



Weddings

February 2016

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Rehearsal dinner how-to

Many couples find their wedding rehearsal dinners to be relaxing respites from the whirlwind of wedding planning. Such dinners enable the happy couple to slow down and enjoy themselves in a relatively casual gathering with their closest friends and family members.

Rehearsal dinners typically take place in the night or two before the wedding. The couple, members of their wedding party, the parents of the bride and groom and others involved in the wedding typically attend this dinner. The couple generally takes the time at the dinner to thank everyone for their contributions to the wedding and to offer some small gifts of appreciation. No rules govern rehearsal dinners, so couples have the freedom to plan the dinners as they see fit.

Rehearsal dinners often come immediately after the ceremony rehearsal, when the wedding party and the officiant go over the timing and details of the wedding. Make

arrangements with the ceremony site and officiant prior to making dinner reservations.

Parents of the groom traditionally host the rehearsal dinner, so they will be integral in planning the event. That means couples should keep an open and gracious mind. Remember, the rehearsal dinner doesn't have to be a lavish affair, and it can be customized to any budget or preference.

Some couples feel that hosting rehearsal dinners in casual settings can make the dinner more comfortable for members of the wedding, who can use the dinner as an opportunity to mingle and get to know one another before the wedding. This will help to tame nerves and enable the wedding party to loosen up and enjoy themselves even more. Some people may be more inclined to socialize and have fun when they're not worried about putting on airs.

Restaurants that have special meaning to the couple often make



for great places to hold rehearsal dinners. The bride and groom can suggest their ideas, but ultimately it is the person handling the bill who has the final say. Couples who want greater control over the rehearsal dinner festivities can suggest hosting it themselves.

Despite its name, the rehearsal dinner doesn't actually have to be a dinner, as couples can opt for meals at a different time of the day, like brunch or lunch. An earlier occasion gives guests plenty of time to get home and rest up for the festivities of the wedding to come.

Toasts are expected at the rehearsal dinner, but they tend to be spontaneous, off-the-cuff remarks. A couple with a good sense of

humor might not mind being roasted at their rehearsal dinners. The bride and groom should expect to say a few words of thanks to all in attendance, but remarks need not be too formal.

Rehearsal dinners may even feature a little entertainment. Tech-savvy parents may put together a presentation with videos or photographs that chronicles the couple's lives separately and their life together.

Rehearsal dinners provide an opportunity for couples and their families to spend time together before the larger festivities of the wedding pull them in multiple directions. Plus, they set a fun tone for the wedding weekend to come.



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Did you know?

Pets play important roles in their owners' lives and are increasingly included in more activities, such as vacations, dining out and even weddings. The National Association of Professional Pet Sitters says more couples are customizing their wedding celebrations and bridal parties to include pets. Dogs and cats are turning up in wedding photos as well as trips down the aisle. Some pets even serve as ring bearers. Before giving your pet a job for the wedding, consider his personality and temperament. How does the pet react around crowds? A dog or cat accustomed to a quiet home may behave differently when placed in a room full of excited people. In addition, confirm that pets are allowed inside your ceremony space. Certain venues may not allow animals that are not service dogs. Make sure to inform guests that an animal will be present, so those with allergies can take precautions. If it isn't practical to have animals in the ceremony, give them a primary spot in wedding or engagement photos.



Inspiration boards bring wedding plans to life

Making the wedding of your dreams a reality may require some creativity. It can be challenging to organize all of the creative ideas swimming around in your head, but inspiration boards may be able to help.

Inspiration boards, sometimes referred to as idea boards, are commonly used by interior designers, artists, writers, and even wedding planners. Such boards can serve a great purpose when starting a new project, especially if all of your creative ideas seem to lack cohesion. Sometimes seeing things together, rather than in bits and pieces on their own, can fuel even more creativity.

Inspiration boards can include magazine clippings, photographs, fabric swatches, quotes or literary passages, and color swatches. As the idea board grows, you may find a common denominator among your inspirational elements. This can help determine a theme for your wedding or jump-start other planning.

While poster boards may be more traditional idea boards, creative ideas also can be compiled in binders or scrapbooks, which work especially well at keeping all items organized and concise. Plus, they're portable, which means you can take a scrapbook

to a meeting with a wedding vendor and show him or her your concepts for the wedding.

Later, when photographers, florists and other vendors have been booked, you can attach receipts or agreements to the inspiration board for future reference. This keeps all of your important wedding information in one place rather than requiring you to search through different folders or files for important documents. In addition, if friends or family members ask for advice on vendors and planning their own weddings in the future, you can readily access your inspiration board.

