

PLANNING ARTICLES

- 2 Ready to Plan
- 3 Jewelry Selection
- 4 Bridal Attire
- 6 Getting Ready on your Wedding Day
- 7 Fitness Tips
- 8 Tuxedo Formal Wear
- 9 Massage and Spa / The Perfect Tan
- 10 Make-up Tips
- 11 Budget and Expenses
- 12 Invitations and Stationery
- 13 Wedding Coordinator
- 14 Gift Registries
- 15 Out-of-Town Guest / Welcome Bag
- 16 Sample Wedding Day Timeline
- 17 Marriage License
- 18 Creating a Seating Chart
- 19 Unforgettable Parties
- 20 Bridal Shower and Luncheon / Bachelor and Bachelorette Parties
- 21 Rehearsal Dinner
- 22 Photography
- 23 Videography and Cinematography
- 24 Exceptional Flowers
- 25 Transportation
- 26 Venue Selection
- 27 Questions for Venue Selection
- 28 Outdoor Weddings
- 29 Country Weddings
- 30 Transform Your Venue
- 31 Keep Your Reception on Track
- 32 A Memorable Celebration
- 33 Choosing Your Caterer
- 35 Cake and Sweets
- 36 A Toast to the Happy Couple
- 37 Photo Booth
- 38 Music, Music, Music
- 39 Destination Wedding
- 40 Honeymoon
- 41 Cookware
- 42 Financial and Legal Responsibilities
- 44 A Home for Your Happily Ever After
- 46 Home Decor
- 47 Newborn Photography

READY TO PLAN

Congratulations to you and the love of your life! What an exciting and memorable time for you. Take a moment to bask in the glow of being engaged. Have fun and be creative in deciding how you plan to share your special news with your closest family and friends. After that, share your news on social media, and get all your future wedding guests enthusiastic about your big day! Celebrate your recent engagement by enjoying a shopping day. Browse your local bridal boutiques with family and friends, and look at all the beautiful wedding attire available! Then, when you are ready, take wedding planning one step at a time. Wedding planning can be fun, and we have tons of excellent local resources to help you along the way. Here are a few pointers to get you started:

SET A BUDGET WHEN YOU BEGIN

Talk with your partner, then sit down with all parents. This is usually done after the engagement. Find out exactly how each party plans on contributing to the event. Sometimes it is a three way split – both sets of parents and you. If this formula doesn't work, particular expenses can be adopted. For example, "We will pay for the transportation, music and rehearsal dinner. You pay for ..." Another options is for parents to give a set monetary contribution for the couple to use where needed. Also, many couples choose to undertake the wedding expenses by themselves. However you choose to pay for your wedding, it's a good idea to keep cash on hand for upfront deposits and save a little extra for those added must haves!

KNOW YOUR NUMBER OF GUESTS AND STYLE

Decide whether you want a small intimate wedding or a large celebration. Who will you choose to be your attendants for your special day? Do you want an indoor or outdoor wedding? Do you want a local or destination wedding? Do you want a winter, spring, summer, or fall wedding? Is there a certain date you would like to get married on? Are you going to hire a wedding consultant? Think about the wedding you've been dreaming of, then choose a reception site that will make that dream come alive and will still comfortably accommodate your guests and budget. Take a look at our local resources and event centers for ideas, then call them to schedule a visit. They are more than happy to help and offer advice!

SET YOUR WEDDING DATE

Once you know what you want, set your date by reserving your wedding site, officiant, reception hall, or any other must haves. Then use our planning timeline for the rest of your wedding details. Finalize your wedding attire, colors, décor, and theme if any. If you are planning a destination wedding, contact a travel agent right away for their connections, deals, help, and planning advice.

ACCEPT PLENTY OF HELP

Rome was not built in a day and neither will your wedding. If you are lucky enough to have family and friends offer their help... take it! Don't try to do it all, make a list and delegate jobs. Lean heavily on the professionals you have chosen and take good notes. They do this every day will give you very good advice and direction. Accept their contributions graciously and thank them properly. Stay organized and enjoy this venture in your life. We've all dreamed about our wedding day since we were kids, and now is your opportunity to plan your happy ever after. This is the beginning of FOREVER!

