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Get Started!

11 THINGS TO DO AFTER GETTING ENGAGED

He popped the question. You said yes. Now what? These 11 things will help you figure out what to do first—and how to enjoy every second of the wedding planning process.

1. Call Your VIPs
Share the big news with your inner circle before updating your status on Facebook. It’s not cool for your acupuncturist to find out before Grandma.

2. Get your engagement ring insured
It may not be the most thrilling task in the world, but if your engagement ring falls down the garbage disposal, flies off a rollercoaster, or sheds a diamond or two, you’ll be ever-so-glad you got that precious stone insured.

3. Get a manicure
Everyone’s eyes will be on your hand, so grab your BFF, splurge on a professional mani, and start showing off that sparkler!

4. Enjoy the moment
Being engaged means you get to plan the wedding of your dreams. But it also means that you just committed to spending the rest of your life with your soul mate. Take some time (at least a couple of weeks) to savor how epically romantic that is before you dive into logistics.

5. Start dreaming
This is the fun part: brainstorming with your guy about the big day. Compare fantasies (tequila tastings! beach vows!), and sign up for a Pinterest account to create an online inspiration board. Go crazy—you can refine things after you’ve picked your venue.
6. Add up your wedding budget

Ready to get down to the nitty-gritty? Settle on a rough guest list and budget. “Without them, you can’t book the right venue and vendors for your price point,” says wedding planner Tracy Taylor Ward.

7. Get out your calendar

Have a range of dates in mind before you tour venues. Are you envisioning a spring garden wedding, or fall I do’s in the woods? Do you want to honeymoon in Yosemite, or cruise the Caribbean? The answers will help steer you toward your ideal time of year. Tip: Ask engaged friends when they’re getting hitched, so you can avoid those dates.

8. Hire a wedding planning pro

If you want to work with a wedding planner, book her before you choose your venue. “I often wish I could turn back time and show new clients a site that would have been a much better fit,” says planner Annie Lee.

9. Find a wedding venue

Your venue will influence every decision you make, from your color scheme to the style of your dress, so lock it down early. The key is finding one that meshes with your vision (black-tie ballroom, modern minimalist, etc.). And don’t be afraid to think beyond the banquet hall.

10. Stay organized

This is not the kind of party you can throw together at the last minute. Stay on track by creating a comprehensive timeline of your wedding to-dos.

11. Book in-demand vendors

Once you’ve secured a venue and date, start hunting for your officiant, photographer, and band or DJ. Because these vendors typically book just one event per day, they get scooped up very quickly. “Many have schedules that rival the president’s,” says planner Calder Clark.
Who should I tell first about my engagement?
Your parents and his should be the first people you tell about your engagement. You don’t want them hearing about it from another person—even if that other person is a grandparent, sibling, or aunt. If you can’t tell them in person, call them. Sending an email is fine to announce your engagement to your friends, but your parents—especially if you are expecting them to help pay for the wedding—deserve a phone call. After you tell both sets of parents, you can see, call, or email anyone you are close to and share your exciting news: grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, close friends.

Does my boyfriend have to ask my father for permission to marry me?
While it’s more of a tradition than a requirement, many dads appreciate the gesture of being asked for their daughter’s hand in marriage. However, since you can marry whomever you like, regardless of your father’s wishes, nowadays most men ask for a father’s blessing, not permission. If you think your dad may be upset if your future groom doesn’t consult him ahead of time, tell your boyfriend to make sure to talk to him before proposing. If you’re not sure what your dad would like and don’t want to ask him, talk to your mom. She’ll be able to tell you if your father expects to be asked.

If the wedding is cancelled, who keeps the engagement ring?
Even though technically the bride isn’t required to return the ring (at least in most states), it’s the best thing to do, regardless of who called off the wedding. While the ring was a gift, it was more importantly a symbol of a commitment to marry. Since there will no longer be a marriage, do you really want to keep a reminder of a future that won’t happen? After all, the ring isn’t a consolation prize. The emphasis here should be on appreciating the relationship you
once had, not on cashing out any material value. Returning the ring gives everyone a fresh start. In the end, you will need to let your conscience be your guide.

If, however, the ring was a family heirloom of the groom’s family, there’s no question: It should be returned. If you and your fiancé purchased the ring together, one solution would be to sell it and split the proceeds proportionately.

—Anna Post, The Emily Post Institute

My family invited several people to my engagement party that I’m not planning on inviting to the wedding. What should I do?

If the invitations have gone out there’s nothing much you can do. You can’t call them up and un-invite them to the party. You need to schedule a time to talk with both set of parents about the size and style of wedding you and your fiancé want. Based on the size of wedding you want and the amount of people that your reception site can hold, you need to let both sets of parents know how many guests they can each invite—including relatives and friends. If the space allows more people, you may now have to invite these extra guests, or ask your parents to spread the word that the bride and groom have decided to hold a more intimate wedding with only immediate family and close friends.

Here’s a general rule to follow: If you send an engagement party or bridal shower invitation or a save-the-date card to anyone, you will also have to send them a wedding invitation.

Can I propose to my boyfriend?

