



2014

WEDDING GUIDE

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Wednesday, January 22, 2014

Breaking Tradition

Wedding showers continue to break from tradition

Rain showers on a wedding day may bring good luck, but they are seldom coveted.

However, a different type of shower altogether is often highly anticipated and can help couples feel like they're one in a million.

Wedding showers are gift-giving parties held for couples about to get married. The custom began in the nineteenth century and continues to present day, primarily in North America and Australia. Guests traditionally "shower" the bride-to-be with all the necessities (and some fun extras) that she will need after she ties the knot. These gifts will help the soon-to-be-married couple establish a home together.

Bridal showers are steeped in tradition, but today's bridal showers continue to veer off the beaten path. Nowadays, bridal showers feature fun and games much like a party having nothing to do with a wedding. TheKnot.com, a Web site that

aims to help couples plan their weddings and all the events leading up to the big day, identifies these key trends in modern bridal showers.

• **Couples' showers:** Modern couples who like to be all-inclusive are now planning bridal showers that cater to mixed audiences. Dubbed a "couple shower," these parties include female and male friends and relatives. Gifts are still the main focus of the event, but they're varied and include guy-friendly items within the mix of household goods.

• **Power showers:** Many are familiar with the terms "man cave" and "bro-mance," but few may know that there are now wedding showers geared entirely around the groom. Known as "power showers," these events focus on the groom-to-be, who is showered with a bevy of gadgets and



GIFTS ARE still important, but new trends in wedding showers have shifted the focus of these events.

power tools that are certain to stock his future garage. The parties are decidedly more testosterone-friendly and can include golf outings, poker nights or action movie flicks as possible themes.

• **Destination/activity showers:** Rather than having guests hang around a restaurant watching gift after gift get unwrapped, some bridal parties opt to

throw an activity shower. These showers are focused around a particular activity. For example, ladies may be treated to a day at the spa. Other ideas include horseback riding at a stable or a day at the ballpark. Because hosting an activity shower for dozens of people may get expensive, these types of showers may be reserved for only your closest friends and family members.

• **Bride-involved showers:** The idea of walking into a room and being surprised by friends and family members is appealing to some brides-to-be but not everyone. Some brides prefer not to be surprised by a shower and actually would like to have a role in the planning of the party. However, this is delicate ground on which to tread, considering there may be differences

over where the party is held and even the overall experience of the party. These type of showers should be discussed before any plans are made, and tasks should be delegated in accordance with those plans.

It is customary for a bridal shower to take place before a wedding. But new trends have emerged that are shaking up the way showers are planned and held.



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Wedding Invitations Tip Sheet

Wedding invitations often provide guests with a first glimpse of a wedding's style. Invitations also may serve as the means by which distant friends and relatives find out about a couple's pending nuptials if a formal announcement was not made. Amid the flourishes of calligraphy and impressive paper stock is information that speaks to the importance of the day when two people will be joining their lives together. Guests will learn not only the time and the place of the wedding from the invitation, but also the formality of the event and the scope of the party that will follow. Couples should keep certain things in mind as they begin to design their wedding invitations.

• **Have a good idea of your potential guest list.** Before shopping for wedding invitations, it is key to have a strong idea of just how big the wedding will be and how many guests will be invited.

This way you will know how many invitations you will need. Invitations vary in price, so cost may be a consideration if your guest list is extensive.

• **Decide on the formality of the wedding.** Will you be hosting a black tie affair, or will it be a casual gathering at the shore? Guests infer many things about the wedding from the invitations, which should match the formality of the event in style and the sentiments expressed.

An ornate invitation written with classic wording suggests a more formal affair, while a whimsical invitation with less formal wording could indicate a more laid-back event.

• **Choose a legible font and text color.** Your invitation

may look beautiful, but it may prove ineffective if it is difficult to read. Do not risk guests misinterpreting the date or the location because they cannot read the writing on the invitation. Steer clear of pastel or yellow text colors, and remember to have a high contrast between the color of the invitation and the text you are using for easy reading.

• **Dare to be different by playing with invitation sizes and shapes.** Rectangular cards are standard for wedding invitations, but you can explore your creativity by choosing more modern, artsy invitations. Circular invites or scalloped edges can add some whimsy to the wedding mood. Invitations that fold out or are embellished with ribbon or other decorations can be appealing. Just keep in mind that cards that are not the standard shape and size could be more costly to send. Always have the entire wedding invitation weighed and priced at the post office so you will know what the postage will cost.

• **Keep the invitation simple.** It may be tempting to load the invitation with lots of information, but all you really need are the key pieces of information, such as the "who," "what," "where," and "when." Crowding the card will take away from its aesthetic appeal. Most stationers will suggest a separate, smaller insert in the wedding invitation for the



reception information and response card. Never put information such as where you are registered or "no kids allowed." This is material better

reserved for word of mouth or on a wedding Web site.

• **Do some math.** It is important to know your dates so you can receive the invitations on time, mail them out, and give guests enough time to respond. A good rule of thumb is to mail out the invitations at least two months before the wedding. Have an RSVP date of no more than three to four weeks before the wedding, giving ample time to the caterers and accommodating anyone who procrastinates in sending in a response. You will need the final headcount in order to confirm seating arrangements and plan for centerpieces and favors.

• **Handwrite the envelopes.** Your invitation will look more impressive if you address them by hand, rather than printing them off of a computer. If your handwriting is not very neat, consider hiring a professional calligrapher to write out your envelopes.

• **Make it easy for guests to respond.** Be sure to place a stamp on the response card envelope and have that envelope already addressed with your home address so that guests will have no excuses not to mail a response back promptly.

