

Your Dream Wedding Planner

As soon as you are engaged and have set a tentative date, purchase a binder and divide it into sections as you see fit, making sure you have one section for "budget" and ample space for your "ideas/vision".

Start gathering photos, articles, colour/textile samples to help you form and illustrate your "vision". This research material will help guide you in the selection of your cake, décor, dress, and the cultural aspects that fit your overall idea. Make sure you include your partner, and come to an agreement on theme and important cultural inclusions now.

10-12 months prior...

Essentials

- Announce your engagement.
- Select a date.
- Create your first guest list.
This list may change as you start your budget, but it is important to help you choose your venue.
- Determine who will pay for what, and any limitations.
le: Mom will pay for my dress, but only up to \$5,000.
- Create a budget.
Create your own or use an online tool. There's a good template from Google Docs at www.google.com/weddings.
- Create a payment calendar.
More than one deposit may be required per vendor, and you want to know when money is due and how much, so you can budget accordingly.
- Choose & book your venue. Deposit will be required.
See Tip.
- Choose & book a ceremony site. Deposit may be required.
See tip.
- Confirm rehearsal date & time with ceremony venue.
- Consider whether extra parking is needed. If so, find and secure a solution.
- If your venue/ceremony is outdoors, organize a Rain Plan.
le: a tent, a close-by indoor area, umbrellas for guests (if just a drizzle). Determine if your Rain Plan has an additional cost and make sure this fits into your budget.
- Decide who will be in your wedding party and ask them.
- Send Save-the-Date cards, especially to out-of-town guests.
If you want your Save-the-Date cards to match your eventual invitations, you should source and hire a Graphic Designer now. Otherwise, this step will come later.
- Begin shopping for your wedding dress.

Creative Ideas & Tips

- Start a wedding website.** These sites enable you to share directions to your venue, receive electronic RSVPs to all of your wedding events, including choosing menu options, and share photos, videos, and updates. Most have a nominal fee for use but are fully customizable with different design and colour choices. Try www.weddingwindow.com or www.wedding.com

- Hire a wedding planner.** If you think you want help in planning your wedding or you need help staying on budget, a Wedding Planner is a good option. Make sure you interview a few planners and check their references carefully. You will also want to choose someone you click with personality-wise. Another option, is using your venue's Wedding Co-ordinator as a source of information - many venues already have a list of suggested suppliers.

Tip **Selecting a venue.** When selecting a venue, consider what is included. For instance, does your hall provide table linens you actually want to use? If not a typical hall, do you need to bring in equipment such as chairs, tables, cutlery? If extra equipment is needed, make sure it fits into your budget. If not, you may want to consider another location.

Tip **Money Saver.** If you do not care to hold your ceremony in a church, you can save money on transportation and many other costs by finding a venue that allows you more flexibility. Look for a place where you can hold your ceremony (if outdoors, make sure the venue provides a rain plan), your reception, and even take photos. If your guests are able to stay at your venue, even better.

- Get premarital counseling.** Premarital counseling may be required in order to be married by some spiritual leaders, so if you are having a religious ceremony, make sure you ask your Officiant. On the other hand, you may want to see a counselor prior to marrying in order to improve your conflict resolution skills, iron out possible future differences of opinion, and to discuss expectations, finances and children.

Your Dream Wedding Planner

6-9 months prior...

Essentials

- Purchase your wedding dress.**
It typically takes 4-6 months for dresses to arrive. Allow time for at least 3 fittings.
- Research florists, choose one & sign a contract.**
Deposit generally required. See tip.
- Pay second deposit for venue (may vary with venue).**
- Choose a caterer (only if your venue does not provide food) & sign a contract.**
Deposit generally required.
- If you haven't already found a Graphic Designer for your Save-the-Date cards, research Designers & choose one.**
- Research Decorators, book one & sign a contract.**
Deposit generally required.
- Determine who will be responsible for specific décor items and what they will be. Write this down and get confirmation from all involved.**
Only necessary if NOT hiring a Decorator.
- Research Photographers/Videographers, book one & sign a contract.**
Deposit generally required.
- Research DJs/bands, book one & sign a contract.**
Deposit generally required.
- Choose & book an Officiant. Confirm rehearsal date/time and any special requests (ie: writing your own vows).**
- Choose one or two hotels and get special rates for your out-of-town guests. Put a block of rooms on hold & confirm with hotel how your guests should reserve.**
- Shop for and choose bridesmaid dresses.**
See tip.
- Research Bakers, do tasting, book one & sign contract.**
Deposit generally required.

