire:** Sapphires tend to be blue stones (of varying intensity), but they also come in peach, pink, yellow, green, and white. Sapphire may not sparkle as much as a diamond or even moissanite. However, with the right cut, it can be hard to distinguish any lack of luster. Sapphires are the third hardest mineral, and at about one-third the price of diamonds, they make an ideal diamond substitute.

- **Morganite:** According to the blog Bridal Musings, morganite is currently one of the most popular choices for engagement rings. Its pretty pink hue is romantic and feminine. It also sits at around the same hardness as sapphires, ensuring the rings will endure. Vividly cut rubies, emeralds and tanzanite — all gems that are rarer yet less expensive than diamonds — can make beautiful engagement rings. Some couples also may opt for rings without gemstones, such as traditional Claddagh or "true lover's knot" rings to signify their union.



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Did You Know?

According to the 2015 Real Weddings Study from the premier multiplatform wedding resource The Knot, the most popular month for couples to get engaged is December. Sixteen percent of survey respondents became engaged in the final month of the calendar year. The survey also found that the average length of a couple's engagement is now 14.5 months. Where June once was the most popular month of the year to tie the knot, today's couples are now heading down the aisle most often in October. Seventeen percent of weddings now occur in October, closely followed by 15 percent in September. And at what age are couples saying their "I dos"? The average marrying age for a bride is 29 and it is 31 for the groom.



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Information to include on your wedding website

Personal websites are an invaluable resource for couples planning their weddings. Wedding websites provide a great platform for couples to share all sorts of information regarding their big day, making them an essential element of modern-day wedding planning.

Wedding websites need not feature all the bells and whistles of more permanent sites. But while there are specific guidelines governing what to include on wedding websites, couples should be mindful to share certain information to ensure their guests stay in the know about the pending nuptials.

The participants

Wedding websites can be used to inform guests about the couple getting married as well as the various participants, such as the bridesmaids and groomsmen. Extended families of the bride- and groom-to-be may not know much about their loved one's fiancé, and the wedding website can help guests get to know both people getting married. Include information about the bridal party as well. A brief story about each bridal party member's relationship to the bride and/or groom can be a great way to

illustrate just how much each person in the party means to the couple.

The big day

Invitations were once the go-to source for information about couples' wedding ceremonies and receptions. But unlike invitations, websites won't get lost around the house or in the mail, making them more reliable resources for guests. Include all the pertinent details about the big day on your website, including the time and location of both the ceremony and the reception. Include directions to and from the venue (both the ceremony and reception venues if they will be held at separate locations), and include a Google maps feature if possible.

RSVP info

Save guests the trouble of returning RSVP cards by including an RSVP



section on your website. Establish an email address solely for RSVPs, and check it regularly so you can update who is and who is not attending your wedding. Couples can save the expense of postage by requesting that guests RSVP exclusively through their websites. Just be sure to include that request with the invitations if you still plan to mail more traditional invites.

Accommodations

Many couples arrange for discounted hotel rooms for their out-of-town wedding guests. Include this information on your wedding website, and aim to include at least two hotels where guests can register under your party and receive discounted lodging. In addition to the hotels you arrange a deal with, include some extra information about other lodging options in the area. Out-of-town guests will appreciate having as many options as possible, and couples providing that information saves guests the trouble of researching certain neighborhoods to determine if they are safe or close to the ceremony and reception sites.

Registry

Wedding websites also provide a great way for couples to share registry information. Include links that take guests directly to your online registries. Wedding websites are a great resource for couples who want to share information about their weddings. As the big day draws closer, couples can update their sites to reflect any new developments.

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How to organize wedding planning

Weddings require a lot of planning. Couples hosting large weddings or even intimate gatherings can easily be overwhelmed by the amount of planning they must do to make their weddings into events they will remember and cherish forever. Staying organized when planning a wedding is a tall task. It's wise to expect the unexpected when organizing a wedding, and the more organized couples can stay, the more

fun they can have during the planning process and the better they can handle the unforeseen circumstances that are bound to arise in the months leading up to the wedding.

- Create separate filing systems for each aspect of the wedding. Rather than maintaining one massive file with information about various elements of the wedding, maintain separate files for each aspect of the wedding. For example, when receiving

quotes from prospective florists, keep all florist quotes in a single folder that remains separate from information about other parts of the wedding. Separate filing systems make it easier to find quotes and contracts when you need to, saving you the trouble of digging through pages upon pages of quotes, notes and other information you store.

- Maintain a spending spreadsheet. Many couples plan weddings on carefully constructed budgets. But couples can easily exceed those budgets if they are not routinely monitoring and recording their spending or the spending they are committing to upon signing contracts with vendors. Create a spending spreadsheet that allows you to track how much you have already spent, how much you are committed to spending and when wedding bills are due. Update the spreadsheet whenever you write a check or sign a new contract, and periodically examine the sheet so you can make sure you are still on track to remain at or under budget.

- Hire a planner. If wedding planning is proving especially overwhelming or if you simply don't have time to do all the legwork necessary to plan on your own, hire a wedding planner. Wedding planners are invaluable resources who can help couples quickly connect with vendors who can meet their needs while staying within their budgets. Planners also can advise couples on ways to

save money and which areas of the wedding should not be bargain basement. Couples planning destination weddings should inquire about resort-affiliated wedding planners before choosing a venue to host their ceremonies and/or guests.