Of course you can! You can make your proposal of marriage to him as traditional or as fun and informal as you want. And don’t be afraid to get down on one knee either. While we’re not suggesting you buy him a diamond ring, you could buy him another accessory he can wear every day—a watch, necklace, bracelet, or another style ring. Some brides-to-be who decide to propose to their boyfriends have bought themselves an engagement ring, and when the groom-to-be says yes she asks him to slip it onto her ring finger.

I hate my engagement ring. Can I tell my fiancé?

You must absolutely tell him how you feel! And together you can pick out an engagement ring of equal or lesser value. Most guys will understand that your opinion counts for a lot, since YOU are the one who will be wearing the ring—and literally wearing it every day! And guys are cautioned all the time to discuss ring styles with their partner before making a purchase, so you have good reason to speak up. If you think his feelings will be really hurt or if you think voicing your thoughts will make him angry and resentful (and take away from the joy you are both feeling upon getting engaged) wait a year before saying anything.

In general, a new ring is in order if you dislike the color of metal, you dislike the shape or cut of the diamond (round vs. square, emerald-cut vs. cushion, etc.), the ring is too modern/too glitzy/too old-fashioned-looking/too plain, and your style is just the opposite.

However, it is NOT okay to say you want a different ring because you think the stone is too small or of poor quality. Because that’s like saying, “You didn’t spend enough money.” You would never want him to feel that his choice was inadequate in that regard—surely he bought you the most beautiful ring he could afford, so if everything else about the ring works for you (metal, stone shape, style) then hold your tongue. Five years from now you can discuss upgrading to a diamond of better quality.

I’m planning on having a very long engagement. By the time I get married, I will have been engaged for over three years. Is this appropriate?

You can plan to be engaged as long as you want but you may not want to book any vendors or buy your wedding dress so far away from your wedding day. Styles and your own personal taste will change over the course of three years, so enjoy being engaged and start getting ideas from wedding Web sites and bridal magazines. Don’t start signing contracts with vendors until about 12 to 18 months from your wedding date.
Choose a Coverage Provider

When it comes to insuring your engagement ring (or other valuable jewelry for that matter) you have two options. If you have homeowners’ or renters’ insurance, you can purchase an extension (also called a “rider”) that covers your engagement ring specifically. If you don’t have homeowners’ or renters’ insurance you can take out a policy through a company that specializes in jewelry insurance like Jewelers Mutual. Independent companies like Jewelers Mutual are also worth a look if your insurance provider doesn’t offer the specific coverage you require.

The cost of coverage will vary greatly based on several factors including the value of your ring, where you live (and theft rates in the area), as well as whether or not your policy has a deductible, says Kash Bulsara, a team manager in the homeowners insurance division at State Farm. “Policies without deductibles will have higher monthly premiums. And, just as with health and car insurance, it’s a great idea to ask your insurer what types of repairs contribute to your deductible.”

Other important questions to ask a potential policy provider: Can you choose who repairs your ring? If you’re insured for replacement (instead of a cash payout), where can you purchase a new ring? What happens if a suitable replacement cannot be found? How will you need to prove the ring vanished if you make a claim? And are there any circumstances that aren’t covered?

“In addition to engagement ring insurance, remember this is a time when you should be reevaluating all of your insurance needs as newlyweds,” says Jeanne Salvatore, senior vice president of public affairs and consumer spokesperson for the Insurance Information Institute. Even consider ramping up your insurance coverage to account for expensive or hard-to-replace wedding gifts.
Get an Appraisal

You can’t protect the value of your ring if you don’t know what it’s worth. “A thorough appraisal will include the carat weight, cut, color, and clarity of all the diamonds, the carat weight and shape of any colored stones, the metal type and fineness or karat, as well as any identifying marks, hallmarks, or stamps,” says Elizabeth Doyle, president and co-founder of Doyle & Doyle. Most insurance companies will require an appraisal for higher value pieces (for example, rings worth $5,000 or more) while an invoice or receipt suffices for less expensive items.

If your center stone is around half a carat or larger, your jeweler will often provide a diamond certificate or grading report from an independent gemological laboratory like the Gemological Institute of America (GIA), the organization that founded the “4Cs” used to evaluate diamonds: Color, cut, clarity, and carat weight. This assessment of quality—while not an appraisal—lists all of the measurements your appraiser will need to make the most accurate determination of value. (This detailed information can also help track down your specific diamond if it’s ever stolen.) “If your ring is lost and you’re without an appraisal there is no way you’ll be able to recover the ring’s actual worth,” says Russell Shor, senior industry analyst at GIA. “The GIA report is unassailable if people lose their ring or are victims of theft.”

Find a reputable appraiser with sparkling reviews, preferably one who also holds a graduate degree in gemology and is a member of a national appraisal society. (The GIA recognizes these associations.) “It’s very important that your appraisal is accurate,” says Zaven Ghanimian, designer for Simon G. Jewelry. “It’s not a good thing if the appraiser inflates the value of your ring.” Sure, you might be thrilled when the sparkler that cost your groom $2,000 appraises for double, but you could end up losing money in the long run. You’ll pay a higher monthly premium for a ring that appraises for $4,000, and if it’s lost or stolen, your insurance company may just replace the ring—which could also only cost them $2,000—instead of cutting you a check for the cool 4K.