Creative Ideas & Tips

Tip Hiring vendors. Research and get quotes from at least two possible suppliers per category. Check references and/or testimonials, and ask to see samples of their work. If your vendor only gives you the option to choose from pictures in a sample book, then it is unlikely they are a true creative professional.

Tip Signing Contracts. Read your contract carefully, making sure that delivery dates, locations, production instructions and costs are correct. If you do not understand a clause, make sure you get clarification. Deposits are normal, but NEVER pay a vendor in full prior to receiving their full service (if you pay ahead of time, it will be harder to get your money back if the service is not rendered as agreed upon). Make sure you keep a copy of all of your contracts.

Exercise. If you would like to lose a few pounds before the wedding or if you would just like to be healthier, now is the time to do it. By forming healthy habits long before you're stressed, it will be easier for you to avoid the natural urge to binge as your stress levels increase.

Research & book your honeymoon. If you plan on honeymooning right away, research and book early on. Air travel is unpredictable, so consider connection times between flights. For instance, if you're going on a cruise, leave a day between the day of your flight and the day your cruise departs. If leaving within a day after your wedding, pack at least a week ahead of time. By doing this, you'll avoid a lot of unnecessary stress and, perhaps, your first post-wedding argument.

Tip Decorating your venue. Every venue has rules about decorations. I.e: Most places prohibit the use of tacks or nails. Your decorator should know your venue's rules, but it is ultimately your responsibility to make sure that your planned décor is permitted.

Tip Dressing your bridesmaids. Keep the girls happy. Choose a style/colour that is flattering on everyone and could be worn again. If there is a variety of body types in your party, consider choosing a colour, and letting each girl choose a style that suits them. If the girls are paying for their own dresses, consult with them on an appropriate budget - generally, \$75-\$150 is reasonable.

Purchase wedding insurance. Typically \$100-\$500, wedding insurance protects you against unforeseen events that could postpone your Big Day (cold feet don't count). If your wedding is at home, the liability portion could be especially useful if a guest injures him/herself.

Your Dream Wedding Planner

4-5 months prior...

Essentials

- Work with your Graphic Designer on invitation & stationary design.
- Shop for wedding bands. Send for engraving, if desired.
- Decide on groom & groomsmen apparel.
- Confirm that your bridesmaids have ordered their gowns, and choose their shoes and accessories.
- Choose your shoes and accessories.
- Help your mother and future mother-in-law choose their outfits.
- Choose & communicate dates for bridal shower, bachelorette and bachelor parties.
- Start your gift registry.
See tip.
- Reserve any necessary equipment such as chairs, tables, cutlery, etc.
- Reserve any decorating equipment if not provided by your Decorator. I.e: linens, candles, chargers, etc.
- Choose centrepieces, using your decorator's resources.
See tip.
- Book rehearsal dinner location.
- Decide on readings & ceremony particulars. Create a ceremony outline.
See tip.
- Notify friends & family members you would like to perform particular tasks/readings during the ceremony/reception.
- Notify friends & family members if you would like them to do other special jobs before, during or after your wedding.
I.e: help set up/clean up, help with putting together guest favours, etc.
- Interview & hire performers or entertainers, if desired.

Creative Ideas & Tips

- Order groom's cake.** While your wedding cake will likely be a bit more formal and fit into the overall look & feel of your wedding, the groom's cake is a great way to have fun and to incorporate your personality into the day.
- Make wine.** Making your own wine can be cost-saving and also a great way to add a touch of personalization to your wedding (your Graphic Designer or your winery can make you personalized wine labels). Make sure you speak to your venue about corkage fees and whether a Special Occasions Liquor License will be required (minimal fee).
- Hire additional staff.** If your wedding is very large, you may want to hire additional management staff for your wedding day. If your guests have young children, consider interviewing & hiring babysitters.
- Update your wedding website.** It's time to update your bridesmaids, groomsmen and soon-to-be guests on what is going on and wedding planning progress.