- Start early. The average length of engagement for couples who wed in 2015 was 14.5 months. That means today's average couples have more than a year to plan their wedding. By starting their wedding planning early, couples can avoid having to plan everything at the last minute, which can be hectic, nerve-wracking and unorganized. In addition, starting early affords couples more time to find great deals and stay within their budgets.

Staying organized when planning a wedding can make for more enjoyable planning and a happier wedding day.



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Selecting a comfortable wedding gown

Many brides-to-be visit bridal shops with specific goals in mind regarding the style of their wedding gowns. Some women come equipped with magazine tear-outs or pull up ideas on their mobile phones. Others may have an entire scrapbook filled with various ideas they've been compiling for years.

Much consideration is given to wedding gowns. The cost and silhouette of the dress may garner the bulk of that consideration, but brides might want to spend more time considering comfort.

Depending on the time of day their weddings take place, brides can spend 12 hours or more in their wedding gowns on their wedding day. However, when shopping for their gowns, brides may prioritize beauty over comfort, even though it's entirely possible to find a gown that's both stunning and comfortable. When staff and friends or family who have come along to offer advice start to blush over wedding gowns, brides-to-be may feel pressured to downplay any discomfort they feel.

To make sure brides look flawless and elegant but are still comfortable



in their wedding gowns, consider the following tips.

- Know what to highlight and what to cover up. No two body types are the same, and many women feel certain parts of their bodies are their best assets while they want to downplay others. Try on gowns that play up your best features. If you have shapely legs, consider a dramatic gown with a slit to show them off. Certain gowns can enhance the neckline or show off an hourglass shape. Remember, many gowns can be modified so that you feel secure and confident. Sleeves can be added or fabric placed to cover up any perceived flaws. Confidence and pride are important parts of the comfort factor.

- Get sized correctly. Bridal gown

sizes do not coincide with street sizes. Depending on the manufacturer, brides may have to select gowns that are several sizes larger than they would normally wear. This should not be a cause for alarm. Brides should go by their measurements. Attempting to squeeze into a dress that is too small will only lead to discomfort on the wedding day.

- Purchase the right undergarments. Improperly fitting bras, shapewear and other undergarments can lead to discomfort as well. Some seamstresses can sew in supportive cups to remove the need for separate bras. Brides can explore various options to reduce the visibility of certain accoutrements.

- Move around in the gown. Brides should not just stand in front of the mirror and smile when trying on gowns. Put them through their paces. Try sitting, bending and even a little dancing. Make sure the dress is comfortable to move around in.

- Try different options. The gown brides have in mind may not be the one they ultimately go home with. Explore different styles and

materials. Choose cooler, breezier fabrics and lightweight gowns, like crêpe, georgette or organza, for summer weddings. Heavier fabrics, such as brocade, may be more comfortable in the winter. Wedding gowns can be both beautiful and comfortable for those who know how to shop.





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Weddings and nontraditional families

Families come in all shapes and sizes. During special events — particularly those steeped in tradition, such as weddings — blended families may have to employ certain tactics to ensure the events go off without a hitch.

When planning their weddings, couples must give consideration to the needs of their families. Even though a wedding is about the union of two people, oftentimes couples engaged to be married must contend with the politics of divorce or other familial issues. This includes if and how to incorporate stepparents and stepsiblings into the ceremony and celebration.

There are no traditional rules regarding how to handle blended families, so brides- and grooms-to-be can customize their decisions based on their own unique situations. Even when families have been happy through the years, the unique

circumstances and traditions surrounding the wedding can dredge up former insecurities, and certain aspects may require extra patience and tact. Here's how to navigate the process.

- Consider stepparents and stepsiblings VIPs. Brides and grooms who are not particularly close to their stepfamilies still have to recognize the role they play in the family dynamics. These people are still family, so respect and courtesy should be offered. If there is any lingering animosity, extend the olive branch on this day and try not to let anyone be made to feel as if they are unimportant. A simple announcement of who stepparents are at the wedding reception or inclusion of their names on wedding itineraries can help smooth over any potential bumps.

- Put others' needs before your own. While the wedding may be about you and your future spouse, you must

consider the feelings of others. Biological parents and stepparents may act defensively if they feel uncomfortable or hurt, and that can create an air of negativity to the day. Try to avoid this by considering potential areas of conflict. For example, mothers might be hurt if their ex-husbands' new girlfriends are asked to be in a group family photo. Instead, select separate times to have everyone included. Remember to give parents and stepparents priority seating as well, and they each should be seated next to someone they love and someone with whom they can converse comfortably. You may think everyone can play nice, but it's best not to push the issue just to make a point at the wedding.

- Recognize that some families break the mold. Recently, a father made waves on the Internet when a video of him pulling the bride's

stepfather up to assist in walking her down the aisle went viral. This was a wonderful image of families making it work despite their differences or the awkwardness that can result when brides or grooms have parents and stepparents in attendance. Although this scenario might not play out for all, find ways to impart a special touch, especially if you're close to both your biological parents and your stepparents. For example, your biological father may walk you down the aisle, while your stepfather may enjoy the first dance.

- Order flowers and gifts for all. Purchase flowers and wedding party gifts for all of the special people in your lives, including your stepfamily.

Weddings can be complicated affairs when factoring in blended families. With patience and compassion, such families can enjoy a beautiful and happy day.