• **Always order extra.** Mistakes happen, and you may need to send out a few extra invitations that you hadn't originally counted. Always order extra invitations just to be on the safe side. And don't forget you will probably want to keep one as a keepsake for yourself.

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Tips for newlyweds about to merge finances

Newlyweds often have a lot on their plates upon returning from their honeymoons.

One of the more critical issues newly married couples must address is their finances and how those finances will be combined going forward.

Combining finances can be a touchy subject for many couples, especially those who had not given much thought to their finances prior to tying the knot.

But there are steps couples can take to make the process of merging finances go more smoothly.

- **Discuss finances early and often.**

Allowing finances to be the elephant in the room is a mistake, as couples do not want to begin their lives together treading lightly around an issue as significant as finances.

Couples should discuss their expenditures and spending habits as early as possible, as one of the biggest hurdles newly married couples must clear is coming to grips with one another's financial habits. If such habits have already been discussed, then developing a financial plan will be much easier once that time comes.

When discussing finances, define both short-term and long-term goals and how each of you can adjust your spending habits to make those goals come true.

- **Pay off any debts.**

The cost of weddings has skyrocketed over the last several decades, and many newlyweds find themselves in a considerable amount of debt upon returning from their honeymoons.

When merging finances, couples should prioritize paying down such debt, as debt is a significant source of stress for newlyweds and long-married couples alike.

Newly married couples with little or no debt should avoid spending above their means in the months after they get married.

Such spending is commonplace, as newly married couples often want to fully furnish their new homes or reward themselves for pulling off their weddings.

But new debt can be just as stressful on a marriage as debt from the wedding, so avoid this potentially problematic pitfall by paying down existing debts with your

newly merged finances.

- **Make note of mutual expenses and open a joint account to pay for those expenses.**

Mutual expenses like mortgage payments, food and utilities should be the responsibility of each partner, and a joint account should be established to handle such expenses. When opening a joint account, discuss how much and how often each partner will contribute money.

One partner might earn considerably more money than another, so work out a reasonable agreement that details how much each partner will contribute each month, and whether such contributions will be made on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis.

- **Make concessions for one another.**

When merging finances, couples often discover that they don't see eye-to-eye on how each person spends money. Couples who successfully merge their finances often note the importance of making concessions with regard to their partners' spending on certain hobbies or luxuries.

As long as those hobbies are not putting couples in debt or jeopardizing their financial goals, couples can make concessions so their partners continue to be happy and enjoy their favorite activities.

Merging finances is an issue that looms for many newlyweds or couples about to tie the knot. Though it's not always easy, merging finances early and discussing goals can ensure newlyweds get off on the right financial foot.

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Choosing the right wedding reception favors

Planning a perfect wedding is no small undertaking. From scheduling venues and hiring vendors to tasting menus, lots of decisions must be made when planning a wedding. But when the pieces fall into place, the entire day can be magical.

One of the final components of weddings are the favors guests will take home with them as mementos of the festivities. Though favors don't require immediate attention, that does not mean couples should wait until the last minute to made decisions regarding their wedding favors.

Brides- and grooms-to-be should not underestimate the importance of handing out wedding favors, a tradition with a rich history. A wedding favor is considered a symbol of good will to guests, and there are many different wedding favors on the market. Finding the right one can take a little work. It is usually a good idea to find something that suits the theme of the wedding and is both long-lasting and practical. Try to avoid anything that is too kitschy.

A couple's budget should be considered when choosing wedding favors. A couple may want to give their guests lavish gifts but should only do so if their budget allows. It may be challenging for couples to

find favors that fit the theme of their wedding, as well as their own personalities and budgets. But it can be done. The following are some favor-finding guidelines.

• Be creative

Wedding favors can be just about anything, so there's no need to stick to Jordan almonds or wine bottle stoppers. The more creative couples are, the more receptive their guests will likely be. For example, for an autumn-theme wedding, fill mason jars with the ingredients for a spiced cake and give the recipe directions on a tag. For a summer wedding, gift guests with a sun and surf survival bag, full of sunblock, a beach towel and sunglasses.

• Complete the theme

Some weddings follow a particular theme from start to finish, and wedding favors should stick with

See FAVORS, Page 18



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Choosing a wedding date wisely

Although a number of couples would prefer to bask in the excitement of their engagement, some couples feel pressured to rush into picking a wedding date.

Choosing a wedding date without giving it much consideration may make things more difficult down the road.

Rather than jumping head first into any decisions, couples should give thought to any and all dates and decide if there are certain times of the year they want to tie the knot or avoid.

Season

When thinking about potential wedding dates, it helps to have a place to start. Some couples find it helpful to start with a particular season and then narrow it down from there. Decide if you prefer the lush greenery of summer or the amazing color spectrum of an autumn afternoon.

Perhaps you envision arriving at the ceremony with a snow-packed landscape amid twinkling holiday lights?

Think about the season when you feel

Many couples find themselves bombarded with questions the moment they become engaged, and perhaps no questions is more common than, “When is the wedding?”

most happy and then determine if that time of year is doable.

Month

Certain months may seem perfect, but not for busy professionals or those with limited vacation time at their disposal.

For example, early spring may not be good for accountants tallying year-end numbers. Teachers may feel most comfortable tying the knot in the summer when they already have days off.

If you run a pool business or a lawn maintenance company, then the summer might not be so good. Keep these factors in mind.

Holidays

Some people would like to tie their wedding day to a particular holiday. Valentine's Day is popular for weddings thanks to the romantic sentiments synonymous with the holiday, while some couples prefer Halloween or Christmas weddings.