To start building your own board or book, take clippings of photos or articles that resonate with you. As you visit bridal shops and other stores, take fabric swatches and pictures of particular looks. Attend bridal shows and take home promotional materials. Remember, inspiration may not always come from bridal-related resources. Anything you come across in your daily life — such as window-shopping at a furniture store or passing an art exhibit — may inspire some creativity.

Inspiration boards are used by top design professionals and can be a handy resource for couples planning their weddings.




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Making your engagement photoshoot a success

Engagement photos vary depending on the couple. Often reserved for save-the-date cards and now commonly used to spruce up wedding websites, engagement photos can range from formal shoots in which couples are dressed to the nines to more laid back shots featuring couples in more everyday attire.

When planning an engagement shoot, couples should give themselves carte blanche with regard to style, as the photoshoot need not follow many of the more accepted rules that the wedding itself will ultimately adhere to. Once couples have settled on a style for their photoshoot, there are additional ways to ensure the session is a success.

- Find a photographer who shares your sensibilities. Photographers can vary greatly in style, and an engagement photoshoot will be most successful when couples find a photographer whose style



matches the theme they are looking for with their photoshoot. You likely would not hire a nature photographer to photograph a basketball game, so don't hire someone who specializes in posed shots if you want your photos to be more lively and spontaneous. Before you hire anyone, ask for samples of each photographer's work to be certain you're getting someone who has experiencing shooting the type of photos you want to take.

- Solicit ideas from the photographer. Some couples already know exactly where

they want their engagement photos to be shot and which poses they want to be arranged. However, many couples have little or no experience with professional photoshoots, and such couples should solicit ideas from each photographer they are considering hiring. A skilled and/or seasoned photographer should propose several ideas. Be wary of photographers who offer little input, as you may ultimately be dissatisfied with their work once the shoot has come and gone.

- Avoid studio shots. Many couples prefer their engagement photos be taken somewhere they have a personal connection to, such as the sight of their first date or a park they frequently visit. Studio photoshoots might provide the best lighting, but couples have no connection to such spaces, and down the road they may regret not taking the photos in someplace that's a little

more meaningful. In addition, a photoshoot outside the studio affords couples and their photographer more opportunities to experiment and improvise, which can produce a wider array of shots than a studio photoshoot is likely to deliver.

- Don't forget candid shots. Candid shots make the photoshoot more fun and loosen couples up a little bit. Many engagement photos will never be seen by anyone other than the photographer and the couple he or she is shooting, so don't be bashful during candid shots for fear of being embarrassed down the road. Have fun with the candid shots, and your other photos are likely to come out better as a result.

An engagement photoshoot should be fun and reflect the personalities of the couple. A few simple strategies can ensure couples' shoots accomplish both of those things.

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Wedding good luck charms

Couples' wedding days are special moments, ones they hope pave the way to a life filled with happiness and good fortune. That's why the bride and groom surround themselves with close friends and family who want to celebrate and support their new life joined together.

Perhaps due to superstition or tradition, many couples employ some wedding day strategies to increase their good luck. The following are some of the symbols that couples may want to keep an eye out for on the day they walk down the aisle.

It's good luck for the bride to see a dove on the way to the wedding because doves symbolize peace and prosperity. Because doves mate for life, this symbol is doubly beneficial on a couple's wedding day, as it can be a harbinger of a long, happy marriage and home.

Some brides believe sugar cubes

tucked into their wedding gloves leads to a sweet union.

Hindu tradition states that rain on a wedding day is good luck. Rain is believed to be a symbol of fortune and abundance, especially after times of drought. What's more, rain can foretell a strong marriage. That's because a wet knot is more difficult to untie.

Ancient Romans were so concerned with ensuring good luck that they actually studied pig entrails to determine the luckiest time to marry. If they consulted with the English, they might determine that a wedding shouldn't take place on a Saturday, which is unlucky. English tradition states Wednesday is the best day to get married.

In Holland, well-wishers would plant pine trees outside of newlyweds' homes as a symbol of fertility and luck.

Grooms may want to give a coin

to the first person they see on the way to their weddings. This is another symbol of good luck.

Some couples plan to marry during a full moon, because that can symbolize good luck and good fortune.

On a couple's wedding day, tears from a bride or a child during the ceremony is considered lucky. English folklore suggests that brides who discover spiders in their gowns are in for some good luck.

The Chinese believe that lighting fireworks at their wedding ceremonies chases away evil spirits. A red umbrella also might be held over a Chinese bride to keep bad spirits at bay.