Incorporate flowers in various ways

Weddings are special moments for couples and the guests they invite to share their happiness on their big days. Beautiful weddings require substantial planning, as every last detail must be considered for couples to enjoy the wedding of their dreams. Flowers play a big role in many weddings, and couples can add beauty and ambiance to the event by using floral arrangements in various ways. Modern floral arrangements are stunning, and many couples may not know that herbs, spices and flowers have been used in weddings for centuries.

Today, flowers are used to decorate wedding venues, impart sweet fragrances and complement formal attire, but in ancient times they were used differently. Flowers were used to bestow good luck on the couple and keep bad omens away. Brides carried

aromatic flowers and spices to keep evil spirits from spoiling the festivities, and some even tucked bulbs of garlic into their bouquets. In ancient Greece and Rome, both the bride and groom wore garlands made out of strong-smelling herbs flowers around their necks or heads. These wreaths were considered gifts of nature, and thus extremely appropriate for a wedding. Traditionally, bridesmaids would be responsible for fashioning these floral components. In ancient Sweden, young girls would carry small bouquets of fragrant herbs down the aisle and the groom would put thyme in his pocket. These aromatics were thought to help keep trolls at bay. Besides warding off spirits or hungry trolls, flowers also served more practical purposes throughout history. During the Middle Ages, people bathed less frequently than they do today.

Bathing might only have occurred twice a year, once during summer and then again at Christmastime. Because many weddings took place in the spring, flowers were used to mask bodily odors. Not only were flowers and herbs carried, but they also would be sewn into clothing.

Modern brides and grooms may no longer see their wedding days as times for opportunistic evil spirits. But that doesn't mean that couples cannot borrow from ancient traditions and incorporate flowers into their weddings in various ways.

- Wreaths and garlands: Ask the florist to weave small flower buds, berries and vines to a headband, wreath or piece of twine so that the bride and groom can wear these flowers in the way they were worn by ancient Greeks and Romans. When coupled with Grecian-styled wedding

gowns, brides can look like beautiful goddesses on their wedding days.

- Fragrant favors: Tuck dried rose petals and other fragrant flowers into sachets that are embroidered with the wedding date and couple's names. Guests can use these sachets to keep clothings smelling fresh in drawers or as subtle air fresheners around the house.

- Edible flowers: Ask the caterer to make meals flower-friendly by including some edible blooms in the salad or as a garnish on meals.

- Raining petals: In lieu of bubbles or birdseed, guests can shower the newlyweds with rose petals after the ceremony.

- Memorial: Some couples like to honor departed family members. Floral arrangements with small placards can make for fitting memorials.

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Choosing a hotel for wedding guests

As engaged couples compile their guest lists, many might realize their friends and family are spread out across the country, if not the world. Technology has made it easier than ever before to stay connected to faraway loved ones, and engaged couples no doubt have a handful of guests on their lists who will need lodging when the wedding weekend arrives.

Many hotels cater to wedding guests, so finding a hotel should not be too difficult. However, finding the right hotel requires couples to consider a host of factors.

• **Location:** Location is arguably the most important consideration when choosing a wedding hotel. Hotels that are close to transportation hubs such as airports or train stations will be a welcome relief to guests who traveled far and wide to make it to your wedding. But hotels located in close proximity to your ceremony and reception sites will also be appreciated, especially come the end

of the reception when guests who danced the night away will want to return to the hotel as quickly as possible. If the wedding reception is far from the nearest airport or train station, try to find a hotel close to the reception site so guests don't feel like they have been traveling all weekend long.

• **Attractions:** Attractions are another important factor to consider when choosing a hotel for your wedding guests. Brides- and grooms-to-be will be busy throughout the weekend, but wedding guests who arrive in town on Friday for a Saturday ceremony will have lots of free time on their hands. Unless your wedding weekend is intended to be a weekend retreat for you and your guests, try to find a hotel in a lively neighborhood with plenty of nearby attractions so guests have something to do in the days and hours before the wedding.

• **Cost:** Many hotels offer discounted

rates to wedding guests, so couples should expect to do some negotiating before making a final decision regarding their wedding hotels. Travel is expensive, so if your list includes a lot of out-of-town guests, try to find the most affordable rate without settling for unsightly accommodations. Guests will appreciate the cost savings, and some might be more inclined to attend the wedding if the lodging is a bargain.

• **Transportation:** Another thing to consider when arranging lodging for out-of-town guests is transportation to and from the wedding. Many hotels offer shuttle service for wedding guests, which can save guests the added expense of renting cars to get around on the day of the wedding. Couples may need to foot the bill for hotel shuttle service, though some hotels include the service if enough guests book under a certain wedding party. Some hotels even offer airport shuttle service, which can save guests even more money.

Couples hosting many out-of-town guests for their weddings should do their best to find a hotel that's affordable, accommodating and close to their wedding venues.

Wedding day memorial ideas

Weddings are momentous occasions that are full of happy sentiments. But for couples who recently lost loved ones, an undercurrent of sadness may make wedding ceremonies and receptions somewhat bittersweet.

Loss touches everyone at one point or another, but it can be particularly sorrowful when the loss of a loved one occurs close to couples' wedding day. Even though it can be challenging to acknowledge that someone close is no longer around to participate in a wedding, there are plenty of ways for couples to express their heartfelt sentiments for lost loved ones on their wedding days.