Holiday weddings can be exciting, but they also produce significant obstacles that

couples who choose to get married during other times of year don't have to worry about. Guests may not want to travel or spend time away from their families to attend a holiday wedding.

Having a wedding during a holiday may mean competing for vendors and reception spaces. Prices on everything from food to flowers to airline tickets could be higher as vendors cash in on customer demand.

Day of the week

It's less expensive for couples to get married on Fridays and Sundays than Saturday afternoons or evenings. Couples may think that the money saved will be well worth it, but they also should think about how this decision may affect their guests.

A Friday wedding requires people to take off from work or school.

Sunday weddings may be slightly more convenient, but those who have to get back to work on Monday may be tired from late-night festivities. Couples should anticipate

some guests not making it to their weddings when those weddings are not on Saturdays.

Religious constraints

Couples having religious ceremonies should consult with their houses of worship as to which dates are acceptable. Some will not have weddings on days of religious observation. It is wise to consult with a church, synagogue or mosque before booking any other components of the wedding so that you are certain your chosen day is acceptable.

Any available dates

Your wedding date may be dictated by your caterer or wedding hall. If you have a particular venue in mind, you may be limited by their availability.

This is a concession you will need to make if your heart is set on this particular location.

Planning a wedding can be exciting. But the ball cannot get rolling until couples first choose the day they will tie the knot.



Wedding dates to avoid

Some couples are excited by the prospect of hosting their weddings during holiday weekends. After all, having off on a Friday or a Monday provides an extra day for recovery or planning the wedding.

Travel costs and accommodations could be higher around holiday weekends, and some people have family traditions or other plans they may not want to miss during a holiday weekend. Reception sites and vendors may charge higher fees to book a holiday weekend wedding, or they may be full on the dates you request.

Looking ahead to 2015, here are the prominent holidays and when they occur, so you can plan accordingly.

EASTER

Weekend of April 4

MOTHER'S DAY

Weekend of May 9

MEMORIAL DAY

Weekend of May 23

FATHER'S DAY

Weekend of June 20

INDEPENDENCE DAY (CA.)

Wednesday, July 1

INDEPENDENCE DAY (U.S.)

Saturday, July 4

LABOR DAY

Weekend of September 5

COLUMBUS DAY

Weekend of October 10

HALLOWEEN

Saturday, October 31

REMEMBRANCE DAY

VETERANS DAY

Wednesday, November 11

THANKSGIVING

Thursday, November 26

CHRISTMAS

Friday, December 25

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Wedding Cakes

Explore unique cake flavor combinations

A wedding cake is the piece de resistance of the wedding ceremony. Guests anxiously await the unveiling of the cake near the end of the festivities.

Modern cakes are showpieces grander in scale than in years past. As bakers and confectioners hone their skills with fondant, buttercream and gum paste even further, the results are often impressive, awe-inspiring cake designs.

While the look of a wedding cake is certainly important, cakes should not only look good, but taste good as well. Vanilla cake with vanilla buttercream frosting was once the gold standard. But today's cou-

ples are being more adventurous with their wedding cakes and winning rave reviews from guests along the way.

The vast scope of wedding cake flavor choices available to brides and grooms is astonishing. Options may range from the traditional to something adventurous and daring. Keeping in mind that couples will need to please the masses, finding a compromise between plain vanilla and a mocha-chile-coconut surprise is essen-

tial. Otherwise, they risk an unpopular flavor and a lot of wasted, expensive cake.

Some couples shy away from more adventurous cakes because they fear something chocolatey or not white in color will not be well suited to a wedding reception. Such couples should keep in mind that any flavor of cake can be hidden beneath layers of pearly white fondant or royal icing. Therefore, the sky is the limit with regard to flavor combinations.

Those who might want to veer from tradition can consider these clever cake combinations.

- **Lemon cake with vanilla buttercream:** Lemons are tart, juicy and refreshing, helping to cleanse the palate after a rich meal. Lemon cake, with its summery feel, is tailor-made for summer weddings. The flavor is popular enough to



THINK OUTSIDE of the cake box when selecting flavors for the centerpiece of the wedding reception.

appeal to many, but just a little different to add an unexpected zip of flavor.

- **Chocolate cake with chocolate ganache and mocha filling:** True chocolateolics will be hard-pressed to resist such a decadent flavor profile. Chocolate can be sweet and satisfying and a welcome change from the

vanilla cakes commonly served. For traditionalists, the cake can be covered with a white chocolate ganache. Or couples can ask that the cake be adorned with white sugar roses for an eye-appealing contrast. Chocolate cakes covered with autumn hued flowers go over well at fall weddings.

- **Red velvet cake with cream cheese frosting:** Red velvet cake was once a regionally specific staple, but now has grown steadily in popularity across the country. Red velvet has quickly become the new classic, as its vibrant red coloring offers a shock of

See UNIQUE, Page 18

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Negotiation Know-How

How to get the best deals on wedding services

Many engaged couples have grandiose visions of their wedding days. While such visions typically come to fruition, they often do so only after heavy negotiations with the various vendors necessary to turn a dream wedding into a reality.

Many engaged couples have grandiose visions of their wedding days. While such visions typically come to fruition, they often do so only after heavy negotiations with the various vendors necessary to turn a dream wedding into a reality.

Negotiating prices with wedding vendors is something brides- and grooms-to-be may not anticipate, but the process of negotiation is paramount for couples who hope to plan their dream weddings without ruining their budgets. Though vendors vary considerably with regard to their willingness to negotiate, the following are a few tips for couples hoping to get the best deals possible on their wedding services.