Many grooms do not see their brides in their wedding gowns before their wedding ceremonies, feeling it is bad luck if they do. Many brides also do not wear their complete wedding outfits prior to their big day.



Doves and sugar cubes can symbolize good luck on couples' wedding days.




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Grooms: Look your wedding day best

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

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

Hair

Schedule a haircut with a professional stylist roughly a

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

Shaving

Shaving is another thing grooms must consider. If you have a beard, make sure it is clean, combed and trimmed. Men who shave the day of their weddings may find their skin is sensitive and irritated, which can lead to

redness. Unless your facial hair grows especially fast, shave the evening before. This is a good time to splurge on a professional shave with a straight razor at a barber shop. A hot shave from a professional will produce a close shave with the least amount of irritation when done correctly.

Hands

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

Skin

Get plenty of sleep the night prior to the wedding. Being well rested will help reduce puffy eyes, dark circles and sallow skin. It will also put you in a more positive mood, which can help you enjoy the day even more.

The day of the wedding, shower using water and a mild soap. Avoid any skin irritation by patting your face and body dry, rather than rubbing it with the towel. Moisturize your skin to avoid dry patches. Stores sell many moisturizers geared toward men's needs, often in unscented or more masculine fragrances.

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



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

Smile

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

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






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Undergarments can make or break wedding looks

As guests' eyes are trained on couples come their wedding days, it is no surprise that both the bride and groom want to look flawless on their big days. Men and women will spend thousands of dollars on clothing, hairstyling, makeup, teeth whitening, fitness classes, and more to ensure they look their best. While couples may be particularly concerned with their wedding day appearance, what they wear under their clothing — particularly for women — can impact how clothes fit and look.

Choosing the right bra or supportive undergarments can play a crucial role in how a gown fits and whether or not brides achieve that picture-perfect look. Wearing the wrong undergarments can negatively affect a bride's appearance and make her extremely uncomfortable.

According to a study done by Swiss lingerie company Triumph, a large number of women are choosing their bras incorrectly. The international survey of 10,000 women found that 64 percent of them are wearing the wrong size bras. If women are wearing the wrong undergarments for everyday looks, it stands to reason that their wedding choices may not be spot on, either.

Undergarments should be purchased and brought to all fittings as soon as a gown is selected. In fact, it often is a good idea to ask the bridal store employees to suggest a bra or corset that will complement the gown and remain invisible beneath the dress. Some shops will make bras available when trying on gowns. Brides are not obligated to purchase undergarments where they purchase their gowns, but take

note of the brand and style and find a similar one elsewhere that fits with your budget if you don't want to buy at the store.

Pay attention to the gown's fabric and how dense it is. Certain shapewear, including bras, that have a lot of boning in them to shape and support the body can show under bridal dresses without a lot of layers. Always try on the bra with the gown to gauge the finished look. You may opt for simpler and plain lingerie styles so that you will be guaranteed a seamless appearance. Nude-colored bras tend to be less

noticeable than white. You always can purchase something with more pizzazz to change into for the wedding night. Some dresses with plunging necklines or backless designs may necessitate other options. Sew-in bra cups are another option that can lend invisible support.

Women with more ample busts may want to select gowns that will allow for bras with supportive straps to be worn. This way there is no worry about strapless bras or other style lingerie slipping down.

In addition to bras, other types of shapewear can enhance certain areas of the body or downplay perceived flaws. Shapewear can smooth and pull in stomachs. Choose boy shorts or thong-style cuts for a seamless finish. Shapers can smooth out bulges on the back, legs and hips, too. There also are special shorts that have some padding in the rear to create a more curvy look.

Bras and other shapewear can make a world of difference in how wedding attire looks and feels. Invest in some quality pieces that will highlight wardrobes to their fullest.

Choosing the right bra or supportive undergarments can play a crucial role in how a gown fits

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Bridal veils come in many different lengths and can complement personalities and gown styles.

Wedding veils complete bridal look

The perfect dress is on the wish list of many a bride-to-be, but no bridal ensemble is truly complete until the bride chooses her veil.

Veils have been worn by brides at their weddings for centuries. Veils can be traced back to the Middle East, where veils helped protect against the weather while also preserving the modesty of the bride. In Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, veils were used as protection against evil spirits.

According to popular wedding website The Knot.com, until Vatican II, all Catholic women were required to have their heads covered in church, including during their wedding ceremonies. Veils were worn for this purpose, but they also symbolized trust in the groom and his love and companionship. Some Christians also see the veil as a visual representation of submission to the Church and to God. Others think of the veil as another beautiful accompaniment to their bridal gown, without attaching any additional meaning to the veil itself.

