

# Bridal Guide

## Jewelry Care

*Keep your jewelry pristine before & after the ceremony*

## Fantastic Flowers

*Add beauty & ambience with floral arrangements*

## ...And Much More!

*Wedding planning, save-the-date card tips, and more*



February 8, 2017 • SECTION A

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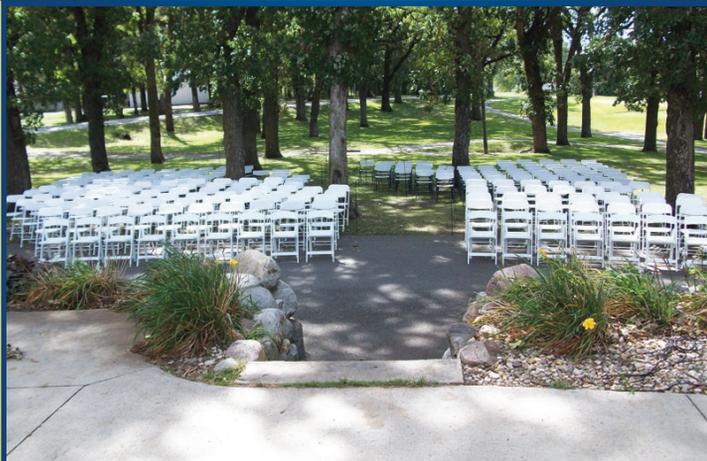
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# Successful toasts help shape social events

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 deities 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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# Keep your gown wedding white

Many brides walk down the aisle in white gowns, which have long been considered the most traditional choice. Wearing white can be a frightening prospect to some brides, who fear that white clearly shows every blemish or stain. Protecting a white dress so it looks pristine on one's wedding day takes a little effort, but such efforts are well worth it.

## Before the wedding

When trying on the gown, be sure that your hands are clean and you are not wearing any makeup. You may want to wear a thin pair of gloves so any oils from your hands are not transferred to the gown. If anyone helps you in and out of the gown, ensure their hands also are clean.

Try on the gown sparingly before the wedding, ideally only for fittings. When you are not trying it on, store it in a protective garment bag until it needs to be steamed just prior to the wedding. Some seamstresses or tailors will hold onto the gown until the final alterations are done and then steam out any wrinkles prior to delivery.

## Wedding day

On the day of the wedding, resist the urge to handle the gown early in the day. The gown should be the last thing you put on during wedding day preparations.

Wait until just before departing for the service to get fully dressed in your gown. Again, make sure your hands and the hands of any helpers are clean. Ask for help so that the gown can be placed gingerly over your

head, avoiding any makeup in the process. Some brides may find it helpful to leave lipstick application for the very last step in getting ready. Should an accident occur, bright lipstick on the white gown can be especially difficult to conceal.

Pack an emergency stain-fighting kit to bring along to the ceremony and reception. This way, should a minor stain occur, it can be treated right away. Use sparingly because you will not know just how the cleaning product will react with the gown's fabric, and overuse may make the stain worse. If possible, test the product on a small swatch of gown fabric prior to use.

## After the wedding

Use caution when removing the gown and then promptly repackage it into its garment bag. After the wedding, take the gown to a professional dry cleaner to have it cleaned and preserved. Then the gown can be used by future generations or simply saved as a keepsake.

White gowns are traditional wedding fixtures. Brides-to-be can keep their gowns looking beautiful throughout and after the wedding.



## 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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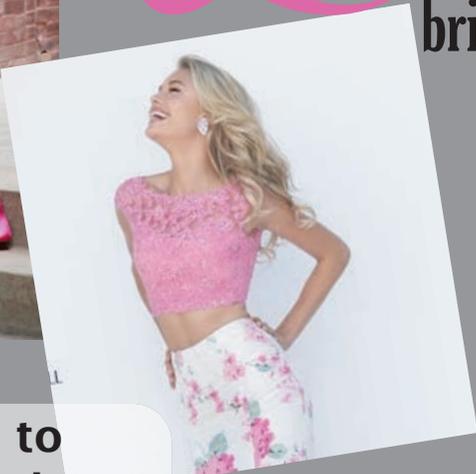
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# Incorporate flowers in various ways

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



Apart from bouquets, flowers can enhance weddings in several different ways and take their cue from historical traditions

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 clothing 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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# Jewelry care and cleaning guidelines

Bridal gowns and tuxedos may get their fair share of attention at weddings, but the subtle details of brides' and grooms' wedding attire also garner guests' attention.