• **Prepare, prepare, prepare.** Couples who blindly enter negotiations with wed-

ding venues and vendors are far less likely to get a good deal.

When working with any wedding vendor, whether it's a wedding venue representative, a local florist or a deejay, couples should know what the going rate for the vendor's services are.

Couples who find a venue they like should receive quotes from similar venues before negotiating a rate with the venue they most prefer.

Arming oneself with quotes from competitors increases the chances of receiving a more couple-friendly quote from the venue liked best, as that venue won't want to lose business, especially to one of its chief competitors.

See DEALS, Page 14



COUPLES WHO make the most of the negotiation process with wedding vendors often find it easier to make their dream weddings a reality.

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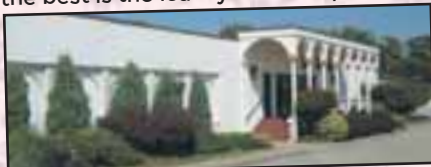
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Top 10 Wedding Cake Questions - Answered!

The wedding cake isn’t just about having a slice of something sweet at the reception, it also gives the bride and groom a chance to express their individual style. And because the cake usually takes center stage for that cake cutting moment, there’s plenty you should know before you pick it out. We spoke with cake expert Amy DeGiulio of Sugar Flower Cake Shop to get the inside scoop on what every bride should know before she picks out her wedding cake.

Q: What should I do before my consultation?

Start thinking about what you want your cake to look like. “Brides don’t have to come with a picture of the cake they want, but the consultation is harder if they come in and don’t have any idea of what they’re looking for,” says Amy. She suggests thinking about shape, colors, and the number of tiers — just enough to get a rough idea. Amy also encourages brides to use lots of adjectives when describing their wedding style.

“If they’re talking about being ‘chic’ and ‘elegant,’ ‘whimsical’ or ‘over-the-top,’ it’s a great way of figuring out what their style really is,” she says.

Q: What should I ask the cake baker during the consultation?

Since you’ve done your homework you’ll have plenty to talk about at your first consultation. If you haven’t seen the cake baker’s work from an online portfolio, ask to see one when you get there.

You should also ask how far in advance the cake is made. “Decorations can be made months in advance, but I bake the day before,” says Amy.

And, as with all of your vendors, after your first meeting you should feel like you



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can trust them with all the details of your wedding day. “You should feel the confidence the baker exudes, and that should help narrow your choices,” says Amy.

Q: How early should I start looking?

This all depends on two things: your priorities and your budget. If the food, especially the cake, is very important to you, then make sure you start your search early to give yourself plenty of time

to choose. “But for most people, about four to six months in advance is great,” says Amy.

If you’re going with a custom design, go about six months in advance to give the baker plenty of time to design and then revise that design based on your input. Bottom line: If you’re paying for a custom cake, make sure you allot yourself enough time to get exactly what you’re looking for.

Q: What should I look for in a cake baker?

“If you have a specific style in mind, you should go to a cake baker who works with that style,” says Amy. For instance, if you want a unique topsy-turvy cake, you may not want to go to a cake baker who specializes in more traditional white wedding cakes and vice versa.

Q: Does a cake baker design a cake from scratch every time?

Not necessarily. This is one of the differences between customizing (starting a design from scratch) and personalizing (slightly altering a preexisting design) your wedding cake.

“As you’re looking through the cake baker’s portfolio, see if you can mix and match certain parts of different cakes,”

Questions

From Page 10

says Amy. “Ask if you can change the color of the ribbon on one that’s in the portfolio as opposed to trying to reinvent the wheel.”

Part of the cost of the cake has to do with how much labor goes into making it. So, if a cake baker has made that type of cake before and knows it won’t be too labor-intensive, you can still request a few minor changes and not break the bank.

Q: Does my cake need to match my wedding colors?

While it’s great to have a wedding color scheme, when it comes to your wedding cake, you may need to back off a bit. Asking for a cake with bright orange or blue frosting may not look that appetizing to your guests — even if the cake does taste great. Instead, Amy suggests you use only the cake decorations to incorporate your wedding colors.

“Use the colors as an accent, but keep the cake white or ivory,” Amy says. “Sometimes, you know, when you have to add food coloring, it does produce an off taste. And though food coloring is edible, if it’s added to your icing, it may not always come out tasting the same.”

If you do want a color, Amy suggests you stick to a flavor that naturally produces that color. For instance, using strawberries or raspberries to have a pink cake or a honey frosting for an ivory cake.

Q: What’s the difference between fondant and buttercream?

Fondant is a smooth cream confection that you often see on the outside of wedding cakes — and make no mistake: It can be a real treat to look at. Despite that, most people don’t actually enjoy the taste.

“Too many times I’ve seen people pick up the icing with a fork and throw away the fondant,” Amy says. And since fondant is usually more expensive than other icing, Amy suggests that budget-savvy brides can skip it entirely. Instead, use buttercream icing.

“With buttercream, you can get that same level of smoothness in the icing, but it’s a much richer, more flavorful taste,” she says. “Plus, you can change out the flavor and have everything from vanilla to fruit.”

Q: Can I make my cake myself?

All right Julia Child, step away from the kitchen. In the days leading up to your wedding, chances are the last thing you’ll want to do is baking a cake — even if your wedding is less than 50 people. Good cake



bakers will make their cakes the day before your wedding (and sometimes even the day of!) to guarantee you get the freshest one possible. And our guess is you won’t want to leave the rehearsal dinner early to go home and bake.

Plus, even if you’ve made stellar birthday cakes in the past, this one is a little different. “I could put together a cake in four or five hours, but it would probably take an average bride most of the day,” says Amy.