Tip **Gift Registry.** Almost every store with a website now offers a registry, but for ease-of-use, look for a "universal" registry such as myregistry.com, where you can register for anything including cash - don't worry, it's tasteful!

Tip **Choosing centrepieces.** There are just two rules to choosing centrepieces: 1) base the proportions of your centrepiece on the size of table being used; 2) don't block your guests' view while they are seated. Otherwise, the sky's the limit - use candies & snacks, flowers, candles, or a combination thereof. If you are using, candles, be sure that the flame is contained as most halls do not permit "open-flame". When selecting flowers, choose blossoms which do not have an overly powerful aroma as this could affect the taste of your guests' meal.

Tip **Personalizing your ceremony.** From spiritual readings, to your choice of music, to special arrival beverages for your guests, there are a myriad of ways to make your ceremony unique and memorable. However you choose to make your day special, remember these simple boredom busting rules: 1) if parts of your ceremony are very orthodox or in another language, inform your guests of their special meaning via the Program; 2) a lot of people make a lot of noise, so make sure your voices are loud enough, or get a microphone; 3) keep it brief - try to keep your ceremony to 30-45 minutes (if Aunt Jo-Jo still wants to sing a special song for you, perhaps she can do it at the reception.) Check out this site for other neat ideas for personalizing your ceremony: <http://wedding.theknot.com>

Your Dream Wedding Planner

2-3 months prior...

Essentials

- Finalize your guest list and submit it to your Graphic Designer.
- Mail your invitations (typically 8-10 weeks prior).
- Test out a hairstylist/makeup artist & book appointments for yourself, as well as the wedding party.
- Purchase wedding accessories: money box, ring pillows/baskets, candles, etc.
- Choose & purchase gifts for wedding party.
See tip.
- Confirm that groom & groomsmen have ordered their tuxedos (or their attire for the day).
- Research transportation companies, book one & sign contract.
Deposit may be required. See tip.
- Begin merging your lives.
See tip & explanation.
- Finalize rehearsal dinner details.
ie: outfit, invitations, gifts, menu, etc.)
- Finalize your reception menu - if you would like a tasting, now's the time.
- Determine where gifts will be opened the day after the wedding. If your wedding is being hosted at a hotel, consider booking an additional room for the gift opening. If desired, book it now along with any necessary food & beverage.
- Update your gift registry, if needed.
- Shop & purchase guest favours. If donating a sum to a charity in your guests' name, find a card or small memento to represent your gift.
- Have your first bridal gown fitting.
See tip.
- Begin outlining your wedding-day schedule, hour by hour. This will give you a base you can tweak as you continue to plan.

Creative Ideas & Tips

- Take dance classes.** Got two left feet? If you want to perfect your skills before your First Dance or you want to surprise your guests with an entertaining number, start training.

Tip **Attendant Gifts:** Wedding etiquette doesn't state a specific price range for attendant gifts, but the amount your girls and guys spend to make you happy (on dress, accessories, hair, travel, etc.) should be taken into consideration. Whether your budget is tiny or vast, make sure the gifts you give your bridal party are of good quality and useful. Personalizing the gift with an engraving or monogram is a nice way to show you appreciate their help. Another option is not to get your party gifts, but to pay for their accessories, hair and/or a portion of their wedding day attire.

Tip **Getting to the church on time.** Confirm that your desired transportation company has a good reputation and backup cars should there be a mechanical issue on your Big Day. The groom should be dropped off at the ceremony site no later than 45 minutes prior to the event - this gives the driver time to get the bride, and to deal with any unexpected stops (ie: groom forgot the rings). Finally, observe the cardinal rule of white only while in the car - drinks should be clear in colour and avoid coloured sauces with food.

Tip **Merging your lives.** Modern couples often live together prior to marrying, but that doesn't mean all the Ts have been crossed. If you don't already share an abode, begin searching for one together or decide who will move into who's domicile. You may want to plan the move prior to the wedding so you don't have to worry about it during your "honeymoon period". Avoid financial arguments by being open and honest with each other about income and debts. Create a combined budget and come up with financial goals you both want to save for (check out www.gailvazoxlade.com for good tips and budget sheets). Set up a common or joint account. Review beneficiaries on your investments or insurance policies and make any necessary changes. You may want to consider purchasing insurance, such as life or medical. Finally, if you have a will, this may be a good time to update it.