Breathtaking jewelry worn by the bride, groom and members of the bridal party looks great on the day of the wedding and in photos couples will keep for decades to come. Naturally, engagement rings and bridal bands are the shining stars of the celebration. However, other pieces of jewelry also make for cherished accessories for weddings.

Bridal jewelry is an investment worth maintaining. According to a 2013 report by the Jewelers of America, couples spend an average of \$4,000 on engagement rings and more money on wedding bands. Considering several thousands of dollars may adorn the necks, fingers, ears, and wrists of bridal party members, individuals should learn how to keep their jewelry investments looking pristine.

## Remove jewelry during hard work

Exercise caution when wearing jewelry during strenuous activities or when jewelry can be damaged. Also, watch when handling slippery substances such as soaps and oils, as jewelry may fall off and become lost. Instead, remove precious jewelry and store it in a safe location, such as in a jewelry chest or a drawer.

## Use caution with beauty products

Apply lotion, cosmetics, perfume, cologne, and hairspray before putting on jewelry. These substances can discolor certain metals or even damage stones. Prolonged contact with perspiration and bodily oils also can cause discoloration over time. Gently wipe down jewelry with a soft cloth after wearing it to remove oils and sweat.

## Be careful around spas, swimming pools and the ocean

Couples should remove jewelry before partaking in water-based activities on their honeymoons. According to jewelry retailer Zales, chlorinated water can react with the metals found in jewelry, causing color changes and even structural changes. Don't risk jewelry falling off in the ocean. Store it in a secure location before diving in.

## Beware the sun, too

The Gemological Institute of America, Inc. states that sunlight can affect the durability and color of colored gemstones. Over time and in excess, the sun and heat can fade or damage some stones, such as amethyst, topaz and pearls. Other stones can darken with exposure to the sun.



Protect jewelry by cleaning it regularly and exercising caution when engaging in certain activities.

## Clean jewelry with care

Rely on mild detergents and a light touch when cleaning jewelry. Use products specifically designed for jewelry care, and read labels to ensure safety. The International Gemological Institute says seriously soiled jewelry should be professionally cleaned.

## Inspect and know your jewelry

Routinely inspect jewelry to test for any structural issues that can result in breakage or lost stones. Make sure any suspected problems are repaired promptly.

Ensure jewelry will last for years to come. Exercise caution when wearing pieces and clean and care for them properly.

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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.

Kleinfeld Bridal, a premiere New York bridal boutique, says that 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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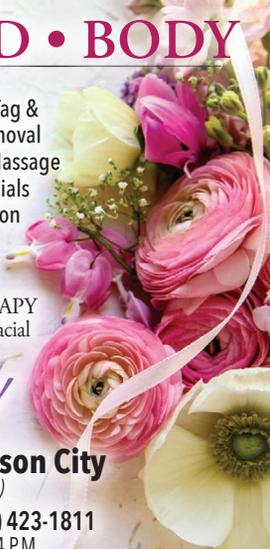
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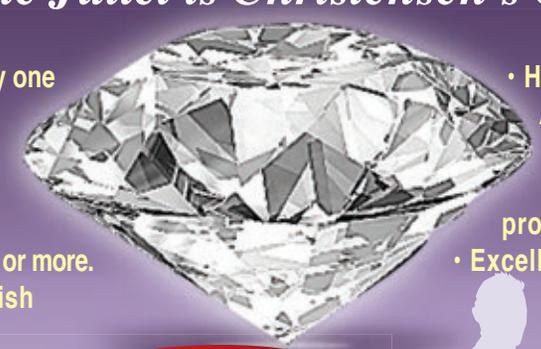
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# Bridal Guide

## Hotel How-To's

*Tips for guests looking for lodging*

## Personalize Your Vows

*Write cherished, memorable vows.*

## ...And Much More!

*Wedding planning, registry tips, and more*



February 8, 2017 • SECTION B

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# Prevent wedding day foot pain

While some couples may get cold feet on their wedding days, there's no reason for anyone, including brides who don high heels in the name of fashion, to endure foot pain.

Foot pain is a common complaint for those unaccustomed to wearing stilettos or formal footwear. Wedding attire is not worn every day, so it's no surprise that wedding footwear may contribute to some aches and pains.