• **Establish a memory table.** A memory table is a place where you may put a photo of a loved one or items he or she may have given you that mean something special.

• **Keep a memento close by.** Sew something symbolic of your lost loved one into your wedding gown or tuck it into a pocket of your tuxedo so you know he or she is always nearby.

• **Reserve an empty chair.** Keep a chair at the ceremony and the reception empty for your departed loved one.

• **Dove or butterfly release.** Symbolize unending love by releasing doves or butterflies in honor of your lost loved one. This can be both a touching tribute and also a beautiful spectacle that couples and their guests will remember forever.



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Throw a casual wedding to remember

Elegant, lavish weddings provide moments couples will remember for years to come. But while such storybook ceremonies and receptions remain popular, casual affairs are gaining popularity.

According to the bridal resource *The Knot*, more and more couples are opting for less pageantry and more laid back style when planning their weddings. For those who prefer something more intimate and more personalized, casual weddings may be

right on target.

There are many advantages to having a "luxé with less" wedding, including the ability to break molds and impart more of the couple's personality into the event.

Another advantage is the price tag. The average U.S. wedding, according to *The Knot 2014 Real Weddings Study*, costs \$31,213. In some urban areas, particularly New York City, average costs are three times that amount. Golden Girl Finance, a leader

in financial digital media, has found that Canadian weddings average \$31,000 with honeymoon included. Although wedding costs have gone up, the average number of wedding guests has gone down. As such, certain couples might look to rein in other aspects of their wedding.

Transforming the festivities into a casual affair can help keep the overall budget low while still allowing for an exciting and enjoyable event. To put casual plans into motion, consider these ideas to help the wedding vision come to fruition.

Venue

Catering halls and other reception

sites do a wonderful job of meeting the needs of their clientele. However, food and beverage costs are often the most expensive wedding expense. To reduce the per-guest cost and also incorporate some variety into their wedding days, couples can consider a venue change. Look for public locations that allow couples to hire their own caterer, which may be a favorite restaurant or specialty food shop. The cost per person may decrease dramatically from the venue costs.

Changing the venue also enables couples to pick unique spots that may hold special meaning to them. For example, couples can choose the site of their first date or the location where their proposal took place.

Contrast

Enjoy a casual, free-spirited wedding that incorporates some aspects of formality in an off-beat way. Think about serving fast food, such as fried chicken or pizza, on fine china. Those wearing tuxedos and gowns can opt for casual footwear, such as athletic shoes. Place wildflowers in crystal vases. These are just some methods to give a rich feel without removing the fun element.

Personal touches

Menus or wedding programs printed at home in a fun font can set the casual tone couples are looking for. Look for eclectic fabrics to use as gift tags or napkin holders. Hand-painted signs or a hodge-podge of picture frames can display pertinent information, such as itineraries or seating arrangements. Encourage friends or family to contribute a favorite menu item to the food offerings. A home-baked dessert can be delicious and budget-friendly.

Wardrobe

Clothing often indicates the formality of an occasion. Everyone from the wedding party to the guests can dress down. Sundresses can

replace taffeta bridesmaids' gowns. Guys can opt for tailored sports coats with jeans. Guests may feel comfortable in less formal attire that facilitates dancing and mingling.

Casual weddings are becoming more popular as many couples are playing down the party for various reasons.

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Successful toasts help shape social events

A toast is a drink raised in the health or honor of someone. Such salutes are typically accompanied by some heartfelt words or tokens of advice. Toasts are a common component of social gatherings, including retirement parties, milestone birthdays and weddings.

Toast of the town

It's difficult to pinpoint who originated the practice of toasting. Several ancient societies would raise a glass in honor of idols or special guests. Ancient Greeks offered libations to the gods as a part of ritualistic practices and also as a point to drink to each other's good health. Ancient Romans at one point instituted a practice that all people must drink to Emperor Augustus at each meal.

The term "toast" has an interesting history. Dating back to the 16th century, "toast" refers to a piece of toasted bread. A piece of toast was commonly added to wine during this time because wine was quite inferior in quality then compared to modern vintages. Stale bread was placed into the jug to soak up acidity and improve the flavor. The wine also improved the palatability of the old or spiced bread. According to National Geographic magazine, by the 18th

century, the term "toast" had been transferred from the floating piece of bread to the person honored by the toast. Eventually, "toast" represented the drink raised or the words offered with the gesture.

Prepare for a toast

Toasts can be off-the-cuff remarks shared in the moment, but for many special events, they should be prepared well in advance. Nowadays, some toast-givers devote extra time to preparing toasts, particularly because they know these sentiments can live on indefinitely on social media. Giving a toast can induce anxiety, but some nerves can be relieved simply by doing one's homework and not procrastinating.

Writing tips

A person giving a toast is trying to gain the attention of a group of people who may not be very attentive. These tips can improve the content of the toasts and their delivery.

- Keep 'you' out of it. This toast is not about you. It's about the person you are honoring. Therefore, do not put any self-congratulatory messages in the toast. Make it all about the person — even beginning the toast with that person's

name.

- Hook people in. Open the toast with a good joke or anecdote that will help introduce the person of honor. For example,

Jake is a great guy because he's the type of person who will offer to meet you at your dorm room at 2 a.m. with pizza and beer to get you through a study session. Too bad he has a horrible sense of direction and repeatedly shows up at the wrong door.