Veils come in various lengths and can complement the style of a wedding gown. They also tend to add

glamour to brides' looks. Here are the types of veils from shortest to longest.

Blusher: Blushers cover the face, though some extend only to mid-cheek on the bride.

Flyaway: Flyaways cover just the back of the head. Shorter veils may work better on petite women.

Shoulder: Shoulder veils are about 20 inches in length and will hit at the bride's shoulders or just below.

Waist: Waist-length veils cascade down to the middle of the bride's waist.

Fingertip: These veils extend down 38 to 42 inches, brushing against the bride's fingertips.

Waltz/Knee: For a dramatic look, many brides may opt for waltz-length veils, which fall to the back of the knees.

Chapel/Floor: Veils that extend to the floor may be referred to as "chapel" or "floor-length" veils. Such veils cascade slightly behind the bride.

Veils can complete brides' wedding day looks. Shorter veils may be comfortable to wear throughout the day and evening, but brides may want to consider detachable veils if they are selecting lengthier options.

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Clever takes on the 'something old, new, borrowed, blue' tradition

Wedding day tokens of good luck come in many forms, but "the something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue (a sixpence in your shoe)" adage remains one of the most popular luck-enhancing wedding traditions. According to the bridal resource The Knot, this tradition stems from an Olde English rhyme. Something old represents continuity; something new is for optimism for the future; something borrowed stands for borrowed happiness; and something blue is for purity, love and fidelity. The sixpence in your shoe is a wish for good fortune and prosperity, but this is not a tradition widely celebrated outside of the United Kingdom or British territories.

These traditions can add some creative flair and personality to wedding ceremonies. There's no end to the inventive combinations of items brides can carry to increase their good fortunes.



Something old

Something old is one of the easier mementos to obtain. There is a good chance that someone in the family is willing to pass an item down to the bride that she can include in her wedding wardrobe. It also can be something the bride may have in her own memory box. Beads taken from a grandmother's dress or a swatch of fabric from a beloved toy doll are creative ideas that can be sewn into inconspicuous places on gowns.

Something new

Brides already purchase many

new items for their wedding day looks, so "something new" should not be too hard to find. Couples may want to work together to find something new they can both carry so they have a matching set upon tying the knot. Interlocking charm bracelets or keychains may work. What about the groom carrying a small padlock and the bride the key? Quirky couples can each wear one sock from a pair. Get clever and have fun.

Something borrowed

Much like something old, something borrowed is yet another way to pay homage to a friend or family member. It's also

one way to add a sentimental twist to everyday items. Borrow a grandfather's handkerchief to wrap around the stems of the wedding bouquet. Exchange vows with the original rings used by a distant relative at their own wedding. Flatter a close friend by wearing the same veil she did.

Something blue

There are many ways to incorporate "something blue" into your wedding ceremony. Brides can paint their toenails blue or wear blue shoes under their gowns. Sew a patch from a pair of denim jeans into the bodice of the dress. Paint the bottom of your shoes bright blue so they stand out when kneeling at the altar. Blue sapphire or topaz jewelry can add an exotic look to the wedding wardrobe.

With a little ingenuity, brides can easily incorporate "something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue" into their wedding ceremonies.

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Tips for writing your own wedding vows

A wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime event for many couples, so brides and grooms wish for the event to be momentous and memorable. As such, couples are increasingly integrating personal nuances into their ceremonies and receptions to tailor weddings to their unique visions. The desire to include personalized wedding vows continues to be a popular trend.

If you are considering personalized wedding vows, first realize that it may not be a simple task. That's because you want the message conveyed to be dear to your heart, and that can be challenging when faced with the pressures and planning of the rest of the wedding. That isn't to say that writing your own vows is impossible. Here are some guidelines for personalizing your ceremony with your own sentiments.

* Schedule time for writing. Amid the bustle of dress fittings and interviews with photographers, it can be easy to put off the important task of writing vows for another day. But as any

great writer can attest, it takes writing -- and rewriting -- to achieve a finished product you can be proud of. Give the task of writing your vows your undivided attention. Mark it in on your calendar or set a reminder on your computer just as you would any other appointment.

* Be aware of ceremony guidelines. It is best to check with your officiant and confirm that personalized wedding vows are allowed. During civil ceremonies it's often acceptable to customize vows as you see fit. However, during religious ceremonies there may be lines of scripture that need to be read or certain passages required. Before you spend hours working on the task, be sure that it is allowed and that your spouse and you are on the same page.