Q: How can I save money on my wedding cake?


One of the main ways that brides can save on their cake and still get a pro-looking product is by choosing to personalize rather than customize the cake. Ask your cake baker if there are any predesigned cakes available.

If you or a family member truly wants to make the cake, Amy also has a few suggestions for that. “You can buy professional sugar flowers and add them to your cake,” she says. Some cake shops sell sugar flowers separately with the idea that brides going the DIY route can add them for a professional touch. You can also use them to cover imperfections or to simply incorporate more color into the cake.

Q: Do I have to cut the cake?

Technically no; it’s your wedding, you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. However, cutting the cake gives your guests a chance to “ooh” and “ahh” over the unique design that you worked out. If you decide against a cake cutting, make sure you have your caterer or baker set aside a few slices for you and the groom so you can enjoy the cake later.

If you decide to cut the cake, traditionally it’s cut towards the end of the evening, but you can also choose to do it right after the dinner so that you can dance the night away without any interruptions.

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Mistakes made when selecting wedding flowers

• Not seeing the big picture

Couples tend to see the centerpieces and the table setting but do not visualize the whole reception room with their guests in it.

For example, couples pay for a room with a wonderful view of the ocean or scenic surrounding and want tall, large centerpieces that will obstruct this view.

• Not trusting your florist

Communicate your vision, likes, dislikes, and expectations but have a little flexibility and be comfortable with substitution.

We want to make your wedding absolutely breathtaking. So relax, put trust in your vendors and remember why you hired that amazing talent!

• Booking your florist last

Couples should begin the

process of booking vendors by speaking to one vendor from each category before booking anyone.

This way they can get an idea of what things cost and perhaps they could budget better.

• Not reusing ceremony arrangements

Aisle flowers can become centerpieces and altar pieces can be moved to the buffet table.

The ceremony usually only lasts about half an hour — it's a shame to see so many flowers only being used for that amount of time when they could easily be incorporated into the reception decor!

• Refusing to compromise

The biggest mistake is for a bride to have her heart set on specific flowers and not be flexible.

A florist can do a much better job if the bride asks for an overall look, feel, and color scheme and let the florist create it.

• Ruling out pricey blooms

Don't be scared of the expensive flowers. Flowers like cattleya orchids and peonies are more expensive, but they also cover more space and have a greater impact.

One cattleya orchid can have a greater impact than a bouquet of roses.

• Not communicating with your florist

Knowing what you like is just as important as knowing what you don't like.

Bring lots of pictures — it is the best way to help convey what you do and do not want your floral designs to look like.

• Using only one color

A lot of brides try to match the flowers to the bridesmaid dresses.

A bridesmaid in a lavender gown with lavender flowers will make for very disappointing pictures.

Flowers are a great place to choose an accent color — for example, a lime green against a lavender gown will bring out the best in both colors and make for fabulous photos.

• Choosing strongly scented flowers

Choosing highly aromatic flowers for centerpieces may sound like an amazingly romantic idea, but it will drive your guests insane if they are prone to allergies.

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Thank-you Etiquette

Wedding thank-you cards etiquette

Weddings and gifts go hand-in-hand.

Couples who are tying the knot can expect to receive scores of gifts, ranging from simple well-wishes to cash to items listed on their registries. Because gift-giving is tradition, couples should plan on spending some time writing thank-you notes to express gratitude to the people who were kind enough to give a gift.

Contrary to popular belief, couples do not have a year's grace period to mail out thank-you notes after the gift has been received or the wedding has taken place.

According to the etiquette experts at The Emily Post Institute, all thank-you cards should be written and mailed within three months of receipt of a gift. It is preferable that the thank-you be written directly after receipt of the gift, but time-strapped couples may not have the opportunity to do so.

However, writing a few thank-you cards every few days can alleviate having a giant pile to do later on.

Many couples prefer to order thank-you stationery when they order their wedding invitations. This way the paper, font and style match the original invitations.

In addition, it may be less expensive to order stationery as a package.

In some cases, a photography package may include thank-you notes with wallet-sized photos to include. Couples can then mail out a nice sentiment with a photo from the wedding. To keep with the etiquette

time frame of thank-you notes, it is important to find out when the thank-you photos and cards will arrive first from the photographer. The thank-you sentiments should not be delayed by the photographer.

For those interested in less expensive options, preprinted thank-you cards can be purchased at a stationery store.

There are many designs and price points available. Remember, it is not the card itself, but the thank-you that is important.

As to the rules regarding those getting a thank-you, it is just about anyone who contributed in some part to the wedding, even if a verbal thanks was already offered

Anyone who provided an engagement, shower or wedding gift, those who gave gifts of money, anyone who hosted a party or shower, attendants in the wedding, people who may have housed wedding guests, parents of the bride and groom, suppliers and vendors, and employers who have wished couples well should all be included on the thank-you list.



BY ADHERING to thank-you card etiquette, couples will ensure their guests know that gifts and efforts to make the wedding special were appreciated.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW

- Mail out a handwritten note to each and every person being thanked.
- Do not use form letters or preprinted cards to which you simply add your signature.
- Be sincere in your messages and try to mention the gift and what it will be used for.
- Promptly respond to gifts that were received through the mail so the giver knows they arrived.
- Never mention that you plan to return a gift or exchange it.
- Mentioning the amount of a monetary gift is optional, but it does confirm to the giver that the right amount was received.
- A mass thank-you posted on social media is not adequate.
- Even if you are late with writing out thank-you notes, that doesn't exclude you from doing so.