Remember to Reappraise

The good news is your engagement ring was a smart investment! As its value has likely gone up since it was purchased, it’s important to have your ring reappraised every 2 to 3 years for insurance purposes. And consider going back to the same appraiser each time (assuming you had a good experience), says Bulsara. Most reputable appraisers will retain a copy of your original appraisal and can work from that instead of starting from scratch—and that cuts costs. (But bring a copy of your appraisal in the event they don’t keep records for that long.)

—Alyssa Wells

THE DO’S AND DON’TS OF TAKING CARE OF YOUR ENGAGEMENT RING

Do’s and Don’ts

You’ve spent months, perhaps years, dreaming of the perfect engagement ring. Now that it’s a permanent fixture on your left hand, you’ll want to ensure it stays just as shiny and sparkly for many years to come. From the chemicals to avoid to where to store your ring, here are a few do’s and don’t’s on how to care for your engagement sparkler.

Do purchase insurance

“Insurance is necessary to protect your financial investment in the event that something gets lost, stolen or damaged,” explains jewelry designer Sylvie Levine. “It is also important to have your jewelry appraised every five years as the cost of diamonds and precious metals go up. If you were to lose something which was appraised 10 years ago, the insured value would be far less than the actual replacement cost.”

Don’t Remove Your Ring in Public

Hand washing is a must in a public restroom but resist the temptation to remove your engagement ring while you’re lathering up. The possibility that you might leave your ring on the ledge of the sink, or, worse, drop it down the drain, is too great a risk to take.

Do Keep Your Ring Clean

“Cleaning your gems with random cleaners at home is
something I do not recommend,” says LA-based jeweler Susan Foster of Susan Foster Jewelry. “Elizabeth Taylor would clean her 33.19 carat Krupp diamond ring with hot water, a toothbrush, and gin; however, taking your precious and sentimental engagement ring to an expert jeweler to get it properly steamed clean would be my recommendation.”

Don’t Treat Your Ring with Harsh Chemicals

“Remove your ring when cleaning or touching harsh chemicals,” explains Susan. “Bleach and other cleaning agents can dull the finish of a ring and actually harm porous colored gemstones like emeralds.”

Don’t Put Your Ring Through Needless Wear and Tear

“A diamond is one of the world’s hardest natural materials,” explains Adelaide Polk-Bauman of Forevermark, “but that doesn’t mean a cut and polished diamond cannot chip! Sometimes the table of a cut diamond can be susceptible to wear and tear. Be sure not to knock it against other hard materials.”

Do Schedule Monthly Maintenance Appointments with Your Jeweler

“It is very important to schedule maintenance appointments with your jeweler at least once a year to make sure the prongs are tight, the diamond isn’t loose and there are no hairline cracks in the shank,” says Susan. “All around maintenance is vital.”

Don’t Get Ring Envy

Every bride has a different idea as to what her dream engagement ring will look like. Once you have that shiny stone on your finger, don’t start comparing your ring with anyone else’s. An engagement ring is a symbol of a couple’s love and devotion, not a sign of status.

YOUR ENGAGEMENT RING (CONTINUED)

HOW TO PICK A WEDDING BAND THAT WORKS WITH YOUR ENGAGEMENT RING

Your engagement ring and wedding band should complement one another without feeling too matchy-matchy. Here are ten pairings we think work well together and tips for picking your own unique combination.

Your Engagement Ring: Simple Solitaire

A solitaire engagement ring—whether the cut is princess, round, or emerald—is the most versatile style to match. While your bauble will look lovely alongside nearly any wedding band, we recommend pairing a simple solitaire with a thin pavé diamond band for an extra dose of sparkle.

Your Engagement Ring: Pavé Band

If your engagement ring features an eternity or half-eternity diamond band, opt for a simple gem-free wedding band to let your sparkler take center stage.

Your Engagement Ring: Three-Stone

Pair your three-stone engagement ring with a band featuring similarly cut gemstones.

Your Engagement Ring: Colored Stone

If your engagement ring features a colored center stone, consider a wedding band that also incorporates that gem. A band that alternates between colored and white gemstones is a smart choice—it coordinates, but doesn’t compete with, your engagement ring.
Your Engagement Ring: Unusual Shape
Uniquely-shaped engagement rings have seen a surge in popularity in recent years. Choose a band that complements the curves of your engagement ring so that the pair will lay flush on your finger.

Your Engagement Ring: Pavé Band
A trend we’ve been seeing more of lately: engagement bands. For your wedding band, choose a thin band in the same metal, but opt for a style that incorporates colored stones.

Your Engagement Ring: Stand-Out Design
Some engagement rings command more attention when worn alone. If your bauble falls into this category, forgo the traditional band entirely (use your engagement ring for the ring exchange part of the ceremony) or select an equally eye-catching band to wear on your right hand.