JEWELRY SELECTION

Diamonds Are Forever

The first thing your friends are going to say when you tell them you got engaged is, “let me see your ring!” The ring is the ultimate symbol of true love and lifetime commitment. You want it to be special, you will wear it every day for the rest of your life! Look online for designs of rings that you like, and forward them to your significant other for ideas. Better yet, make a dinner date and go ring shopping together at your TRUSTED local jewelry stores. While browsing, talk about what kind of rings you like. Do you want your rings to match? Would you like diamonds or gems? What kind of metal do you prefer? Consult with a sales professional for advice and ideas.

THE FOUR C'S

The diamond is a symbol for everlasting love because of its beauty, hardness, rarity, and enduring value. The diamond industry uses the Four C's to determine quality. **CUT** The cut is the shape and proportion of the diamond. The cut is the only human contribution to the value of the diamond. The most common shapes are round, pear, oval, marquise, emerald, baguette, and heart. The best cut diamond will reflect the maximum amount of light. **COLOR** A completely colorless diamond is very rare and is the most valuable. Similarly precious, is an intensely colored diamond with definite color, such as pink, red, green, blue, yellow, and brown. **CLARITY** The purity of a diamond is rated in terms of clarity. Natural elements called inclusions are grown in the stone while being formed. The fewer inclusions, the higher the clarity will be, and the rarer and more expensive the diamond becomes. **CARAT** The weight of a diamond is expressed in carats. The weight of a diamond is the most significant factor to its rarity.

Ring Selection

There are so many dazzling ring choices. Do your research to find your perfect ring that you love, and will fit your lifestyle.

METALS Couples choose many different metals for their rings. Gold, platinum and silver are “precious” metals. With gold and platinum being an increasingly more expensive material, the alternatives are becoming popular. Contemporary and non-precious metals such as tungsten steel, cobalt, titanium, ceramic, and stainless steel are less expensive and very durable for an active lifestyle. Titanium and tungsten are a popular choice and virtually wear-resistant, but it is a process to set precious stones into these metals. Platinum is a rare white metal used in its pure form, but is also expensive. Palladium is in the same family as platinum without the high price tag. Rhodium is added to white gold to make it look white.

LIFESTYLE When ring shopping, think about your everyday life and what you do. What ring will best work with your lifestyle? If you do a lot of physical labor, you will want a strong ring. If you work at a hospital or clinic where you wear gloves, you may consider buying a separate band so your diamond doesn't get caught. Find a ring that fits your style, budget and life, from now until forever...but nothing is written in “stone,” you can always reset your diamonds in a new ring later in life.

CUSTOM JEWELRY If you are looking for a one of a kind ring, have the jewelry store custom design a ring just for you. Be sure to select skilled designers. Whether you want a simple design or an intricate and detailed piece, experienced professionals will make the perfect ring for you. This is a two pronged task. You will meet with a designer to work through the creation of your custom ring, then an artisan will make the handcrafted masterpiece. You can add special finishes and engraving to finalize your perfect creation!

CLEANING AND CHECKUP Clean your jewelry with the cleaning solution from your jewelry store. Use a soft bristled tooth brush. Visit your jeweler every 3-6 months for a ring checkup and cleaning.

BRIDAL ATTIRE

THE WEDDING DRESS

“Here comes the bride.” Everyone will be watching as you walk down that aisle, so let us help you find the perfect dress! Start researching gown styles by scanning bridal magazines, the internet and attending bridal shows. The dress you choose should show off your personality, compliment your figure, and match the theme of your wedding. Once you have an idea of what you are looking for, shop your local bridal boutiques for your perfect gown; their expertise is helping you select your perfect dress and accessories! Call ahead to schedule an appointment at each bridal shop to be sure you are given the attention you deserve. This is your big day and you want to look and feel stunning in your gown!