Podiatrists warn that heels between one and two inches in height are the best to maintain foot health. But that heel size does not work for all brides. Brides-to-be, bridesmaids and others can employ these tips to keep their feet pain-free throughout the ceremony and reception.

## Give your feet a break

Swap out a higher heel with a lower one every couple of hours. Do not wait until you start feeling pain to switch to a lower heel or more comfortable shoe.

## Choose shoes that fit and leave a little room

Standing and dancing can cause feet to swell, sometimes as much as one half-size larger. Make sure the shoes you plan to wear to the wedding afford potentially swollen feet a little breathing room.

## Break in the shoes

It's not a good idea to wear a brand new pair of shoes when you know you'll be on your feet most of the day. Instead, purchase wedding shoes several weeks in advance of the event. Wear them around the house with a pair of socks to stretch out straps and enable them to mold to your foot shape. Wearing them in advance also helps identify spots that rub or are likely to cause blisters.

## Slip in a pair of insoles

Stores carry a variety of insoles that can add cushioning, distribute weight and prevent rubbing or chafing of the feet.



## Consider wearing stockings

It's now less of a fashion faux pas to attend formal events with bare legs than it once was, but it may be in your best interest to wear a pair of stockings to a wedding. The thin material will help alleviate rubbing and hot spots from skin-on-shoe direct contact.

## Stretch and soak feet prior and afterward

Wearing heels can put strain on your calves, creating extra pain. Stretch your feet and legs whenever possible. And after a long night, make sure a pedicure is one of the first spa experiences you enjoy on your honeymoon.

## Did You Know?

Longevity in marriage is something to be celebrated. Couples who reach fiftieth and sixtieth wedding anniversaries often commemorate those anniversaries with big parties. But there are some around the world who would consider golden anniversary celebrants to still be newlyweds. In December 2015, Karam Chand, 110, and his wife, Kartari Chand, 103, from Bradford, West Yorkshire (originally from India), celebrated their 90th wedding anniversary, becoming the world's longest-betrothed couple. In America, John and Ann Betar, ages 104 and 100, respectively, have been married 83 years as of 2016. The couple eloped in 1932. They have been named one of America's longest-married couples by the Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

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# Hotel How-To:

## Tips for guests looking for lodging

Couples about to tie the knot often arrange for discounted hotel rooms for their wedding guests. Many hotels offer substantial discounts to wedding parties, but some guests and bridal party members might still want to examine their options before booking rooms. The following tips can help guests find the right room so they can enjoy their loved ones' wedding weekends to the fullest.

- **Don't overlook the wedding hotel** Many couples put a lot of thought into the hotel where their guests will be staying. Couples may have already done the legwork with regard to finding a hotel that's closest to the wedding ceremony and receptions sites and still within arm's-length of other attractions guests can enjoy while in town. Give ample consideration to the hotel or hotels affiliated with the wedding prior to beginning your search, even if the hotel is a chain you have never used before or have not liked in the past.

- **Prioritize proximity.** It's important to consider factors aside from cost when searching for a place to stay for a loved one's wedding. The most affordable option is not always the most ideal. Proximity to the ceremony and reception venues should be a priority, as guests won't save much money, if any, if their hotel is so far away from the weekend's activities that they must rent cars or take taxis all weekend.

- **Share rooms to reduce costs.** If the wedding rates are unaffordable, float the idea of sharing rooms with fellow guests. Splitting the cost of a double room instead of booking a single room by yourself can save substantial amounts of money. And staying in the hotel with many of the other guests will make you feel like you are not missing out on anything during your stay.

- **Look for lower rates in the wedding hotel.** Room rates are locked in once couples choose a particular hotel or hotels, but guests might be able to find more affordable rates at the same hotel by waiting to book and perusing discount hotel websites and apps.



## Different roles for the father of the bride

Popular movies and television 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. The Knot's "2014 Real Wedding Survey" reported that, 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.