Your Engagement Ring: Modern
A heavily-adorned band will look out of place next to a modern engagement ring. Avoid flowery designs and opt for a sleek band with minimal decoration.

Your Engagement Ring: Vintage
Vintage-inspired rings often feature filigree, engraving, and other intricate decorations. Give your ring pairing a cohesive feel by selecting a band that highlights a favorite design element from your engagement ring, like engraved flowers.

Your Engagement Ring: Organic
When it comes to selecting your wedding ring, texture and finish are just as important as the type of metal used. For example, a hammered metal band plays up the hand-hewn vibe of an organic engagement ring.
With just a few days left before the big day, you already have a mile-long checklist of to-dos—now meet the don’ts! From impromptu skin treatments to all-night movie marathons, here are 11 things to avoid at all costs.

**1. New Hair Color**

“Even if your colorist is the absolute best, avoid making changes to your hair within a week of your wedding,” says Paul Labrecque, hairstylist and owner of Paul Labrecque Salon and Spa in New York City. “You never know how the color could oxidize or how it will look with your skin tone.” If you want to refresh your hue without endangering your look, ask your colorist to put a clear gloss on your strands. “This will add a lot of shine and sheen,” says Labrecque. But if you do get mixed up with some bad color before the big day, you won’t do too much damage to your hair by getting it re-colored right away—as long as there weren’t high levels of bleach involved in the process, says Labrecque.

**2. Drastic Haircuts**

“Wedding trials and consultations start about three months prior to the actual day, and you should keep the same hairstyle throughout the process,” says Labrecque. “Not only will the texture and style of your hair change if you get it chopped, but keep in mind something drastic may not look right with your dress’s neckline, veil, or wedding day jewelry.” Bridesown beauty director Dana Wood suggests only going in for a quarter-inch “micro trim” a month before your big day to snip off any fried ends. But other than that, steer clear of the shears! “No matter how well you plan ahead there seems to always be something left to the last minute—hair should not be one
of them,” says Stephanie Bork, senior stylist at the José Eber Salon. “The closer you get to the big day, the more stressed and emotional you’ll be. You want to make all of these preparations and decisions while you’re still clear headed and calm.”

3. Alcohol
For something you sip, alcohol carries a ton of extra calories, so you may want to cut back even earlier than the week before your wedding. As for immediate effects, alcohol can make you look and feel puffy due its sulfur-bearing gases and other qualities that weaken your digestive system. (And who wants to say “I do” feeling like a marshmallow? We thought not.) What’s more, alcohol dilates your blood vessels, which can lead to wedding picture-compromising redness, says Debra Jaliman, MD, author of Skin Rules: Trade Secrets from a Top New York Dermatologist.

4. A New Workout
“Stick to the routine you’ve been doing,” says Melissa Paris, a certified group exercise instructor and Lululemon ambassador. “Now is not the time for new moves.” Pulled muscles can take weeks to heal and you definitely don’t want to be too sore to get down on the dance floor. If your goal is to lose weight, make sure to start a new fitness program well before your dress fittings. And if you’re just looking for an amazing way to relieve pre-wedding stress, grab a friend for a quick walk or run in the park. “There is something about being outside with a friend that is so helpful,” says Paris.

5. Spray Tan Booths
“Spray tanning in a booth may be a budget-friendly option for a safe, sunless glow, but there’s a good chance the color you get won’t match your skin tone as well as other fake tanning alternatives,” says Nina Patino, an aesthetician at Paul Labrecque Salon and Spa. Rather than stepping into a box—which can result in uneven color if you don’t hold your body just so—it’s best to have a specialist expertly apply the tanning solution so it’s evenly distributed and complements your skin color, says Patino. And don’t forget to lightly exfoliate beforehand. “The color will last longer and you’ll literally glow as you walk down the aisle,” says Patino.

6. Changing Up Your Makeup
“Sometimes brides panic at the last minute that they’ve got too much or too little makeup on,” says Jodie Hazlewood, a London-based makeup artist who does more than 70 weddings a year and teaches professional bridal makeup artist courses at the Jemma Kidd Makeup School in Notting Hill. “That’s why during the trial—when they’re in a much more rational state of mind—I give brides a chance to try out different looks.” At the end of the day, trust in your makeup artist, who takes your skin type, age, hairstyle, wedding color palette, and the time, location, and style of your day
into consideration when designing your look. “Modern bridal makeup is a little like red carpet makeup,” says Hazlewood. “It needs to look good on HD video cameras, professional cameras, personal camera phones, in bright light and candle light, as well as last for hours.”

How do you make sure your skin is the perfect canvas for your wedding day makeup? “Water, water, water! Sleep, sleep, sleep!” says Hazlewood. “Stay away from sun beds and major tanning. And don’t worry too much about breakouts! They can be easily be covered by a good makeup artist—as long as you don’t touch or pick at the blemishes.”

7. Juice Cleanses

“I like to think of food as fuel,” says Keri Gans, RD, author of The Small Change Diet. “You need calories to keep you alert and help you get through your crazy, busy weekend. It’s not the time to stop nourishing yourself.” Juice cleanses are very low in calories, sapping your energy and making you irritable. And cleanses that include mostly fruit juices are high in sugar. “The week before you should be eating well-balanced meals with a focus on fruits and vegetables and drinking plenty of water—and don’t skip any meals!” says Gans.