- Tell a story. Reference the person in the

toast, other audience members, and even yourself if you can be painted in a self-deprecating light.

- Keep it short. This is a toast, not a monologue. Be brief so that the audience doesn't lose interest. Set a five-minute limit.

- Wrap it up. Conclude the toast by tying the story back to the introduction and making sure to include the audience once more. This will help you get the biggest laughs and applause.



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Master the wedding save-the-date

Many couples' weddings take more than a year to plan. Couples want all of the special people in their lives to witness their vows, and giving guests advance notice can ensure as many loved ones as possible attend the ceremony.

To be certain that guests have ample notice to clear their schedules, many couples now turn to save-the-date cards, which announce weddings well in advance of the actual wedding day. Save-the-date cards once were reserved only for weddings that required travel or special circumstances, such as destination weddings. But such cards have now become commonplace for all weddings. That's because many people plan vacations or business trips anywhere from four to six months in advance. Busy people require plenty of notice to include this important date on their calendars, particularly when wedding dates fall during popular travel seasons or around the holidays.

Save-the-date cards are typically mailed six to eight months prior to the wedding, though some are sent as early as a year before the big day. Once a date and a location is secured, save-the-dates can be ordered and mailed.

Save-the-date cards require couples to assemble their guest lists well in advance of the wedding. The leading bridal

resource The Knot notes that everyone who will get a wedding invitation should also receive a save-the-date card. There's no turning back once cards are sent, so couples will need to be certain everyone they want to attend is getting advanced notice.

It's acceptable to mail save-the-date cards even if some wedding day details are still up in the air. Guests really only need to know the date and location of the wedding. Couples also can use the save-the-date card to direct invitees to a wedding website where guests can learn the details of the wedding as they unfold.

RSVP information does not need to be included on the save-the-date card. Save-the-date cards are much less formal than invitations, so couples can have fun with them. They can showcase couples' clever personalities or funny quirks. Keep in mind it is in poor taste to mention gifts or registries on save-the-date cards. There will be plenty of time to direct guests to registries later on. Couples are increasingly turning to save-the-date cards when planning their weddings to make sure busy friends and family will have enough time to make plans to attend their weddings.



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Different roles for the father of the bride

Popular movies and televisions shows give the impression that the job of the father of the bride in a wedding is ultimately about making sure the festivities are adequately funded. In the movies, fathers fret about the costs of everything from flowers to photos. But gone are the days when the father of the bride bankrolls his daughter's entire wedding, on average, the bride's parents contribute 43 percent of the total cost of a wedding; the bride and groom contribute another 43 percent; the groom's parents spend 12 percent; the remaining 2 percent of the budget is paid for by family members or friends. That frees up Dad for other roles in wedding planning. With some creativity, couples can find ways to incorporate the father of the bride into the festivities in even more productive ways.

• **Wedding sites:** Assign dear old dad the important task of looking at potential wedding reception sites prior to visiting them yourself. He may have certain connections through work or attended business or leisure occasions at catering halls and other venues. Dad's connections can pay off. Let him impart his negotiating skills and find the best deals with the ideal backdrop for the festivities.

• **Wardrobe:** Let your father assist the best man and other groomsmen in securing their tuxedos or other wardrobe essentials. Dad also can step in and return rented items following the wedding.

• **Beverages:** Dad may be fitting to keep tabs on what is occurring at the bar during the reception, ensuring that guests' needs are being met. He also can keep an eagle eye trained on anyone who may have overindulged and needs to take a break.

• **Speech:** Give your father an opportunity to shine by letting him make a speech. Remember, this is a momentous day for Dad as well, as he may be trying to come to terms with his daughter starting a new life.

• **Father-daughter song:** Let Dad pick father-daughter song, and go with his choice even if you had something else in mind.

• **Ceremony:** Even if you prefer a less traditional wedding ceremony, let your father walk you down the aisle. This will likely be a moment he'll remember for years to come.

Expand the father of the bride's role in the wedding by assigning him tasks where he can put his style, experience and excitement to good use.



Make the first dance even more special

Donna Summer may have sung about making the most of life with her song "Last Dance" in the 1970s, but during a wedding reception most of the focus is on the first dance of the evening when the newlyweds take to the dance floor for the first time after tying the knot. Not only does the first dance give the couple an opportunity to shine on the dance floor, but it also can help set the tone for the reception to follow.

A couple's first dance is significant. Traditionally, the first dance was performed to a slow waltz, but now the first dance is not governed by any rules. Many couples like to push boundaries or get creative with their first dances, and this can make the wedding even more memorable. In fact, some couples enroll in dance classes or enlist the help of choreographers to ensure an epic opening dance number. Social media is full of videos of innovative couples performing spot-on dance routines from classic dance movies like "Dirty Dancing" or beautifully choreographed dances to popular first dance songs such as "At Last" or "Can't Help Falling in Love."

Whether a couple wants to perform an intricate tango or simply wants to sway to the music on the first dance, here are some pointers to keep in mind.

• **Choose a wedding song that has meaning.** It may be fun to do a dance routine to DNCE's "Cake by the Ocean,"

but remember your first dance song will forever be linked to your life as a couple. Select a song that has deep meaning to you. Read over the lyrics to make sure it's an appropriate wedding song.

• **Tame those nerves.** Practicing is a way to feel more confident in your steps, and that will help keep nerves at bay. Many couples experience a bit of stage fright. Just keep in mind that these friends and family are at the wedding to support you and not judge your dance moves.