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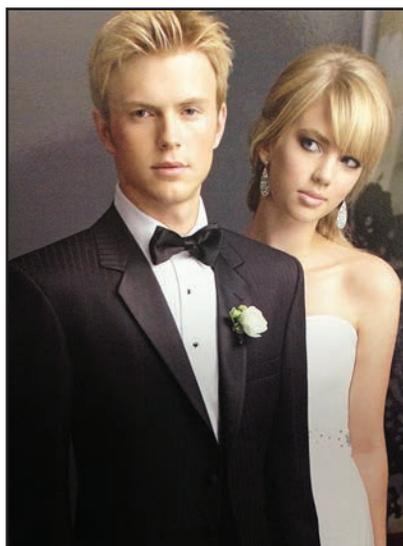
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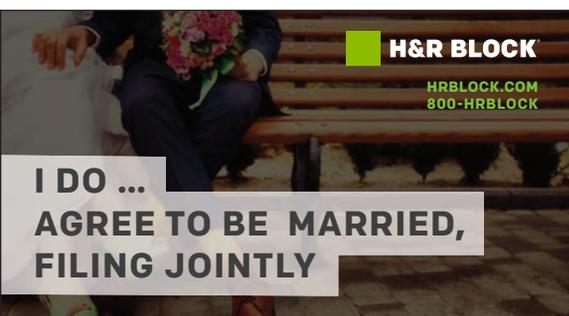
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2. Notify the IRS and Post Office if you change your mailing address by filing Form 8822, Change of Address, available at [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8822.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8822.pdf).
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4. Stay organized. Locate your tax returns from last year and keep them in a secure place. Keep important documents that you'll need to file your joint return in one location.
5. Get a tax checkup. If you have questions about how marriage could impact your tax return, ask your tax advisor for help or check out H&R Block's tax tips and calculators at [www.hrblock.com](http://www.hrblock.com).

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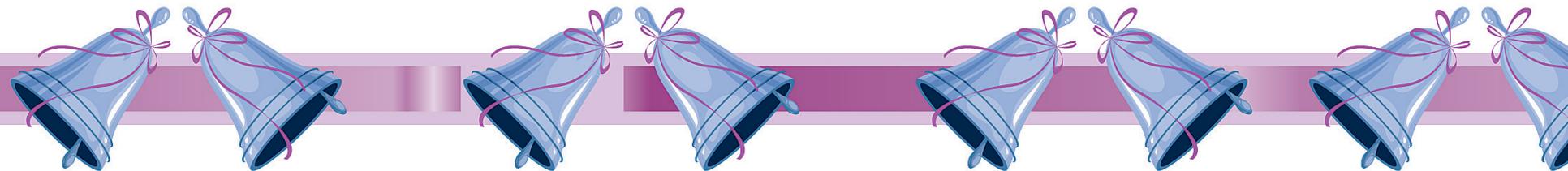
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# Selecting a comfortable wedding gown

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 decollete or show off an hour-glass 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.

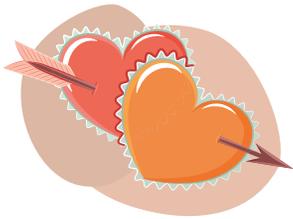
- **Move around in the gown.**

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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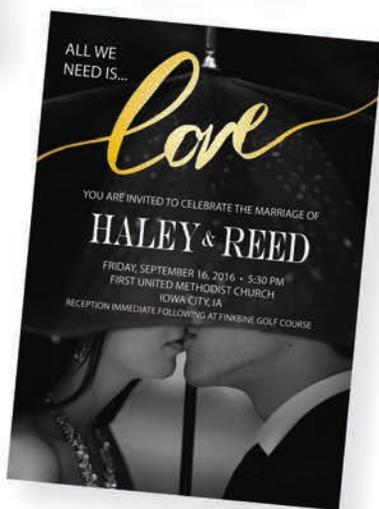
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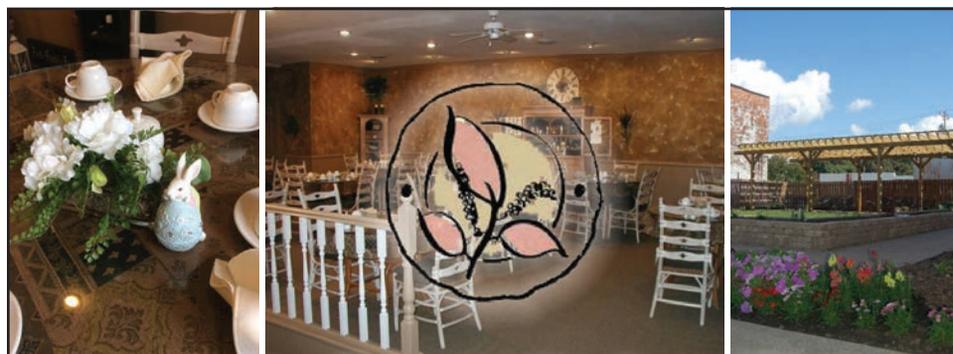
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# Build a registry to relish

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. Try to include one brick-and-mortar store, ideally one with a national presence, so guests who prefer to shop in-person won't be forced to buy online.