* Jot down your feelings. Answer some questions about what marriage means to you and how you feel about your spouse. Try to avoid trite sayings and think from your heart and personal experiences. Think about what is the most important thing you

want to promise to your future partner. These notes can serve as the starting points for the actual vows.

* Read inspirational writings. Perhaps there is an author or a poet who inspires you? You can quote certain writers in your vows or let the tone of their works help shape the words of your vows. There also are suggested wedding readings and other quotes about marriage readily available at the library or with a quick search online.

* Decide on a tone. Although the day is based on love and affection, you may not feel comfortable spouting words of adoration in front of friends and family. Feel free to tap into your unique personality. Humor can be used if it aligns with the way you normally express your affections. Be sure to weave this tone into more traditional passages to create a cohesive expression of your feelings.

* Establish an outline. Put together all of the words and phrases you've jotted down into

an outline to help you organize the flow of the vows, using these words as a blueprint for the vows and building upon them. Make sure the vows will be concise. Aim for your entire speech to be around 1 minute in length to keep everyone engaged and the ceremony moving along.

* Put everything together. Draft your vows and then practice them by reading out loud. You want to avoid long sentences or anything that trips you up. Although large words may sound impressive, they could make the vows seem too academic and not necessarily heartfelt. Enlist the help of a friend or two to act as your audience to see if the vows sound good and are easily understandable.

Writing your own vows can be a way to include personal expressions of love into a couple's wedding day. Public speaking is seldom easy, nor is finding the perfect words to convey feelings about a future spouse. However, with some practice and inspiration, anyone can draft personalized vows.





Tips when choosing a honeymoon destination

As couples cope with the stress and struggles of planning a wedding, many begin to see their honeymoons as a time when they can finally unwind and relax without having to worry about seating arrangements, vendor negotiations or the host of other responsibilities that come with planning a wedding. But securing the perfect honeymoon can be nearly as difficult as planning the wedding.

The biggest dilemma couples face when planning a honeymoon is where to spend that first week or so as a married couple. The right locale for a honeymoon varies depending on the couple. Some might prefer a Hawaiian island while others might find a week spent camping in a national park is more their style. Whatever you and your future spouse's style may be, the following are a few tips to ensure you both have the time of your lives.

* Decide what you can afford. The days when the bride's father

takes care of the bill for the wedding are largely a thing of the past. Many of today's couples finance their own weddings, which can leave little money leftover for the honeymoon. When shopping for a honeymoon destination, know what you can and can't afford. Your honeymoon budget may narrow your options considerably, but it will help you ensure you aren't spending your first trip as a married couple pinching pennies.

* Play around with the length of your trip. Many couples aim to spend at least one week on their honeymoons. But one way to save money on the honeymoon or make a more expensive locale more affordable is to reduce the length of your stay. An extra two days in paradise might break your honeymoon budget, but what about a shorter stay? You will likely want to spend at least five days at your chosen destination, but a five-day trip can prove considerably less expensive than a full week,

especially if you arrive and depart on a weekday.

* Travel in the offseason. While many couples deserve an immediate getaway after planning and financing their weddings, you might get a better deal if you delay your honeymoon until the offseason, when resorts tend to offer more attractive packages after the tourist season has peaked. A honeymoon in the offseason is likely to offer more privacy than one taken during the peak of the season, so you might find such a honeymoon is more romantic. If you do decide to delay your honeymoon, you might still want to plan a short getaway to a nearby locale for a few days after you tie the knot. Even a short trip can help you unwind after all that planning and coordinating.

* Establish a honeymoon registry. In addition to who's paying for the wedding, one of the ways in which today's couples are different from those of yesteryear is the fact that many couples

now live together before tying the knot. That reality has made the traditional registry somewhat obsolete, as many of today's couples already own their own furniture and already have a fully stocked kitchen. But couples can still have a honeymoon registry, which allows their guests to donate money they would otherwise be spending on a wedding gift to a fund that will be used specifically to fund the couple's honeymoon and any adventures they choose to enjoy on their trip. Guests may even prefer such a registry, as it saves them the trouble of wrapping a gift and carrying it to the wedding while ensuring the happy couple will truly enjoy their gift.

A couple's honeymoon is a great opportunity to unwind and enjoy some rest and relaxation on their first trip together as man and wife. And by putting a few savvy suggestions to good use, couples can ensure their honeymoon is all they hoped it would be and much, much more.