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Deals

From Page 9

In addition to pricing, estimates from other venues can vary based on what they include. Even if a favorite venue does not come down much on its original quote, they may be willing to add extra services, such as an open bar or an extra hour during the reception, free of charge to match a competitor's offer. But they cannot match such offers if couples don't first do their homework and solicit estimates from their competitors.

• **Avoid making demands.** Coming off as too demanding when negotiating prices with wedding vendors may not produce the results couples are hoping for. Much like couples don't want to receive "take it or leave it" offers, vendors don't want to be

given demands they have to meet in order to book a wedding. The right tone can go a long way with wedding vendors, who are typically more willing to work with couples who treat them nicely than couples who enter the negotiation process full of demands.

Vendors often like it when couples know what they want, but couples are not doing themselves any favors when they express those desires as demands.

• **Don't be afraid to ask for more.** Making demands and asking for more are not the same thing. When negotiating with wedding vendors, there's no harm in asking for more.

For example, the worst a deejay can do when asked to play an extra hour at no additional charge is deny that request. Reception venues often have the most wiggle room, so don't be afraid to ask for free coffee with dessert or valet parking. Vendors are often open to suggestion and will-

ing to honor requests, but it's not their responsibility to make such offers.

• **Make sure all contracts are itemized, and read them thoroughly before signing on the dotted line.** The negotiation process is often tedious, and contracts should reflect that. When hiring a wedding vendor, make sure the contract is itemized, spelling out in intimate detail just what was negotiated and how much each item costs.

Couples may even notice items in the contract that can be removed, saving them a few dollars as a result. Be especially mindful of extra fees that can add up.

For example, some venues try to make up for lower rates couples negotiated by tacking on fees for cutting the cake or other minute details. These fees will be in the contract, and it's up to couples to have them removed before they sign and the contract becomes official.

• **Remember there are two parties involved in the negotiation process.** Ven-

dors are not the only ones who might need to bend a little at the negotiating table. Couples might have to be flexible in order to make their dream weddings a reality. Some vendors charge considerably less during certain times of the year than they do during peak wedding season.

If couples are finding it impossible to afford the wedding of their dreams during peak wedding season, they should consider tying the knot during a less popular time of year, when venues and vendors can offer them more competitive rates.

Brides- and grooms-to-be cannot expect vendors to bend over backward for couples who aren't willing to make any concessions themselves, so couples might have to make certain sacrifices at the negotiating table when planning their weddings.

Negotiation plays a significant role in wedding planning. Couples who take the process of negotiation seriously often find the best deals without having to make too many concessions.

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History behind the bridal veil

Wedding day attire has changed in many ways, but one component of getting dressed up for a wedding that has withstood the test of time is the wearing of a wedding veil.

Though many brides know it is tradition to wear a bridal veil, many do not understand why. Here is a look at the history behind the veil and why it is continued to be worn today.



The veil and the bouquet that a bride carries may predate the wearing of white. Although there is no definitive reason for the wearing of a veil, many surmise it has to do with ancient Greeks and Romans’ fear of evil spirits and demons.

In fact, this is where many of the bridal traditions actually come from, including bridesmaids wearing similar dresses in order to serve as decoys for the bride.

In an effort to frighten away or disguise the bride from evil spirits, brides-to-be were dressed in brightly colored fabrics like red and obscured by a veil.

But in many cases, the veil prevented the bride from seeing well. That is why her father or another person “gave her away.”

He was actually escorting her down the aisle so she wouldn’t bump or trip into anything. The veil also served as a method of shielding the bride’s face from her future husband, especially in the cases of arranged marriages.

Superstition has it that it is bad luck for the groom to see the bride prior to the wedding. A veil hiding her face also ensured that the groom would not see his soon-to-be-betrothed up until the ceremony.

Eventually the meaning behind the veil transformed as weddings evolved into religious ceremonies. The veil came to symbolize modesty and obedience.

In many religions it is seen as a symbol of

reverence for women to cover their heads.

When white wedding dresses were worn to symbolize chastity, the white veil followed suit.

There are others who say that before the advent of shampoo, people didn’t wash their hair as often and it could get quite dirty. The veil may have been a method to covering up unsightly hair.

Regardless of the origins, veils continue to be sported by today’s brides, who choose from a few different styles.

A flyaway is a short veil that ends at the shoulders, while a sweep veil ends at the floor. Chapel and cathedral veils follow the bride at a significant length (nine and 12 feet, respectively).

A blusher is a very short veil that covers just the bride’s face as she enters the ceremony. With a fingertip veil, the veil reaches the bride’s waist and brushes at her fingertips.

The veil will coordinate with the style of the gown, and many wedding attire consultants suggest choosing the gown prior to the headpiece and veil.

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Seating Arrangements

Tips for making seating arrangements

One of the biggest decisions couples make regarding their wedding receptions concerns where to seat their guests. Many a bride and groom has felt the crunch of compiling responses and then coming up with an acceptable seating arrangement for the reception.

Seating guests is not a task exclusive to brides- and grooms-to-be. Anyone holding a special party, whether it's at a reception hall or a restaurant, must determine seating arrangements.

While you may want to do a seating chart early into the reception planning, it's best left until a few weeks before your wedding day, when you know who will and will not be in attendance. Having a final headcount is essential.

Next, know the number of tables you will be allotted in the party space. A catering hall may have a set number of seats that can fit at each table and can usually provide you with a map of the room or a blank seating chart. Many standard reception tables can comfortably seat between eight to 10 people.

If you are a visual person, you may benefit from writing guests' names on small pieces of paper and physically moving them around your seating chart, much as you would do if you were trying to arrange furniture on a room layout.