ORDERING YOUR WEDDING DRESS

Have fun while shopping for your wedding dress. Take a couple of close friends or family members to help you decide. You know they'll be honest with you and help you find a dress that fits your figure and style! Ideally, plan to order your gown eight to twelve months before your wedding day. Wedding dresses can take five to six months to order and alterations can take an additional three months. It's always a good idea to plan for a “stress free” month, meaning your dress is done the month before your wedding. This allows you to focus on other details of your big day. Keep in mind the 60/40 ratio: if you spend \$600 on a dress, plan on spending \$400 on accessories and alterations.

BUYER BEWARE

Purchasing gowns on the internet may end in disaster! If you find an online site offering a “designer” gown at a substantially lower cost than other shops, you should be VERY cautious. These online retailers are selling counterfeit gowns of much lesser quality that look and fit nothing like the originals. It's important to find a good deal, however, compromising quality and service to save may actually cost you more in the end.

ADD SOME FLARE

In the past there were specific standards and cultural norms that told the bride how to dress, down to the last details. Thank goodness those rules have been washed away. Today anything goes when choosing gowns: chic, trendy, classic, sexy, quirky, or themed. Individual preference reigns when choosing gowns in this modern age. Any bride may wear a long white gown no matter what age, how many times she has been married, and whether or not she has children. Just as any bride may wear white, any bride may wear color. Accent your dress with color in your beading, jewels, trims, or ribbons to make it pop. Colored jewelry, shoes and gloves work too. In recent years, brides have chosen shorter trains and bustle them after the ceremony for ease of movement. Veils can be long and traditional, or you may choose a short blusher veil for the ceremony. Most veils are removed for the celebration.

ACCESSORIES

Your gown sets the tone for your accessories. When bridal shops talk accessories, they mean headpiece, veil, shoes, stockings, garter, gloves, and jewelry. The right accessories can add personality and style to even the most glamorous wedding gown. If your gown has diamonds, accent with diamonds, if your gown has pearls, accent with pearls. Statement jewelry is very popular!

BRIDESMAIDS' GOWNS

The bridesmaids' dresses should complement the gown. Attendants may wear identical dresses, a palette of complimentary colors, or a variety of styles in the same color. The maid of honor may also wear a different color or style of dress. Take into consideration each attendant's body type and what they will feel comfortable in when choosing their attire. You want them to feel confident and ready to show off their Gangnam Style on the dance floor at your reception!

Continued on the next page...

BRIDAL ATTIRE *Continued...*

ORDERING BRIDESMAIDS' DRESSES

Order your bridesmaids' gowns six to ten months in advance. When ordering identical colored dresses from a local bridal shop, place the order all together. This ensures the fabric will be sewn from the same dye lot of material, and that your gowns will all be delivered together. Larger chain bridal shops buy their fabric already dyed so you can order individually. Decide if you would like your bridesmaids to purchase identical shoes, or wear a pair of their choosing in an identical color. Nude shoes are popular, and your attendants would get many uses out of them.

MOTHERS' ATTIRE

The mothers of the wedding couple often wear compatible styles and colors of gowns. Depending on formality and the bride's gown, their style choices are endless. They can wear floor length, shorter dresses or tailored suits to their liking.

JR. ATTENDANTS' AND FLOWER GIRL'S ATTIRE

Junior attendants and the flower girl often dress similar to the bridesmaids and bride. Choose colors or styles similar to the bridal party, but keep in mind the age of the attendants. Think comfort when selecting a child's shoes and make sure there is room for twirling in that new dress!

ALTERATIONS

When ordering your gown, ask to see the size chart from the manufacturer. If the bridal shop has limited sizes to try on, the dress may have stretched with use. Order your dress according to your largest measurement (bust, waist or hip). Even if you plan to lose weight, order the dress that fits you now. If you lose a few pounds, it is much easier to take a dress in, than to let one out.

Allow plenty of time for alterations as wedding gowns and bridesmaids' dresses can be difficult and time consuming to alter. Two to three months would be ideal.