8. Peels & Microdermabrasion

A peel or microdermabrasion session promises silky-smooth skin in the future, but it’s a total no-go the week before your wedding. “After receiving a chemical peel or microdermabrasion some people see their skin peel off repeatedly, which leaves dead skin on the surface that can ball up under makeup,” says Patino. “Others see their skin get extremely red and irritated.” And wearing make-up, which is the reason you went in for a skin smoothing and cleansing treatment in the first place, can only exacerbate that irritation. “Schedule any appointments for a peel, microdermabrasion, or other treatments like Botox, at least 2 weeks before your wedding in case there is any redness or bruising,” says Jaliman.

9. New-to-you Skincare Products

“Don’t change your skincare regimen if you have fewer than two weeks to go before your wedding,” says Jaliman. “You should change it months in advance.” Swap-
Your wedding to-dos—and when to do them

12 MONTHS BEFORE
- Write up the guest list.
- Fantasize about your ideal wedding.
- Have the money conversation.
- Book a reception venue and ceremony site. Lock in the date.
- Set your budget—with some wiggle room.
- Figure out who’s paying for what.
- Hire a wedding planner, if you want one.
- Book a stationer.

10 MONTHS BEFORE
- Settle on your officiant.
- Go dress-shopping.
- Select your bridal party.
- Shop for vendors. Set up in-person meetings with potentials.

8 MONTHS BEFORE
- Book the caterer, florist, band/DJ, ceremony music, and photographer—and secure your rentals.
- Order your dress.
- Block hotel rooms for out-of-town guests.
- Register.

6 MONTHS BEFORE
- Shop for wedding bands.
- Send save-the-dates.
- Meet with vendors to hammer out details.
- Order invitations.
- Order bridesmaids’ dresses (if you want them to dress alike).
- Book the getaway car.
- Book transportation (buses, limos) for guests, if required.
- Book the honeymoon.

4 MONTHS BEFORE
- Order the cake.
- Hire a calligrapher.
- Plan the rehearsal dinner.
- Crank out thank-you notes post-shower.
- Choose the groom’s and groomsmen’s attire.

2 MONTHS BEFORE
- Set up your hair-and-makeup trial.
- Write the vows, if you plan to personalize.
- Finalize the ceremony selections with the officiant.
- Mail the invitations.
- Accessorize your look.
- Buy gifts for the bridal party, parents, and your fiancé.

21% of women get highlights before their wedding

5% of brides wear a floral crown

12% of couples throw a joint bachelor/bachelorette party

70% of brides bring their BFF with them to pick out their wedding dress

70% of couples throw a joint bachelor/bachelorette party

80% fiancé, 20% mom

WHOSE OPINION DO YOU CARE MORE ABOUT WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR DRESS—YOUR FIANCE’S OR YOUR MOM’S?
The List

6 Weeks Before
- Confirm the arrival of the bridesmaids’ dresses.
- Apply for a marriage license.
- Print the programs, menus, and other wedding-reception stationery.
- Plan welcome baskets for out-of-towners.
- Partake in bachelorette high jinks.

48 Hours Before
- Pick up your dress.
- Put all vendor tips in envelopes. Delegate their distribution to the maid of honor or best man.
- Write day-of balance checks that are due.
- Drop off welcome baskets for out-of-town guests.

2 Weeks Before
- Final dress fitting (!).
- Submit your shot list to the photographer.
- Give playlists and “no play” lists to the DJ.
- Procure your marriage license.
- Review the RSVPs, and chase after stragglers.
- Update the registry.

1 Week Before
- Give the final head count to the site and caterer.
- Break in your shoes.
- Finalize the seating chart.
- Give last-minute requests to vendors.
- Get any waxings or facials.

Day Before
- Reconfirm pickup times.
- Last-minute primping (nails, bronzing).
- Rehearse the ceremony and go to dinner.
- Give your bridal party and your parents their gifts.

Day of
- Exchange presents with the groom.
- Give the rings to the best man and maid of honor.
- Eat small, light meals.
- Beautify.
- Get married.
- Enjoy!

24% of brides do their own hair or ask a friend or family member to be their stylist for the wedding

45% of couples donate to charity instead of giving favors

9% of couples donate to charity instead of giving favors

5% of brides wear “something blue”—on their toes!

57% looking thin

43% looking sexy

24% of brides put an heirloom in their bouquet as their “something old”
Weddings are undoubtedly joyous occasions—but unfortunately, they can also be very pricey. From the invitations to the band, there are hidden costs everywhere. Step by step, we’ll explain how to cut your wedding budget in half and put your money where it matters—without sacrificing any fun.

Are you ready to slash your wedding budget from $50,000* to just $25,000? Read on.