• **Choose an uncomplicated routine.** If dancing is not your strong suit, select an easy song that allows you to simply sway back and forth and move around minimally. Dancing takes practice, but with that practice even the self-professed "worst dancer" can cut an impressive rug.

• **Work with a professional.** If you desire something more intricate for the first dance and you have the budget to pay for some dance lessons, go for it. An instructor can take you through dance basics or help you choreograph a more polished piece.

First dances are memorable moments at wedding receptions. Guests can't wait to hear the song couples choose, and some couples exceed guests' expectations with their impressive moves.



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To Have & To Hold

How to build your wedding budget



Couples engaged to be married have a lot on their plates as they begin planning their weddings. Whereas tradition once demanded parents of the bride pay for a couple's wedding, nowadays more and more engaged couples are completely or partially financing their own wedding. That means prospective brides and grooms must develop wedding budgets that won't ensure their first act as Mr. and Mrs. is paying down debt.

In its 2015 Real Weddings Study, online bridal resource The Knot found that many couples still receive substantial financial support from their parents to pay for their weddings. The survey found that, on average, the bride's parent's contributed 44 percent of the overall wedding budget in 2015, while couples financed 43 percent (the remaining 13 percent was financed by the groom's parents and additional sources). Couples who hope to follow that formula or pay for their weddings on their own can heed the following tips to build wedding budgets that won't break the bank but will still ensure a day to remember forever.

- **Examine your collective finances.** Few couples know the details of each other's finances before getting engaged. While some may still hesitate to share their personal financial information upon getting engaged, an open and honest discussion and examination of each person's finances is the only way to develop a realistic wedding budget that both partners can live with. Once couples know what they can contribute, they can then consult their parents to determine if their mothers and fathers are intending to contribute.

- **Develop a preliminary guest list.** A preliminary guest list can give couples an idea of how large and expensive their weddings will be. According to the Real Weddings Study, the average cost per wedding guest in 2015 was \$237. While that cost can vary greatly depending on geography and other

factors, couples should keep that figure in mind when drafting their guest lists. If need be, keep costs down by trimming the guest list so it includes only close family members and friends.

- **Don't count on gifts.** Many couples justify runaway wedding budgets by telling themselves that they will ultimately get the money back via wedding gifts. While many guests will give financial gifts, counting on such windfalls is a recipe for accruing debt. Do not build potential wedding gifts into your wedding budget. If you do so and your expectations fall short, you could be facing considerable debt upon returning home from your honeymoon.

- **Gather quotes before choosing where to tie the knot.** Where couples get married will have a great impact on how much money they will spend on

their weddings. For example, the Real Weddings Study found that, in 2015, the average wedding in Manhattan cost couples slightly more than \$82,000, while the average Alaskan wedding cost just over \$17,000. Venues within the same city can vary greatly with regard to pricing and offerings as well, so couples should give themselves ample time to gather quotes and find an affordable venue they like.

- **Build extra costs into your budget.** When determining a budget you can live with, remember to include a little extra for unforeseen costs. Weddings are large undertakings, and it's reasonable to expect some unforeseen costs to arise. Building such costs into your initial budget will make these unforeseen circumstances that much easier to handle.

Budgets can help couples stay on track and avoid debt as they plan their weddings.



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To Have & To Hold

Wedding transportation tips

Weddings are momentous events for the couple tying the knot as well as all of the friends and family invited to share in the big day.

Before couples can tie the knot and cut a rug at their receptions, everyone, couple and guests included, must arrive at the location (or locations if the ceremony site differs from the reception area). Though arranging wedding day transportation can be difficult, there are ways to make the process go more smoothly for guests and bridal party members.

Determine your needs

Before a transportation plan can be made, couples must first map out their needs. Everything should be built around the ceremony. Once the ceremony time has been set, the rest of the day can be arranged around that time.

Determine how much time is needed to travel from the ceremony to the reception area. Allocate enough time before the cocktail hour to allow for traffic, photos and any other needs that may take up time. Couples do not want anyone, included themselves, to feel rushed.

Once the timing has been

orchestrated, couples can figure out exactly which types of transportation will be required.

Book personal transportation first. Happy couples must make their own transportation their top priority. Arrange for the couples' transportation between five and seven months in advance of the wedding. It could be preferable to book it even further in advance if a couple is getting married around a holiday or during prom season when limousines and party buses are in high demand. Remember, unless the bride-to-be plans to be seen by her groom, couples will need separate transportation to the ceremony site. Factor multiple vehicles into the wedding transportation budget.

Explore your personality. Brides and grooms have many transportation options at their disposal. If a limousine doesn't add the spark of creativity they desire, they can opt for a VW bus or a retro roadster. Outdoor enthusiasts might want to ride off on horseback, while easy riders might prefer to rev up the engine on a Harley-Davidson. Couples

should never feel penned in by tradition, especially when something else makes them feel remarkable and the budget allows for it.

Have your getaway car ready. Couples generally opt to arrive to the wedding and reception in style, but take their own vehicles or cabs home afterward. This requires some advanced planning. Enlist the help of friends to park the return-trip car in a convenient location. Check with the catering hall to see if a vehicle can be left in their lot overnight. Otherwise, arrange to grab a ride home with friends or family.