When your gown comes in, ask about the price of alterations and schedule fittings. Many bridal shops are able to do alterations on site. Alterations can average around \$300, depending on the complexity of the change. If the quote seems too high, take the gown to a tailor for a second opinion. Call ahead for an appointment as most shops schedule fittings on weekdays. Wear your wedding day shoes and undergarments for each alteration. This will provide consistency in fit. When you pick up your gown, make sure it is steamed and pressed. Store the gown in a secure location until the big day.

GETTING READY ON YOUR WEDDING DAY

ITINERARY Nothing will make your day go smoother than a Wedding Day Timeline. Go to our website to view a sample timeline. This will ensure everyone is where they are supposed to be, and know what they need to know. Print out an itinerary for your attendants and all your helpers. This will keep the day rolling!

MUSIC Nothing sets the mood like an upbeat playlist that will have you and your closest friends smiling and singing along.

ACCESSORIES

Veil or hair piece: although rarely forgotten, it happens... also your garter and shoes!

TIPS Don't forget to take care of your stylists. You don't want to have to send them money before leaving for your honeymoon.

CAMERA If your photographer is not contracted for this part, then you will want some documentation of your final bonding time with your best friends as a single person.

SNACKS This is your big day and you and your attendants can't tackle it on an empty stomach! Bring in clean munchies, sandwiches and granola bars that won't make a mess. Everyone will love you for it. Fainting or thinking about your hungry tummy is the last thing that should be on your mind during the ceremony.

BEVERAGES

Think coffee, pop and don't forget the water. Pack straws for your lipstick. Staying hydrated will keep your energy up and your skin looking pretty.

Bridal Crisis Kit

As you think of all the possible things that could solve your wedding day emergencies, put them in a basket. Your personal attendant or maid of honor will need this kit that includes:

- o Cell phone/charger with a list of everyone in the wedding party and all vendors.
- o Mirror, brush, comb, hair spray, bobby-pins, safety pins, and wet wipes.
- o Hair dryer and curling iron.
- o Clear deodorant, perfume, talcum powder, and facial tissues.
- o Extra make-up, lipstick, waterproof mascara, and washcloths in a plastic bag.
- o Fingernail polish: your color, your attendants' color, and clear to fix nylon runs.
- o Extra nylons.
- o Extra earring backs.
- o Breath mints.
- o Anti-static spray.
- o Spot removal.
- o Sewing kit with thread to match formal wear and all gowns.
- o Shopping bags for attendants' clothes.
- o Money for last minute errands.
- o Black socks for the groomsmen who forget.

FITNESS TIPS

SET REALISTIC GOALS

Write down a realistic and achievable goal considering the length of time and the amount of weight you wish to lose. With proper diet and exercise, stress can be lessened, and you will look and feel fabulous. An average loss of one pound per week is achievable and sustainable. Variety is the key to prevent boredom and to make sure you target different muscles in your body. Your regimen should include weight and cardio training, mixed in with flexibility and stretching exercises.

MAINTAIN FITNESS ACCOUNTABILITY

To maximize the effectiveness of your program, increase the intensity for your cardio and strength-training every week. If you find yourself cutting corners and not following your fitness plan, hire a professional. There are many options (personal training, small group training, or large group training) to fit every budget. A qualified trainer will hold you accountable for your goals, create a fitness plan for you, correct your form, and make sure you are working at the right level of effort.

EAT A HEALTHY DIET

Diet is just as important for losing weight as exercise, if not more! Remember that old saying, “You are what you eat.” Fill your house with plenty of fresh local produce. Keep healthy prepared food ready to eat for when you come home starving. Stay away from boxed and processed foods; if you can’t pronounce the ingredients, don’t eat it. Use a small plate for meals, and eat 5 to 6 small meals a day to keep your metabolism burning. Do not be tempted by diets that promise results with little effort, maintaining a healthy weight is a daily battle. Eat clean and drink plenty of water during the week, but allow yourself to enjoy some non-diet food and drinks at your weekend gatherings so you don’t burn out.

These tips can change your life for the better! Being healthy is a choice you deserve to make. Get healthy with your fiancé, you will both look and feel so much better!