Wedding rings are symbolic gestures of commitment

Couples adhere to many traditions on their wedding days, including the exchange of wedding rings. Wedding rings symbolize the union of two people and their pledge to remain faithful to each other.

No one is exactly sure just when the tradition of exchanging wedding rings originated, but some say it can be traced back to ancient Egypt, when the oldest recorded exchange of wedding rings was made. Reeds growing along the Nile were twisted and braided into rings and given during betrothal ceremonies. The round ring symbolized eternity, and the hole within the center meant a gateway to things unknown. Since reeds were not very durable, soon ivory, leather and bone were used to create wedding rings.

As new lands were explored and territories expanded, traditions from one culture were adopted and modified by other cultures. The same is true with wedding rings. According to the Diamond Source, wedding rings were adopted by Romans and incorporated into Western wedding ceremonies. Romans' rings were highly decorated, and some historians believe wedding rings were given to represent ownership over brides instead of symbolizing love. These rings were made of iron and called "Anulus Pronubus," or "betrothal ring."

Rings have been simplified since



Exchanging rings is an important wedding day tradition for many couples.

those days and ultimately made of many materials. Throughout history, wedding rings were worn on various fingers and even both hands, whereas many married people in Western cultures now wear their wedding rings on

the left hand and on the fourth finger. Romans once believed that this finger contained a vein, called the "Vena Amoris," that ran directly to the heart. Though that is not true, the tradition has prevailed.

Other legends say that, when blessing a Christian marriage, priests would bind the marriage by saying, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," simultaneously touching the ring to the recipient's thumb, index finger and middle finger, before slipping it on the fourth finger while saying, "Amen."

Another theory on ring placement is that wedding rings are worn on the ring finger because that finger isn't used as much as the rest of the hand, ensuring delicate ring materials won't be damaged.

Ross Simmons Jewelry states that gold is still the most popular metal choice for wedding rings, but couples are opting for some other metals that are more durable. Platinum is popular not only because it is long-wearing, but it also tends to be the most expensive. It's also a dense metal and can feel heavy in hand. Tungsten carbide is another durable metal that has grown in popularity in recent years. These rings cannot be cut and resoldered, which means it's important to size the rings correctly the first time. Titanium is both lightweight and durable, and it's popular because it is hypo-allergenic, making it practical for those with allergies to other metals.

Wedding rings continue to serve as symbols of a couple's vows and union. Much like the marriage itself, they are designed to last the test of time.

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Easy ways to trim wedding costs

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

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

Guest list

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

Reception

A couple's wedding reception also will chew up a lot of their wedding budgets. But there are ways to reduce the costs of receptions, too. Couples planning



on having a morning wedding can shift their receptions from the evening to the afternoon, when the cost per meal will be considerably less. Afternoon receptions also can be alcohol-free, saving couples even more money. If a nighttime reception is a must-have, choose a limited cash bar instead of an open bar. Limited cash bars often provide guests with free beer and house wine while guests who prefer liquor or mixed drinks must pay

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

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

choose the least expensive option.

Arrangements

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

Gifts

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

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



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Creating a wedding registry now easier than ever

While many once popular wedding traditions might have fallen by the wayside, many others have withstood the test of time. One tradition that has endured is the wedding registry, which is designed to help wedding guests find the right gift for the couple of honor.

Thanks in large part to the Internet, it's now easier than ever before to set up a registry. Couples can do so entirely via the Web or visit their favorite store or stores and use a hand-held scanner to add items to their registry. But even though registries are easy to set up, it might help couples to consider a few tips before they start clicking or scanning away.

* Register with multiple merchants. Couples can help guests out by registering with multiple merchants. Doing so gives guests more options and increases the likelihood that guests can find the store.

When choosing merchants, try to choose national stores that guests can access regardless of where they live.

* Don't assume all guests are tech-savvy. While the Web has made setting up and accessing a registry easier for couples and guests alike, it's safe to assume your guest list will include one or two holdouts who have never before shopped online. Because of that, couples should still register with a brick-and-mortar store instead of only registering online.

* Read the fine print. Some online retailers are kinder than others. When establishing an online registry, examine the retailer's policy thoroughly to be sure it does not include substantial service charges or

exorbitant shipping fees. Guests should not be penalized for their generosity.

* Vary the options within the registry. When adding items to the registry, be sure to include items that everyone can afford. Especially nowadays, when many weddings host guests from far and wide, it's ideal to include lots of affordable items. That way guests who have already spent considerable money

getting to the wedding won't have to break the bank even further to gift the bride- and groom-to-be.