- Update your wedding website.**

Tip **Bridal gown fittings:** Bring the shoes and accessories you'll wear on your Big Day with you. Ask a bridesmaid or your mom to come with you for advice and support.

Your Dream Wedding Planner

1-2 months prior...

Essentials

- Finalize ceremony readings/songs & confirm with those involved. This includes the selection of a quality MC.
- Meet with your Officiant & finalize the ceremony.
- Begin writing Thank You notes for bridal shower gifts and early wedding gifts.
- Update registry, if needed.
- Prepare a photo and/or video shot list, detailing specific people and/or groups of guests you would like photographed on your wedding day. Submit this list to your photographer/videographer.
- Send menu information to your Graphic Designer and have menus printed.
- Pay final deposit on venue (timing may vary with venue).
- Have your second wedding gown fitting.

Creative Ideas & Tips

- Order liquor not provided by caterer.** Be aware that a Special Occasions permit may be required.
- Write your vows.** If you want to add a personal touch to your commitments, writing your own vows is a great way to do it. Firstly, don't wait until the last minute to write them - spend time brainstorming what marriage means to you (alone or with your partner) before you begin. While you'll likely want to include *why* you love your partner, also include *what* you promise to your partner. Feel free to borrow from poems, scripture or even traditional vows. Remember your vows will be said in front of your friends and family, so don't make them so personal that they're cryptic or embarrassing, and make sure they sound OK when spoken out loud.
- Begin whitening your teeth.** If you don't have pearly whites, you may want to consider brightening up your teeth for picture-perfect wedding photos.
- Update your wedding website.**

3-4 weeks prior...

Essentials

- Finalize your bridal accessories.
- Select music for all phases of day & create a detailed list. Submit this list to your DJ/Band.
- Practice your First Dance wearing your bridal shoes.
- Send wedding program information to your Graphic Designer and get programs printed.
- Call guests who haven't RSVP'd.
- Pick up your wedding bands.
- Get your marriage licence.
See tip.
- Mail your rehearsal dinner invitations.

Creative Ideas & Tips

- Confirm honeymoon.** Share travel arrangements with family members in case of emergency.
- Research how to change your name.** There are two ways to change your name. You can legally change your name (includes your birth certificate) - it's a lengthy process (costing \$10 - \$400) and is very difficult to reverse should your relationship change. The simpler option is to "assume" your partner's name. This process is generally free, easily reversible and does not require you to change your birth certificate. To apply for new identification using your partner's surname (or a hyphenated version), you need only to present your marriage certificate. Check your province's website for more information.
- Tip** **Obtaining a marriage licence.** Your province's website will give you details on how to obtain a marriage licence. Licences do expire, so confirm how long it is valid for before purchasing. If you are getting married outside of your home province or the country, you may need to get a "Letter of Non-impediment" prior to leaving.
- Update your wedding website.**

Your Dream Wedding Planner

1-2 weeks prior...

Essentials

- Have your final wedding gown fitting.
- Finalize your wedding-day schedule.
See tip.
- Prepare lists and checklists for anyone who has a task for the wedding day.
ie: If Mom is supposed to transport the "ceremony box" and the guest favours, lay that out for her.
- Confirm your beauty appointments.
- Phone and confirm contracts with suppliers.
See tip.
- Pick up your wedding dress.
- Pick up the groom's attire.
- If dressing somewhere else besides your home, carefully pack your dress with accessories, shoes and veil. Do the same with the groom's tuxedo and accessories.
- Proofread your vows one final time.
- Get your hair coloured and trimmed.
- Confirm your final guest list.
- Decide who will sit at which table. Send this information to your Graphic Designer so that he/she may produce your Seating Chart.
- Give final guest list and seating chart to your venue and/or caterer.
- Create a "Ceremony Box" and pack anything you need for the ceremony (marriage licence, candles, ring pillow, guest book, etc.). Assign someone to transport this.
- Create a "Reception Box" and pack accessories needed for the reception (cake topper, guest book, camera, wine, etc.). Assign someone to transport this.
- Ready your guest favours for transport. Assign someone to ensure they get to the venue.
- Prepare place cards or have your Graphic Designer print you some.