TUXEDO FORMAL WEAR

STYLE OF FORMAL WEAR This is your day too, make plans for you and your men to look GOOD! When choosing your formal wear, keep in mind your wedding day plans. The formality and setting of your wedding, along with the style of your fiancé, should help determine what you are looking for. The professionals at the formal wear shop will help you find the perfect formal wear for you and your wedding party.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FORMAL WEAR SHOP When considering which formal wear business to use, make sure their menswear professionals have the skills and experience necessary to help you select the right attire. Make sure it has a large number of styles and sizes to choose from. Ask if they have inventory on hand for you to look at or try on. Once your tuxedos have arrived, will they be able to quickly take care of last minute additions and/or changes? This may come in handy when you and your attendants pick up the tuxedos and try them on before the wedding day. You want to look your best and have a professional, hassle free experience.

SELECTING THE PERFECT TUXEDO FOR YOU The professionals at an accomplished shop are there to guide you. Let them know what you are looking for, they have excellent suggestions. This is an important day, you want to look good, feel confident, and be comfortable in your tuxedo. Make sure you choose a well-constructed suit, with quality materials to look and feel your best. Usually a tuxedo rental includes a complete package, with fitted and altered tuxedo, shirt, tie, shoes, and vest or cummerbund. Studs, cuff links and suspenders should also be included. You are making a sizable investment in formal wear and this extra dimension of service is what you are paying for. Make sure you know what's included.

WHY NOT BUY? Instead of renting, consider buying a tuxedo or suit. Many formal wear stores offer excellent choices for purchase. If you think about it, in a couple of rentals you will have paid for the complete suit. This may be a wise option for you. Think about the style and formality of the suit or formal wear you are renting and if it is versatile enough for you to use again. Do you have another special event in the near future that you could wear it at?

SHOES Don't forget to rent the shoes. It would be ideal for your men to have matching footwear at the altar. Most importantly, make sure they are comfortable enough to dance the night away!

ADD SOME COLOR Although black and white never goes out of style, grooms are exploring color in their attire in recent years. Shades of grey, chocolate brown and taupe, may be chosen in place of the traditional black, or an assortment of other colors depending on the formal wear shop. It is a good idea to bring along some swatches of material from the bridal gown and bridesmaids' dresses to ensure a pleasing color coordination. Depending on your wedding colors and style, you may or may not decide to match vests to the bridesmaids' dresses.

MAKE IT CASUAL For the informal wedding, you may want to skip the dress coat completely and buy your attendants matching shirts and ties. Whichever style you decide to go with, make sure you feel confident and comfortable in your decision.

TUXEDO TIMELINE As for scheduling, make sure to order the formal wear four to six months before the date of the wedding. For out-of-town men, have your formal wear provider give you a measurement form to forward to those men so they can send in their measurements. Any formal wear shop will measure them. Once the fitting is done, the garments are ordered and arrive at the shop shortly before the wedding. Be sure to have your wedding party try on the tuxedos as soon as they arrive for ease of any last minute alterations, and in case your formal wear shop needs to overnight a different size. Wedding tuxedos are usually picked up the day before the wedding and returned on the next business day. Have the best man return the tuxedos. You will have your new spouse and honeymoon on your mind.

MASSAGE AND SPA

Planning a wedding is big task which usually requires collaborative effort. Reward yourself and your helpers with a spa party. Whether you are celebrating a bachelorette party, girls' night out or a date with your fiancé, a massage and spa offers a relaxing and memorable time that will be appreciated by all! Pamper yourselves with deep tissue massage, hot stone massage or facials. Regular therapeutic massage offers many health benefits. You may appreciate the stress and pain relief, reduced heart rate, improved range of motion and flexibility, and an improved sense of well-being during planning time. Combine aromatherapy for enhanced results.

Research your local spas, many offer special packages to serve all your wedding needs. Consult with a massage therapist. Ask about group rates or if they offer a private room for your party to gather in while enjoying food and drinks between services. A massage and spa is a unique intimate experience perfect for rejuvenating and bonding before your big day....and after!