When arranging the seating, figure out the head or bridal table. This is one of the easier tables to seat because it is traditionally filled with members of your bridal party and their respective spouses or dates. If your bridal party is especially large, consider flanking your own sweetheart table with two tables for the bridal party on either side.

After arranging the bridal table, focus on seating parents and close relatives of the bride and groom next. Many couples prefer to separate their families at the wedding, so the groom's family may sit on one side of the room and the bride's family will sit on the other. This means there will be two parental tables. Consider seating grandparents or other close family members at these

tables to ensure they have a place of prominence in the room. This usually means being close to the dance floor to have a good view of all of the festivities. If your parents are divorced or there are any other strained feelings among parents, you can further separate into another table for step-parents, to avoid any unpleasantness or confrontation.

Many wedding receptions are full of friends and even coworkers of parents whom the couple tying the knot does not even know. You may need further clarification of their relationships and who gets along before seating them. In fact, ask a parent to take care of arranging their own friends so you will be certain the arrangements will be comfortable for everyone.

A friends' table is usually a mingling of friends or your own coworkers who are of similar ages. A friends' table can make guests who arrived solo feel more comfortable because they can converse with others who are like-minded.

Seating children can be tricky. You may be inclined to seat youngsters at their own table, which is fine if the children are mature enough to handle sitting by themselves. But young children sitting apart from their parents may be nervous. Very young children are best seated alongside their folks.

When arranging seating, you also must consider special needs' individuals who may have mobility issues. Such individuals should be seated near doors and restrooms so it's easier for them to get around once the reception hits full swing. Try to accommodate special requests, like not seating the elderly too close to music speakers.

Keep in mind that there is software and even some smartphone apps that make it even easier to make seating arrangements.



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Did You Know?

Symbolic gestures are commonplace during wedding ceremonies.

The exchange of rings, stomping on a glass and lighting of candles are each among the various traditions associated with different faiths.

Couples who would like to try something a bit different can opt for pouring sand.

Choose two different colored sands and decorative vessels that can hold the sand until a special time in the ceremony.

You also will need another large, clear container that will contain the sand once it is poured.

A glass vase or heart-shaped vessel works well.

To symbolize the joining of two lives together, both the bride and groom can take one of the colors of sand and begin pouring them together into the larger container.

The ribbons of sand will join and meld together, much as the couple's separate lives will now become one.

The finished sand art can be kept on a mantle as a remembrance of the wedding day for years to come.



Flowers

From Page 12

your bridal bouquet and the altar arrangements.

• **Not taking care of your blooms**

Everyone loves hydrangeas, especially in bouquets.

However, hydrangeas need to stay hydrated, and the average lifespan out of water in temperate conditions is about three hours.

They might not even make it through your ceremony if you're out all day taking pictures.

• **Forgetting to budget for flowers**

Most brides find that flowers are an important part of their day but forget to include them in the planning from the start.

When I have a budget and a theme, I am really able to

advise them better right from the beginning.

• **Taking on too much DIY**

Brides (who try to DIY their flowers) will purchase dozens of glass vases for centerpieces, only to become overwhelmed.

We receive many frantic calls, asking to take over the stress of these DIY projects, which oftentimes becomes more expensive than hiring a professional from the start.

• **Ordering your flowers too late**

Flowers come from South America, Holland, and all over the world, so it is very hard to contact farms across the world and have flowers arrive within one or two weeks.

Leave at least a six-week window ahead of your wedding week to be able to line everything up. Your flowers will be cheaper if you can

give us the time that we need to order.

• **Choosing an oversized bouquet**

Brides often think: 'The larger the better!' What they don't realize is that the larger the bouquet, the more it covers and fights with the overall design of their dress.

Further, do you really want to carry something that is huge and heavy? Think about the size and comfort when it comes to your bouquet.

• **Overlooking the reception table linens**

What's underneath a centerpiece is as important as the arrangement itself.

Linens don't just complement the look of your centerpieces; they complete them. From runners to underlays and overlays, the right 'undergarments' can make flowers flourish on a table.

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Favors

From Page 6

that theme. Couples who will showcase their love of travel on their wedding days may want to give guests keychains or purse holders that feature popular landmarks around the world. Those who are admitted beach bums may want to present a small fishbowl with sand and a goldfish inside, reminiscent of days at the seashore.

• Go traditional

Couples who opt for universally appealing favors can lean toward some popular options, such as silver cake servers, candlestick holders, decorative photo frames, or engraved keepsake boxes. Aim for favors that have utility. Otherwise, favors may end up collecting dust on someone's shelf.

• Food and beverage gifts are fun

Food favors mean guests can enjoy their gifts and not have to worry about finding space inside their homes to display trinkets. Food favors can be lavishly decorated cookies, fine chocolates, petit fours, small bottles of champagne or cupcakes decorated like the wedding cake.

Favors are often integral to wedding celebrations. Selecting a favor that will be appreciated and fit with the wedding is often a fun and stress-free part of planning a wedding.



Unique

From Page 8

something different, while the flavor is mild for those who are not comfortable taking risks. The richness and creaminess of cream cheese is irresistible.

• **White cake with chocolate mousse:** Couples who want a bit of chocolate but do not want to be overwhelmed can select a white cake that is filled with light and rich chocolate mousse. It's the perfect blend of vanilla and chocolate for guests who enjoy both.

• **Variety tiers:** Those who cannot settle on just one flavor can have different flavors on each tier of their cakes. This gives

guest some flavorful variety and enables them to pick their favorite flavor combination.