- **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.



## Tips for a special mother/son dance

Weddings celebrate the unions of happy couples ready to pledge their lives to each other. In theory, the wedding day spotlight should be shared equally by brides and grooms. But brides often eclipse their grooms, as guests are drawn to stunning bridal gowns.

Though grooms might play second fiddle for much of their wedding days, there is one moment when all eyes are on the groom and a special lady in his life. The mother/son dance is a wedding tradition that many grooms embrace as their opportunity to show their mothers how much they love and appreciate them. The mother/son dance is an ideal time to create a special moment, and the following are some tips to personalize the dance.

- **Precede the bride and her father.** Make

your own tradition and switch up the timing of the dances. Be the first to take a spin on the dance floor and set the tone for the other traditional songs to come.

- **Create a photo montage.** Work with an entertainment company or photographer to create a slideshow of images showing you and your mother together and separately. If possible, include some photos that were shot during the wedding ceremony, asking the photographer to capture the look on your mother's face during pivotal moments of the ceremony.

- **Show off your dance skills.** One increasingly popular wedding trend is for fathers and brides to choreograph the father/daughter dances. Grooms and their mothers can follow suit, particularly if you both have

some stellar dance moves.

- **Let Mom choose the song.** Give your mother the opportunity to express her sentiments to you, as mothers of the groom do not typically toast their sons during weddings or even rehearsal dinners.

- **Invite other son / mother duos up.** If the idea of dancing alone with your mother is a bit intimidating, give other mothers in attendance an opportunity to share the spotlight. Celebrate all mothers in attendance, encouraging any mothers and sons who are present to dance together.

Grooms may not garner the bulk of guests' attention on their wedding days. But they can take steps to make their special dances with their mothers more memorable and unique.

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# Treat guests to personalized vows

Couples who choose to write their own wedding vows recognize how special such personal gestures are. Writing one's own vows can impart a personalized and special touch to the ceremony. But as anyone who has stared down a blank piece of paper or blinking cursor can attest, a case of writer's block may encourage couples to abandon the idea of writing their own vows.

Writing vows can be nerve-wracking. Many couples are unaccustomed to speaking in front of crowds, and then there is the

challenge of turning life-altering feelings into language that will appeal to the masses.

But couples struggling with their vows need not throw in the vow-writing towel. With some practice and guidance, anyone can write cherished vows that will be remembered for all of the right reasons for years to come.

- **Skip the schtick.** Jokes may pop up in speeches throughout the evening, but wedding vows can be your chance to truly speak from the heart. Humor may come across as insincerity. Rather, list the words

that describe your feelings for your future spouse, and build on that.

- **Tell a story.**

If you need inspiration, look to a moment in your relationship when you really knew this was the person with whom you wanted to share your life. Relay the story, but keep it brief. Try to be as specific as possible, and recognize that it's acceptable to be playful with your words. When it's really coming from the heart and not the head, you'll know it.

- **Borrow from traditional words.**

Take traditional vows and tweak them to make them your own. This works especially well for those who have trouble getting started or are unsure of which format to follow. Incorporate key words, such as "partners," "love," "friends," "joy," and "forever."

- **Be sure the officiant is on board.**

Depending on the type of ceremony, the officiant may have final say over what can or cannot be included in your vows. Religious ceremonies, for example, may be limited to certain scripture readings and traditional vows. Before you devote any time to writing vows, ensure that it's

alright to include them. Otherwise, save personalized sentiments for a special toast at the wedding reception.

- **Decide on a mutual structure for the vows.**

If you and your spouse will not be writing the vows together, agree on a format that you both will follow. Otherwise, you might be writing about your unending love, and he or she may be promising to keep updated on favorite sports teams or television programs. You want the tone and style of the vows to be cohesive.

- **Dig deeper.** Look into the future and project how you hope your life to be in 10 or 20 years. Explain all of the reasons you want to be together for the duration.

- Read the vows several times. Read over your work and make sure the language is clear and there are no glaring errors. It may take a few versions to get the final version right where you want it.

- **Get a second opinion.** Ask someone you trust to listen to the vows and offer feedback. This needs to be a person who will be honest and not just tell you what you want to hear.

Personalized vows can add an extra special touch to wedding ceremonies.

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