THE PERFECT TAN

Just think of the photos that will be with you for the rest of your life. It's a very important time and tanning is one of the easiest and most effective ways to look and feel beautiful. Remember, you only get married once and this is your time to splurge on the perfect tan.

INDOOR TANNING

For indoor tanning, buy some quality indoor tanning lotion and a cute pair of goggles. Read the bottle of tanning lotion and follow the instructions. Talk to the experts at the salon on how to start and tan to your perfect color. Once you reach your optimum skin tone, you want to maintain it. Tan once a week until your wedding day, or see what your salon recommends for your skin tone. You will be ready for your big day and honeymoon!

SPRAY TANNING

If you prefer spray tanning, follow these tips. The night before spray tanning, shower, exfoliate and shave. Skip the moisturizer after your shower. Once at the salon, the attendant will explain the 4-5 minute process, which involves moving through a series of positions to ensure seamless coverage. Spray tan one month before your wedding to see how your skin responds. Follow the professional's instructions regarding how often to spray tan before your wedding day. After your session, don't shave or use abrasive products for a few days to preserve your color. Chlorinated pools and hot tubs can fade your tan. Avoid razorback sports bras between your final spray tan and your wedding day. Follow these tips and your spray tan will give you that gorgeous glow!

Research the two options, you will enjoy your tan skin in your wedding portraits for the rest of your life. You also will be honeymoon ready if you are going somewhere tropical!

MAKEUP TIPS

By Lisa Norman

As a Certified Professional Makeup Artist, I want to offer you some quick and easy bridal tips that will help you look and feel the most beautiful version of yourself for your big day.

HIRE A PROFESSIONAL MAKEUP ARTIST

You want to have a stress free day and you deserve to be pampered. I highly recommend airbrush makeup because it gives a natural and flawless complexion. Airbrush makeup photographs beautifully and is designed to resist humidity, smudging and creasing. Schedule a consultation with your chosen makeup artist to ensure you like your fabulous look and feel confident with the results.

PREPARE YOUR SKIN

As a licensed esthetician, I care deeply about the integrity of the skin and helping you achieve that bridal glow. I encourage monthly facials leading up to your wedding. This will help with the overall clarity and cleanliness of the skin, as well as breakouts. Invest in an at home skin care regimen that works for you, and stick to it! Cleansing, toning and moisturizing is the base of any regimen. If a blemish surfaces, do not pick it, keep the area clean and drink plenty of water. Picking will make the blemish worse, and can lead to scarring. This is key to having clear, glowing skin.

GET YOUR EYEBROWS SHAPED

They say your eyes are the windows to your soul....so why not frame them with amazing eyebrows? Well groomed and shaped eyebrows make a huge difference in your overall look. I recommend getting them shaped (waxed, sugaring etc.) at least one month before your big day, and the week prior so any irritation or redness can resolve.

Regardless of what makeup look you decide upon, remember the most important thing... smile big knowing that you'll be spending the rest of your life with your best friend.

BUDGET AND EXPENSES

SET A BUDGET Traditional rules about who pays for which expenses have fallen away as people wait until later in life to marry. Sit down with all parents and figure out exactly what, or how much, each parent is paying for, or if you are footing the bill yourself. Then determine a realistic budget for your wedding expenses.

DON'T GO INTO DEBT Most couples do have one common wish regarding wedding budgets - they do not want to go into debt. There are many options available for weddings, choose ones that work financially for you. Love is all you need!

LIST YOUR PRIORITIES Develop a list of priorities. Many topics need to be discussed including the type of ceremony, number of guests, kind of food, refreshments, atmosphere, and entertainment for your reception. Don't forget about your honeymoon. Assign approximate prices and how important these things are to you. Do your research when assigning prices to make realistic decisions on what you can and cannot afford.

REDUCE EXPENSES Have your wedding on a day other than Saturday. Friday and Sunday weddings are gaining in popularity. Many of the popular reception facilities and services are booked up to a year in advance on Saturdays, however, most are still available on Fridays or Sundays. Another option is to ask about off-season rates for the colder months, which tend to be less popular. Use technology to save by sending digital wedding announcements via email or social media.