Brides- and grooms-to-be who have specific flavors in mind can ask their bakers to include two cupcakes with the wedding cake. Then the couple can enjoy their own mini cakes while the rest of the guests enjoy a more classic cake. In addition, an assortment of cupcakes in lieu of one cake can give guests the opportunity to sample several different flavors.

Cakes are a part of many special events, but few cakes are fawned over as much as wedding cakes. Couples can spice things up by choosing a nontraditional flavor combination.

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Did You Know?

Wedding Ring

- The tradition of the “ring finger” is based on an erroneous historical belief in a “vein of love”

- In many cultures, the groom historically often kidnapped the bride, and the groom’s friends would help him, leading to the modern-day groomsmen. At the alter, the groom always stood on the bride’s right side so his right hand—or his sword hand—would be free to fight/defend a jealous rival.

- Puritans banned wedding rings because they thought they were “frivolous” jewelry or relics of Popery.

- Wedding rings are worn on the "ring finger" because of an ancient belief that it had a direct connection to the heart

- It's called the Vena Amoris which literally means the vein of love.

- It is rumored that the belief comes from ancient Egypt where chains and bracelets used as a symbol of love slowly transformed into the traditional ring.

- Up until 17th century England it wasn't uncommon to use the wedding ring on the thumb or middle finger. The most likely explanation for this tradition for this belief enduring is a combination of tradition and marketing by the jewelry industry.

- The custom of given a wedding ring have the origins in Ancient Egypt. After them, Ancient Romans used wedding rings as the last from a series of gifts traditionally given as a betrothal gift .

- The round shape of a wedding ring is a symbol of eternity because it had no beginning and no end, like time. Also the shape was to be found in forms of Sun and Moon, both worshiped by the ancient Egyptians.

- The tradition imposes wearing the wedding ring on the right hand because this is the traditional hands for vows. There are however cultures where people wear the ring on the left hand on the third finger because of the belief that there is to be found vena amoris (the vein of love) who is directly connected with the heart

- The use of wedding rings for both partners started late 19th century, after a marketing campaign upon request of American jewellery industry in order to increase their revenues. Before, only groom offered a ring to the bride.

- The most common words engraved on a wedding ring are the names of the grooms.



Engagement Ring

- The most popular diamond shape is the round brilliant cut. Depending on the type of shank you choose it does tend to show off the diamond very well. The round defiantly scores high on overall BLING factor.

- GIA is the most respected diamond grading lab in the world. They grade diamonds so you know exactly what your buying. Don't buy one without a certified certificate.

- Ancient cultures believed that the third finger on the left hand, had a special vein called vena amoris, the vein of “love,” this vein runs directly to the heart.

- The word diamond comes from the Greek word “adamant” which means steadfast or invincible. It is from this word that the diamond gets its name. Diamonds are pretty much believed to be indestructible.

- The tradition of an engagement ring was introduced in 1477. Archduke Maximillian of Austria gave Mary of Burgundy a gold ring set with a diamond as a token of love.

- Engagement rings are now used as wedding bands. You can still have a separate wedding ring band, but some design incorporate this.

- Countries such as England, United states, France, and Canada traditionally wear the Engagement ring on the left hand. Where as Germany, Russia and India wear the ring on the right hand.

- The most common metal used for engagement rings is either White Gold or Platinum, however due to the rise in cost for these two types of metal Palladium is the new metal on the scene. Palladium is regarded as a precious metal and is a luxury alternative.

- Although Valentines Day is one of the most important days of the year for jewelry retailers. December is in fact the most popular time of the year to get engaged.

- Diamonds were first discovered in India as far back as 800 B.C. but diamonds were not used on wedding bands or engagement rings until the fifteenth century.

- The average diamond carat weight used in engagement rings is estimated at 0.37 carats.

- Did you know if you shine an ultraviolet light on a real diamond it will glow in the dark for a few seconds. This is a good way to make sure its the real thing.



Wedding Cake

- Back then wheat and barley were symbols of fertility and it was common practice to shower newlyweds with sprinkles of the cake; similar to the tossing of rice as a couple leaves the church. Remaining cake was then to be eaten by unmarried women as a means to giving them good luck in finding their suitor.

- When asked about the color of a wedding cake, most people would answer white. The white color of the icing on a wedding cake has come to symbolize purity and virginal attributes. This notion was first put forward in Victorian times. Before then, though most wedding cakes were white because of a more practical reason. At the time, ingredients for the wedding cake were much harder to acquire, especially for the icing. White icing meant that only the finest refined sugar was used, and so the whiter the cake, the more affluent the families involved were perceived!

- Another reason that the whiteness of the cake was considered pure was the association of the cake with the bride. Originally, wedding cakes were called bride cakes. This not only emphasized the bride as the main focal point of the wedding, but also created a link between the bride and the cake. In fact, even today, the link is being reinforced. Many couples have requested wedding cakes be made to match their color with the wedding dress!

- Perhaps the most well-known tradition associated with wedding cakes is the joint task of cutting the cake. Here the first piece is cut by the bride with feigned assistance from the groom. It has come to symbolize the first task in the couple’s life together and is a key image for the wedding photographer to capture. Originally, it was the sole duty of the bride to cut the cake for sharing by the guests. As cakes became grander, the task became quite formidable, particularly in the early multi-tiered cakes where the icing had to be strong and rigid enough to support the upper tiers. It became a joint task more out of necessity than symbolism.

- Immediately after the cutting, the bride and groom feed each other the first slice. This action symbolizes the commitment to provide for each other that the bride and groom have undertaken. However, in most American weddings, this task has the appearance of a traditional slapstick pie-fight.





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