As for high-end items, keep those to a minimum. Parents, siblings or other especially close relatives might ask to buy those items before you even establish the registry. But it is important to include at least a few expensive

items, as some guests might pool their resources and buy these gifts, saving you money while giving them the satisfaction that you got something you might not have been able to afford after paying for the wedding.

* Set up a honeymoon registry. Many of today's couples live together before they get married, and as a result, they might not need some of the more common household items like cookware, linens or home furnishings. Couples who already have stocked cupboards and linen closets might want to consider a honeymoon registry, which allows guests to donate money toward the couple's honeymoon. Guests can donate money or pay for certain activities the couple can enjoy while getting away from it all.

Wedding registries have evolved, making it easier than ever before for couples to set up a registry their guests can access.

When choosing merchants, try to choose national stores that guests can access regardless of where they live.

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Tame wedding day nerves

When couples tie the knot, many changes are in store, many compromises will be made and many lasting memories will be created. But in the weeks and months before their big days, couples can easily get caught up in the whirlwind of wedding planning, never taking inventory of their feelings until their wedding days have arrived.

Come their wedding days, couples should not be surprised if some nerves set in. A survey from the anxiety self-help resource The Fear Source indicated 71 percent of brides-to-be suffered from some type of nerves during the lead-up to their weddings. Ninety-two percent of brides experienced nerves on the day of the wedding or the evening before, while 66 percent reported that it affected their daily lives prior to their weddings or hampered their performance and enjoyment during the day itself.

According to Psych Central, a modern online voice for mental health information, emotional support and advocacy, pre-wedding jitters are common and can be the subconscious telling a person that something needs to be remedied. Wedding nerves do not mean a wedding is doomed; it just means certain issues may need to be worked through. The following are some ways to tame wedding day nerves.

Keep an open dialogue. Speak with your future spouse about the things that may be causing your anxiety. Maybe you have

doubts on financial choices or where you will be living after the wedding. Communicating openly and honestly is one of the foundations of a strong relationship.

Slow down and breathe. Wedding planning involves making many decisions, and sometimes couples move at breakneck speeds. Make slowing down a priority. Try to enjoy a quiet dinner with just the two of you. When enjoying peaceful moments, take deep breaths, which can be calming and revitalizing. If need be, consider signing up for a yoga or tai chi class to force you to slow down.

Address performance anxiety. It's easy to build up the big day in your mind and hope that everything goes according to plan. But it's impossible to plan for each and every outcome on your wedding day. Focus on everything that can go right, rather than worrying about what might go wrong. Also, realize that your guests are your friends and family members who will be forgiving of any hiccups along the way. You're bound to recover gracefully from any mishaps.

Work on confidence. Wedding fears may stem from inadequate self-confidence. Give yourself a pep talk and surround yourself with positive people. Keep the worry-warts at arms' length for the time being.

Recruit more help. Weddings are huge undertakings, so it's no surprise that couples sometimes feel overwhelmed. Ask reliable



relatives or friends to double-check all of the last-minute details. This way you don't feel it is all on your shoulders.

Wedding days nerves are to be expected and often have little

to do with the decision to get married. Planning such a big event can be nerve-racking, but there are ways to combat any anxiety that builds up as the big day draws near.

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Wedding day transportation tips

Couples must make many decisions when planning their weddings, including choosing transportation for guests to and from wedding ceremonies. Whereas couples once left guests' transportation up to their guests, nowadays it is customary to provide rides for guests so they can easily get to and from their hotel and the ceremony and reception safe and sound.

Many factors must be considered when choosing transportation for wedding guests, and the following are a handful of tips to make the decision a little easier.

Speak with your hotel before booking transportation. While professional shuttle services are an option, couples whose guests will be staying in a specific hotel or hotels should speak with management of

their hotels to determine if the hotels offer shuttle services for guests. Many hotels provide airport shuttle service to guests, and couples might be able to use such services to get their guests to and from their weddings and receptions. Hotels may charge a fee to use their shuttles, but they may offer discounts to couples whose guests book an agreed upon number of rooms. An added benefit to using the hotel shuttle services is that bus drivers won't get lost looking for the hotel.

Find an option that won't bust your budget. Wedding budgets tend to be big, and couples planning their weddings soon realize that budgets can quickly be busted. When choosing transportation for your guests, do not feel pressured to book especially lavish buses. So long as the buses are safe and on time, guests won't mind if they ride in a school bus or a fancy bus worthy of a touring rock band. If you are concerned about the appearance of a bus, ask if you can decorate the bus before the wedding to make it more inviting.