1. Avoid Peak Season: 
Save $1,500
Get hitched in late summer or winter to shave up to 20 percent off your venue fee.  
Your new wedding budget: $48,500

2. Cut in Packs: 
Save $2,500
Shrink your guest list by a table (8 to 10 people) for savings across the board—from staffing to rentals. 
Your new wedding budget: $46,000

3. Embrace All-Inclusives: 
Save $3,125
A venue with catering packages (country club, hotel, banquet hall) or a private room at a restaurant will save $25 a head. 
Your new wedding budget: $42,875

*Starting budget reflects the approximate cost of a 125-guest loft wedding in peak season with 12 attendants, letterpress stationery, abundant floral décor and cocktail-hour provisions, an ornate cake, and an eight-piece band.
14 WAYS TO CUT YOUR WEDDING BUDGET IN HALF (CONTINUED)

4. Choose Local Flowers: Save $600
Stick to seasonal and local flowers—they’re eco- and econ-friendly.
Your new wedding budget: $42,275

5. Have Fewer VIPs: Save $660
A large bridal party equals a hefty florist bill. Cut your posse from six to two and save big on blooms.
Your new wedding budget: $41,615

6. Sorry, No Shots: Save $1,250
Limit booze offerings to wine, beer, and a couple of specialty cocktails for a 25 percent-cheaper tab.
Your new wedding budget: $40,365

7. Focus on Deliciousness: Save $1,250
Pass four crowd-pleasing apps (in lieu of 10) and offer a plentiful spread of cheeses and bruschetta to save $10 per guest.
Your new wedding budget: $39,115

8. Knock a Star Off the Five-Star Meal: Save $1,250
Serve taste-alikes: prosecco instead of champagne, hanger steak in lieu of filet mignon, and grouper over cod.
Your new wedding budget: $37,865

9. Welcome Turntables: Save $7,300
Book a DJ: On average, a talented one costs five times less than a live band of the same caliber.
Your new wedding budget: $30,565

10. Don’t Gild the Cake: Save $1,215
Top it with one XL sugar bloom instead of a cascade of edible flora to save $10 per slice.
Your new wedding budget: $29,350

11. Give Your Photographer a Curfew: Save $350
Who wants to pay for shots of drunk, sweaty guests at the end of the night anyway?
Your new wedding budget: $29,000

12. Honk Once for Love: Save $1,000
Avoid having a fancy car on standby the entire day. Choose to make a grand entrance or a big exit.
Your new wedding budget: $28,000

13. Rein in Albums: Save $1,500
Make one group-friendly edit so you can order the same album for yourselves, your parents, and your in-laws.
Your new wedding budget: $26,500

14. Skip Letterpress: Save $1,500
Print all your stationery digitally. Go for great color and typography rather than pricey techniques and chunky paper stock.
Your new wedding budget: $25,000

Whew! New Budget: $25,000

Congratulations! Your new wedding budget is just half of the $50,000 you started out with. You’ve saved $25,000, which leaves you with more funds for your honeymoon—and your new life together.
The Dress
How to Find The One

Ready for the shopping trip of your lifetime? Here's your guide to landing the dress of your dreams.
The Right Shape

if you’re petite...
Want to look long and lean? Stay away from big ball gowns and go for a silhouette that skims your body.

Q. I’m 5’2”. Can I still wear a princess gown?
A. Absolutely. But instead of one with a voluminous skirt, choose an A-line (like #1) with plenty of princess-y bling.

LEFT TO RIGHT: A slight drop waist can make your legs look short, so opt for a natural waist; $1,707, Justin Alexander; justinalexanderbridal.com.
A form-fitting fit-and-flare gown gives the illusion of height; $1,815, Blue by Enzoani; enzoani.com.
A sheath’s continuous line stretches your frame; $1,315, Zurc for Impression; impressionbridal.com.

if you’re plus-size...
Celebrate your curves in a gown that shrinks and defines your waist.

Q. I’m a size 18, and most of the dresses I’ve tried on are too poufy. Help!
A. You can reduce the pouf by having layers of the petticoat cut out. But why not show off your shape with a sexy and body-conscious style like #1? He’ll love it!

LEFT TO RIGHT: Accentuate your hourglass figure in a fit-and-flare; $2,325, Paloma Blanca; palomablanca.com.
Minimize your hips and shrink your waist in an A-line; $2,097, Justin Alexander; justinalexanderbridal.com.
Side draping and lightweight fabrics are super-slimming; $1,180, Kathy Ireland for Mon Cheri; kathyirelandformoncheri.com.
if you have a big bust...

Slipdresses and sheaths can make you look top-heavy. Balance out your chest with a full skirt.

Q. I’m 38DD. Can I still wear a strapless gown?
A. Yes! Most gowns have a ton of built-in support. And if you need more, you can have a corset inserted during alterations. Just avoid necklines that cut straight across—they can amplify your bust.

LEFT TO RIGHT: The subtle dip in this bodice softens your bustline; $2,850, Paloma Blanca; palomablanca.com.

The strap provides support, while the diagonal ruching shrinks your chest; $2,900, Pronovias; pronovias.com.

Look sexy but still have coverage with a lacy illusion neckline; $2,700, Martina Liana; martinaliana.com.

The Right Shape

if you’re lean and straight...