Consider others' needs

Have the names and phone numbers of taxi or ridesharing services available for those who may not be able to drive after the party. Elderly or disabled guests might appreciate prearranged transportation as well. Although couples can arrange for transportation as a courtesy to others, they don't need to make arrangements for everyone.

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To Have & To Hold

'I do,' take two: Guide to a second marriage

Couples are returning to the altar in increasing numbers, as second and third weddings are becoming ever more popular. Pew Research Center indicates that, as of 2014, 64 percent of divorced or widowed men have remarried, compared with 52 percent of previously married women. Lavish second weddings were once uncommon, but that trend is also shifting. Couples who are taking another crack at marriage are tying the knot with renewed vigor and with weddings that may rival some first-timers'.

Men and women who are remarrying after divorce or being widowed may not know how to approach planning their upcoming marriage. The following are some guidelines to making the wedding sequel a success.

Wardrobe

Couples who have been married before often find that they have more leeway with regard to their wedding wardrobes than they did when tying the knot for the first time. Brides may choose something less traditional than a long, white dress. In fact, this can be a time to let loose and select something that is festive or even funky. This also may provide a great opportunity to choose clothing styles from different cultures or ties into one's heritage. This freedom also allows brides to broaden their horizons with regard to where to buy their wedding wardrobes.

Grooms may opt for something more casual than a tuxedo or coordinate with their brides-to-be so they are on the same creative page. Colored tuxedos and vintage suits are acceptable, even though such attire might have raised a few eyebrows the first time around.

Guest list

The guest list doesn't have to be a source of anxiety. Others will understand that there may be a mixture of people at a second wedding. Children from previous marriages as well as divorced spouses or former parents-in-

law are not out of the question. Even if exes will not be included, make sure they know about the nuptials in advance of others. It's common courtesy, and it can help head off feelings of ill-will.

Some couples choosing to tie the knot again scale back the size of the wedding this time around, feeling something smaller and more intimate — with only the closest of friends and family — is more suitable.

Registries and wedding gifts

Considering couples who have been married previously likely have many of the housewares and items for daily living that first-timers may not, registering for these gifts is not necessary. What's more, some of the same guests may have been present at first marriages and gifted them. In lieu of gifts, couples may ask guests to donate to a specific charity or forgo gifts altogether.

Vows

Couples can use experience to draft vows that have personal meaning to their unique situations and make the wedding ceremony even more special. People getting married again can impart their own personalities into the ceremony and party to follow. There are no hard rules governing second weddings, so couples can plan their weddings with good times in mind.



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Add a twist to bouquet toss traditions

Part of what makes weddings such enjoyable events is the many traditions that are built into the day. Tradition lends familiarity to the proceedings and serves as unwritten cues for guests.

Certain traditions invite guest participation, and these can make great memories for both couples and their guests. Just because something is a tradition, however, doesn't mean couples can't put their own unique spin on things.

The bouquet toss is one tradition that may benefit from a little personalization. In a 2015 Jezebel poll of about 4,500 readers, 19 percent supported having a bouquet toss, but 81 percent were against it, suggesting that this tradition is ready for some updating.

The bouquet toss traces its origins to Olde English times. In those days, women used to try to rip pieces of the bride's dress and flowers in order to obtain some of her good luck. To escape from the crowd, the bride would toss her bouquet and run away. The bouquet is tossed to single women with the idea that whoever catches it will be the next to marry.

This may have fulfilled the wants of single ladies in olden times. Today, however, some single women are no longer interested in finding matches at a wedding and view the bouquet toss as a somewhat old tradition. Others dislike the expectation that they stand on the dance floor with the hopes of finding a spouse.

For couples who want to embrace the traditional bouquet toss while giving it a more modern twist, consider the following suggestions.

- **Girls-only dance:** Invite all of the women out on the floor — not just the single ones — and play a female-centric empowerment song or one that mentions ladies having a good time. This puts the emphasis on having fun rather than finding a spouse.

- **Attach a prize to the toss.** To encourage people to participate, explain that the bouquet- and garter-toss winners get prizes — and that the prize has nothing to do with finding a partner.

- **Wedding anniversary countdown:** Invite all of the married couples to the center of the dance floor. The DJ or band can play a



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beautiful love song and count up the years as the song plays. As each year is mentioned, couples leave the dance floor after their most recent anniversary has passed. The last couple on the dance floor marks the couple who has been married the longest. That couple gets to take home the bouquet.

- **Have a bridal piñata.** All guests

can take a turn at hitting a bouquet-shaped piñata. It's fun and entertaining and doesn't discriminate based on age or marital status.

With a little ingenuity, the traditional bouquet toss can be reborn.

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To Have & To Hold

Build a registry to relish

Registries are a wedding tradition, not unlike a couple's first dance or the best man/maid of honor toast. But as practical as wedding registries are, many couples approach their registries with a degree of hesitation, fearful that they might appear presumptuous or simply uncertain about what to include on their lists.

The following tips can help engaged couples build a registry to relish and utilize for years to come.

- Establish an online registry. Whereas guests once had to visit a couple's favorite retailer(s) and ask what remained on their registry, online registries now allow well-meaning family members and friends to peruse potential gifts from the comforts of home and ship gifts directly to the couple. Online registries even indicate which items have already been purchased, saving couples the trouble of returning duplicates while reassuring buyers that their gifts are fulfilling a need or want.