Comparison shop. Many companies cater to couples looking for transportation for their wedding guests, and couples should explore all of their options before committing to a particular company. Receive formal estimates from several companies before making your final decision, and speak to companies about matching offers. When comparing companies, try to consider both cost and quality. While the lowest estimate might be the most budget-friendly, you should choose the company that you feel is most trustworthy and capable of fulfilling your contract.

Read the contract. Transportation contracts should be gone over with a fine-tooth comb before couples sign on the dotted line. Check for hidden fees, such as mileage or overage charges if the reception runs a little late, and ask how much flexibility you might have with regard to those fees. Make sure any agreements you reach with regard to fees are written into the contract before you sign it.

Transportation for guests is one of many things couples must consider when planning their weddings. Make sure the option you choose is both guest- and budget-friendly.





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Customize your ceremony to give it a unique touch

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

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

Vows: Vows are one of the easiest ways to put a personal touch on your wedding. You can select the words you want to exchange during the ceremony as well as any readings during the service. Work with your officiant to narrow down particular phrasing or sentiments that fit with your vision of the wedding and



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

relationship.

Participants: Wedding party members fulfill certain roles during the ceremony, but they are not limited to those tasks alone. Consider asking wedding party

members or other friends or family members to take on specialized roles in the wedding. They may be able to do certain readings, escort guests to their seats, light candles, or sing and participate in

other ways.

Musical interludes: Choose music that connects with your personalities as a couple rather than selecting standard songs merely because they are the easier route. Work with the organist or other musicians and request that they perform or play musical pieces that you enjoy.

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

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



What to expect at a religious wedding ceremony

Weddings can be as unique and varied as the couples tying the knot. Quite often couples like to include certain twists on the ceremony and celebration to personalize their big days. But just as there are surprises at weddings, there also are many traditions that will be adhered to during ceremonies. Couples who opt for religious

wedding ceremonies often adhere to certain rules and traditions fostered by their faiths. Guests who may be unfamiliar with traditions outside of their own beliefs may not know what to expect during certain ceremonies.

Jewish celebrations

The world's Jewish population is divided among many distinctive

denominations and further classifications. Although there may be subtle differences in wedding ceremonies between the sects, Jewish wedding traditions tend to be consistent across the groups.

Conservative and Orthodox Jews may not hold weddings on the Sabbath or other holidays. Couples will sign the Ketuba, which is a marriage document affirming their connection to each other and to God.

The ceremony starts with grandparents seated first, followed by a procession of the rabbi, cantor and groomsmen. The groom and bride will be escorted by their parents. The wedding party will gather beneath the chuppah, which is a canopy that signifies a house and represents the couple's future together. A solid gold ring is given only to the bride according to Jewish law, although more liberal rabbis may allow a ring for the groom as a gift. The bridegroom smashes a wineglass with his foot after the vows have been exchanged.

Christian celebrations

Christian celebrations are similar among the various denominations. Such ceremonies typically involve a processional, though the groom is typically not included, instead standing at the altar. Christians typically hear various scripture readings, and the officiant will explain the significance of marriage in this faith. Many Catholic weddings feature a full Mass

during wedding ceremonies, and this Mass includes the transubstantiation of the Holy Eucharist.

After vows and rings are exchanged, the couple kisses and is pronounced husband and wife in the eyes of God. The bride and groom will go on to sign the marriage document with two witnesses on hand.

Hindu celebrations

A Hindu wedding celebration is an elaborate affair that includes extended family and community members. The wedding ceremony is called vivaah sanskar and can be a very colorful celebration that lasts for days. The couple and guests will be wearing traditional dress. The bride usually wears body art produced with a mixture of henna and turmeric.

Hindu rituals may vary widely, but some key things are shared. According to the "Encyclopedia of Hinduism," many will include the Kanyadaan, or giving away of the daughter by her father; Panigrahana, or holding one's hands by a fire to signify the union; and Saptapadi, which is taking seven steps and making seven promises to each other before the fire. The couple may have their clothing tied together during the seven promises ritual to represent their lifelong bond.

Wedding ceremonies may vary depending on culture and religion, but they all share the joy of two people pledging their love and devotion to each other.



Wedding ceremonies commonly include scripture readings, vows, rituals, and other religious traditions specified by the faith.



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Helpful hints when planning floral arrangements

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

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

Work with a florist you trust and like.

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

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

Choose in-season or native flowers.

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

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

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

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

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



Changing your last name

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

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

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

Changing one's name also may make it easier to deal with various issues. Finances, travel and even parenting concerns may be

easier when women take their husbands' last names than when they don't.

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

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

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



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