The key to creating curves? Flared skirts, diagonal draping, and daring necklines.

Q. I’m an A cup. I’d love to find a wedding dress that makes me look like a C. Any ideas?
A. A deep sweetheart neckline will help make your bust look full. Want an extra boost? Have padded bra cups inserted.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Diagonal ruching on the bodice and hips equals a sinuous silhouette; $1,587, Justin Alexander; justinalexanderbridal.com.

A V-neck and a flared skirt add curves; $3,100, Martina Liana; martinaliana.com.

Highlight your hips with a full skirt and a waist-whittling sash; $1,750, Mikaella; mikaellabridal.com.
Flattering Favorite

THE GOWN FOR EVERY BODY!
WANT TO BOOST CURVES AND BANISH FLAWS? CELEBS FROM KATE BECKINSALE TO QUEEN LATIFAH SWEAR BY THE FIT-AND-FLARE GOWN

1/ Sweetheart neckline
A subtle plunge downplays décolletage on a large bust, while a deeper dip adds roundness. (The illusion neckline is also super-flattering.)

2/ Natural waist
Snugness at the smallest part of your torso spotlights an hourglass shape. Add a sash for more slimming power.

3/ Cap sleeves
They support your bust and frame your face, drawing eyes up and away from your chest (great for small bustlines, too!).

4/ Long, fitted waist
The “fit” part of the fit-and-flare, this body-conscious style elongates your torso, making you look taller and thinner.

5/ Flare
A dramatic spray of tulle creates the illusion of curves. Have voluptuous hips? Choose a dress that flares out just below your bottom. Big bust? Balance it out with a trumpet skirt at midthigh. Petite? Go for a mermaid style with a flounce at the knee.

Ivory embroidered illusion cap-sleeve gown with a full tulle skirt, $8,495, Marchesa; Gabriella New York.com.
The Search

SHOPPING 101
YOU’VE NEVER BOUGHT A DRESS LIKE THIS BEFORE. HERE’ S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE HOWS, WHERE S, AND WHATS OF GOWN-SHOPPING

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRESS

Think About the Venue
A sexy slipdress will be out of place in a cathedral, while a glamball gown won’t look right on a ranch. Keep your setting in mind while you’re trying on dresses.

Consider the Weather
Saying “I do” in the tropics? Go for lightweight fabrics and ethereal styles. Marrying in the winter? Think sparkle, sleeves, and lush fabrics, like satin or taffeta.

Channel the Spirit of Your Party
You want your dress to reflect the feel of your wedding. So if your stationery and decor scream “formal affair,” your gown should, too.

Live Your Fantasy
After all that, here’s where we tell you to throw out the rulebook. This is your dream and your big day—if you want to wear a ball gown on a beach, it’s your prerogative. Go for it!

WHERE TO GO

Is Your Priority Personalized Service?
If so, head to a bridal salon, where a consultant will help you order a dress that’s made for your body. Note: Dresses generally take six months to arrive after ordering.

A Familiar Setting?
Is there a department store you love? Many have on-site bridal salons.

Wearing a One-Of-A-Kind?
A dressmaker can make your vision happen.

Instant Gratification?
If you want to walk out with a dress in hand, David’s Bridal—which has great service and a ton of affordable styles and sizes—is the way to go.

Buying Online?
Chic ready-to-wear brands like BHLDN and J.Crew can usually get a dress to you in one to five days. But beware: If you find a site with prices that seem too good to be true, they probably are. Click the site’s “store locator” to make sure it has a list of trustworthy online and brick-and-mortar stores.

WHAT TO BRING

☐ Dress Ideas
Break out your wedding binder or iPad—your consultant is going to want to see tearouts and images of gowns you love.

☐ Shoes
Rock heels about the same height as the ones you’ll wear on your big day, so you can see where the hem will actually hit.

☐ Underwear
Many salons require it. Also, rethink the thong—unless you don’t mind the consultants seeing your booty.

☐ Bra
Think supportive and strapless.

☐ Hair Elastic
You’ll want a clear view of your gown’s neckline.

☐ Your Crew
Bring your besties—your mom, your MOH, your sis. Just don’t bring an army—too many opinions can spoil the fun.

SECRETS OF A SALON

You May Need An Appointment
Just like in Bridesmaids, some salons require that you set up a time to shop. The purpose? To make sure every bride gets the attention and personal service she deserves.

You’re Going To Be Naked
Remember that “no thong” tip? Getting into a wedding dress is a production and a half—and your consultant will need to get up-close and personal in the dressing room to make it happen.

You’re Going To Be Pinned and Clipped
Most salons only carry sample sizes, so it’s up to your consultant to make each dress look like it was made for you. Gown too big? She’ll pin and clip. Too small? She’ll cover bare skin with temporary fabric panels.

You May Not Find Plus-Sized Samples
Not every salon carries them, so call ahead to make sure you don’t make the trip for nothing.

You Can Shop For Bridesmaid Dresses Too!
The good news: After you’ve found the wedding gown of your dreams, you can go back and be pampered like a princess again—this time while looking for dresses for your bridal party!