Creative Ideas & Tips

Tip **Wedding Schedule:** Your wedding party (and wedding planner, if you have one) should have a detailed schedule for the wedding day. This way everyone knows who is supposed to be where, when. If someone is responsible for bringing something to a particular event (ie: rings to the ceremony, pick up flowers, etc.), then that should be specified. Your MC will also need to know the schedule for the reception, so that s/he can keep the wedding's timing on track.

Pack for your honeymoon.

Tip **Confirm contracts.** Call all of your vendors to confirm the following:

- dates
- pick-up/drop-off/meeting times on wedding day
- pick-up times post-wedding (ie: equipment rentals)
- quantities
- final payments
- vendor-specific particulars of your contract

Your vendors include: florist, caterer, venue, transportation company, officiant, photographer, equipment rentals, décor, baker, DJ/band, and any performers/staff you may have hired.

Prepare Bridal Emergency Kit. Prepare a special kit with emergency essentials:

- Your lipstick colour & mascara
- Needle & thread
- Clean, white washcloth
- Stain remover such as a Dryel-to-Go pen (Tide-to-Go could discolour your gown).
- Talcum powder (for soaking up & disguising oily stains such as food & makeup)
- Vinegar (if no stain remover pen, a little diluted vinegar dabbed on your dress, should remove stains such as red wine).
- Toothbrush & toothpaste
- Extra hair pins and hair spray
- Comb

Update your wedding website.

Your Dream Wedding Planner

The Day Before...

Essentials

- Prepare cheques for vendors and put them in envelopes, along with any gratuities. Label your envelopes carefully and assign someone the responsibility of distributing the payments.
See tip.
- Hand out your final schedule and checklists to all concerned. Ensure that everyone who is responsible for a task is clear on that task.
- Hand out your Ceremony Box, Reception Box and Guest Favour Box to those responsible for transporting them.
- Get a manicure, pedicure and massage, if desired.
- Rehearse ceremony with Officiant and wedding party.
- Do a last minute check of all your supplies and make sure everything you need is ready to go.

Creative Ideas & Tips

Tip Sweet Dreams before the Wedding. You're bound to be a bundle of nervous energy the night before your wedding. Whether you have the matrimonial jitters or you are just afraid something won't go as planned, it may be hard to get enough shut-eye. Here are some tips:

- Try to get in one last workout during the day.
- Don't stay out too late at the rehearsal dinner - you'll have plenty of time to party tomorrow.
- Set two (yes, TWO!) alarms if you have to get up early.
- An hour before bed, have a relaxing bath.
- About 30 minutes before bedtime, enjoy a soothing cup of tea such as chamomile and read an entertaining book.

Sweet dreams!

- Update your wedding website.**

Tip Tipping. Yes, it is customary to tip vendors. Most venues/caterers already include gratuities on their bill, but for individuals and companies (ie: transportation), it is highly suggested. Check frugalbride.com for helpful information. You can also thank your vendors with a small gift or card.

Your Wedding Day...

Essentials

- Eat breakfast and drink lots of fluids.
- Go to your hair & makeup appointment.
See tip.
- Enjoy yourself!

Creative Ideas & Tips

Tip Beautiful hair. Make sure you wear a button-down shirt for your hair appointment so you won't ruin your style when you change into your dress.

Tip Alcohol Consumption: Enjoy your day, but don't overdo it. You don't want to be silly and slurring your vows at the ceremony! Further to that, many officiants will not marry couples they think are under the influence. Instead of alcohol, try calming teas, juices or just plain H₂O.

Your Dream Wedding Planner

After Your Wedding...

Essentials

- Settle your bill with the venue/caterer.
- Get your wedding dress cleaned & preserved.
- Preserve your bouquet.
- Freeze the rest of your cake to share on your first anniversary.
- Write & mail Thank You notes.
- Change your name.
- Close your bridal registry.
- Meet with your photographer/videographer to finalize & order prints/video.

Creative Ideas & Tips

Trash your dress. An ongoing trend, trashing your dress is tonnes of fun and provides you with some pretty unforgettable photos. While you can do this the night of your wedding, it's suggested you schedule a session with your photographer after your wedding day. Besides, who doesn't want to put on their wedding dress one more time?

Update your wedding website. Some brides choose to keep their wedding website online for a few months after the wedding, while others decide to close down immediately. Whichever option works for you, make sure you preserve a copy of your website as a keepsake.

Congratulations!