- Share your registry information on your wedding website and stationery. Guests need to know where you are registered, so share that information on your wedding website and include it on your save-the-date cards and invitations.

- Register with multiple retailers. By registering with more than one retailer, couples can give their guests more options to choose from.

- Don't be afraid to list expensive items. While few guests will break the bank to buy wedding gifts, that does not mean couples should avoid including expensive items on their registries. Some couples might feel it's inappropriate, but it can actually prove practical. Many stores offer couples steep discounts on items they listed on their registries that ultimately were not purchased. If

you have your eye on an especially expensive item, include it on your list without worrying about how it may look to your guests, as they will understand when you explain the post-wedding discount you're eligible for.

- Don't limit your registry to expensive items. While it's perfectly acceptable to include expensive items on your registry, remember that variety is the spice of life when adding items to your registry. Include items at a range of price points for guests working with various budgets. Don't hesitate to include low-cost items, as some guests may enjoy building a wedding gift basket with various affordable items from your registry.

- Remember that no gift is too obscure. Thanks to the Internet, just about any item can now be tracked down by ambitious gift givers. If you want to include items that might not be available at run-of-the-mill retailers, choose an online retailer such as Amazon to host one of your registries. Such sites are great places to find specialty items or more obscure offerings that might be out of stock at more traditional retailers.

- Encourage donations. If you are truly hesitant to ask for gifts or you're tying the knot later in life and already have everything you need, encourage guests to donate to a favorite charity in lieu of making a donation.

A wedding registry provides a practical way for well-meaning wedding guests to show their love for brides- and grooms-to-be.

Did you know?

Though the idea that white wedding dresses symbolize virginity and purity is often cited as the reason behind wedding dresses being white, a 2014 exhibit at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London indicated that white wedding dresses were a symbol of wealth and had little, if anything, to do with virginity. The exhibit, titled "Wedding Dresses 1775-2014," noted that, during the 18th and 19th centuries, white wedding dresses indicated a family could afford to buy a dress the bride would wear only once. During that time, white dresses were especially difficult to clean and that made it impractical for any but the wealthy to purchase dresses that would likely never be worn a second time. England's Queen Victoria, who married Albert of Saxe-Coburg in 1840, is widely credited with popularizing the white wedding dress. White dresses remain a traditional and popular choice today, though many brides opt for various shades of white if not an entirely different color.





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To Have & To Hold

Master wedding reception seating charts

After the vows have been exchanged and couples have donned their wedding rings, newly married couples and their guests often enjoy some well-deserved fun at the wedding reception.

Though wedding receptions are all about fun, couples may find it difficult to plan the reception seating arrangements. Such a task requires a good deal of time, sorting through guest responses and an intimate knowledge of which personalities will mesh and which will not. But some patience, diplomacy and even a little help can make the process of planning seating arrangements much easier.

- Group related people together. This relation does not have to be familial. For example, seat work friends together rather than scattering them at various tables. It's easier for wedding guests to mingle when they have some common connection.

- Younger guests are more flexible. Recognize that younger guests are less likely to complain about where they are seated than older guests, so you have more wiggle room when arranging

their tables. They can be placed at tables closer to the dance floor, near the entertainment or by the kitchen door, while older guests might want to be closer to the bride and groom and further away from distractions.

- Seat immediate family members nearby. Seat immediate family members closest to the bride and groom. Guests who fall under the acquaintance category as opposed to the family category can be seated further away.

- Place friends or party animals near the entertainment. Guests who are up for a good party may appreciate being seated close to the dance floor or within arm's length of the refreshments.

- Address mobility concerns. If a guest is elderly or needs to be close to exits or the restroom, make those accommodations.

- Embrace the kids' table. Seat young guests together if there are a number of them. Kids will have more fun sitting with one another than with adults or their parents. And seating kids together makes it easier for servers if children will be ordering from a special menu.



Make every anniversary count

Wedding anniversaries provide opportunities for couples to reflect and relive the excitement of their wedding days. Anniversaries can easily be forgotten amid the hustle and bustle of daily life, but many couples are making concerted efforts to ensure their anniversaries are celebrated as the special occasions they are.

A first wedding anniversary is a special one. Some couples celebrate their first anniversaries by enjoying a piece of wedding cake that has been properly preserved in the freezer. Couples may also dance to their wedding songs or enjoy a nice dinner at a favorite restaurant. The first anniversary also is a time to pull out the wedding video or photo album and reminisce about the wedding day. Anniversaries are a great way for couples to celebrate their time together by stepping away from emails, text messages, work obligations, and even mundane everyday tasks to once again remember a day and moment that changed their lives forever. Those who

may need a little inspiration celebrating their anniversaries can consider these suggestions.

- Have dinner at your reception site. Find out if the reception site, which may be a catering hall or restaurant, serves dinner or brunch. Make a reservation and enjoy celebrating in the spot where the memories all began.

- Take a second honeymoon. Honor wedding memories by booking a second honeymoon at a special location.

- Throw a party. Use your anniversary as an excuse to have friends or family over for a party. Be sure to include your wedding song on the music playlist.

- Create a romantic evening. Rekindle the romance by pulling out all the stops, complete with a nice homecooked meal, candles and mood music.

Wedding anniversaries present ideal opportunities for couples to reminisce about their trip down the aisle and all the entertaining moments from the wedding. They're also opportunities to connect as a couple and focus on each other.