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PERFECT FIT

The Look
Yes, alterations can get expensive (see below), but when it comes to looking amazing in your dress, the fit is just as important as the style. In fact, because your seamstress will contour the dress specifically to your body, your wedding gown should be the most flattering thing you ever wear!

The Feel
It should also be one of the most comfortable. A great fit will help lighten the load of a heavy ball gown—and let you dance all night without worrying about wardrobe malfunctions.

The Cost
On average, alterations can run you between $50 and $600, depending on how extensive they are—so make sure you factor them into your dress budget.
Runway Rock Stars

FROM SILVER-SCREEN GLAMOUR TO VICTORIAN ELEGANCE, HERE ARE THE STYLES THAT STOLE THE SPOTLIGHT DURING NEW YORK BRIDAL WEEK

BLUSH

FROM LEFT: 1. CB COUTURE Silk ruched fit-and-flare gown; cbcouturebridal.com. 2. LAZARO Organza ball gown with a floral tier; jlmcouture.com. 3. ROMONA KEVEZA COLLECTION Crystal and floral beaded ball gown; romonakeveza.com. 4. MORI LEE BY MADELINE GARDNER Ombré organza ball gown; morilee.com. 5. MARK ZUNINO FOR KLEINFELD French illusion lace gown with beaded accents and a fluted silk-organza skirt; kleinfeldbridal.com.

SWEET ROMANCE

FROM LEFT: 1. ELIZABETH FILLMORE Ivory embroidered-lace gown with bell sleeves and a high-low skirt; elizabethfillmore.com. 2. RANDI RAHM White organza embroidered strapless ball gown with a matching jacket and blue satin sash; randirahm.com. 3. CLAIRE PETTIBONE Ivory tulle embroidered lace and linen gown; clairepettibone.com.

MINIMAL

FROM LEFT: 1. ROSA CLARÁ Ivory long-sleeved crepe slim gown; rosaclara.com. 2. AMSALE Ivory faille de soie ball gown; amsale.com.
Runway Rock Stars

VICTORIAN
FROM LEFT: 1 RIVINI BY RITA VINIERIS Ivory Chantilly-lace sheath with crystal appliqués and a matching blouse; rivini.com. 2 TULLE Ivory re-embroidered French lace over a yellow bustier; tullenewyork.com. 3 REEM ACRA Ivory re-embroidered lace fit-and-flare gown with a peplum; reemacra.com.

FLORAL

OLD HOLLYWOOD
FROM LEFT: 1 MARCHESA Ivory lace A-line gown with a pleated tulle overlay and necklace collar with pearls and crystals; Bergdorf Goodman, 212-872-8957. 2 REEM ACRA Stretch illusion embroidered column; reemacra.com. 3 JENNY PACKHAM Ivory silk-chiffon Empire-waist gown with Swarovski crystals; jennypackham.com.

CLASSIC LONG SLEEVE
1 MARCHESA Ivory lace long-sleeved ball gown with a tulle skirt; marchesa.com.
Photography

WEDDING PORTRAIT TIPS

Elegant, heartwarming wedding portraits are now outpacing the awkward, snicker-inducing pictures of the recent past. Upon closer inspection, we found that most extraordinary images fit one of seven distinct, possible-to-replicate archetypes. Here’s how to get a portrait that won’t make your future grandkids point and laugh.

For natural, beautiful photos, you need to loosen up

You might be understandably a little tense or nervous if it’s the first time you’re being photographed by a pro, but that will probably wear off quickly. “Couples naturally become more relaxed as the session progresses,” says photographer Kristina Carter of Vrai.

Starting off in a familiar location—anywhere from your kitchen to a favorite bar—is one way to quickly acclimate to the shoot.

Incorporating a prop or pet can also help break the ice. “People often feel uncomfortable having a camera focus just on them,” adds Channing Johnson. “Including a pet takes some pressure off the couple, and gives them something to interact with.”

Your attitude also plays a crucial role. “The more affec-
PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS (CONTINUED)

When selecting your attire, think about the location. “If you want to shoot in a woody area, high heels are the wrong choice,” says photographer Kimberly Hurst. The colors should also play off your location—bold hues work well in a gritty, urban environment, while softer shades are at home in a rustic setting. “It’s not about dressing to play a part,” says Kimberly. “If you wear something you feel amazing in you’ll be that much more confident.” Be sure to have a change of clothing on hand so there’s some variety in the photos.

“I often suggest that couples bring another garment or accessory to switch up the look and add variety,” says Diana Bezi of Di Bezi Photography. “I then help put the outfits together. I used to shoot fashion, so I like to style and have a lot of input.” And don’t forget about your fiancé! “You don’t want to be matchymatchy, but try to wear colors that complement each other,” says Melissa. “His bright red shirt and your pale lavender cardigan are going to clash in photos.”
Your engagement is the most exciting time of your life—but planning the wedding can be overwhelming. We hope this introductory guide gave you the confidence and motivation to get started!

Brides magazine features insightful articles, tips, inspiring images, and more.

The next 6 issues will accompany you on the journey to your perfect wedding. **HAPPY WEDDING PLANNING!**

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