RECORD YOUR EXPENSES Utilize our budget worksheet to keep your finances on track. As prices are quoted, record them on the worksheet, along with commitment details. Stick to your priorities when allocating your budget.

Traditional Financial Costs

BRIDE OR BRIDE'S FAMILY

- Engagement Party
- Wedding Consultant
- Stationery and Postage
- The Groom's Wedding Ring
- The Groom's Wedding Gift
- Gifts for Bridesmaids
- The Bride's Wedding Day Attire
- Bridesmaids' Bouquets
- The Bridal Luncheon
- Photography
- Videography
- Ceremony Fees
- Ceremony Flowers, & Music
- Reception
- DJ or Band
- Floral Décor
- Rental Décor
- The Wedding Cake
- Transportation Costs

THE GROOM'S FAMILY

- Wedding Gift for the Newlyweds
- Rehearsal Dinner

THE GROOM

- Gifts for the Groomsmen
- The Bride's Wedding Gift
- The Bride's Wedding Ring
- The Bridal Bouquet
- Boutonnieres
- Mothers' and Grandmothers' Corsages
- Wedding Day Attire
- Marriage License
- Honeymoon
- Officiate's Fee

THE ATTENDANTS

- Bachelor/Bachelorette Party
- Travel Expenses and Lodging
- Wedding Attire
- Wedding Gift for the Couple
- Parties for the Bridal Couple

INVITATIONS AND STATIONERY

Your Guest List

One of your first tasks as an engaged couple is to finalize the guest list. This can be tough, but you have to remember that you can't invite everyone, even though people may ask. This is your special day as a couple. Family and friends should understand and respect your wedding wishes and be happy for you! You must think about your budget and the style of wedding that you want. If you have a particular venue in mind, know how many people it comfortably holds. Determine the catering cost per person. Consider all these things and your VIP list, your parents' VIPs and other guests you'd like to invite. Then finalize your list. It's your day, your decision.

Stationery Tips

When getting together with an Invitation Specialist, here are a few things to consider:

- Bring pictures, Pinterest page and fabric swatches of the style and theme of your wedding to help choose your perfect design.
- Bring all information and spellings for your wedding invitations/stationery.
- Know what you want to order (save-the-dates, invitations, rsvp cards, map, hotel accommodations, wedding announcements, programs, escort cards, place cards, table cards, menu cards, guest books, thank you notes, specialty cards).
- How do you want them addressed? A few options are: handwritten by you, labels, hand calligraphy or printed envelopes.
- Know your budget.
- Know your quantity to order and add 25 extra just in case (plan one invitation per household, not per guest).
- Ask about mailing costs for different sized invitations.
- Ask about quantity discounts or discounts for ordering multiple items.
- Do they assemble the invitations for you and is there a cost?
- Have guests RSVP one week before your caterer needs your number count so you have time to follow up if needed.
- Most couples today use only the outer envelope, but you may choose to use the inner envelope as well.

Stationery Timeline

- 9-12 Months Before Your Wedding
Send Save-the-Dates.
- 6-8 Months Before Your Wedding
Order Invitations.
- 2-4 Months Before Your Wedding
Address Invitations
(Allow up to 2 Weeks).
- 6-8 Weeks Before Your Wedding
Mail Invitations.
- 1-2 Months Before Your Wedding
Send Bridal Shower Thank You Cards.
- 1 Month Before Wedding
Order Reception Program Invites.
- 3 Weeks Before Your Wedding
Send Rehearsal Dinner Invitations.
- 2 Weeks Before Your Wedding
Finalize Reception Seating
and Placement Cards.
- 3-6 Months Post Wedding
Send Thank You Cards.

WEDDING COORDINATOR

WHAT THEY DO

Should I plan my own wedding or do I need to hire a coordinator? This is a very common question for the newly engaged couple. There is no right or wrong answer, so you'll have to decide what works best for you. The pros of hiring a coordinator are that you tell them your vision and your budget, and they work with you to make it happen-worry free! Not only do they help you plan your wedding on the front end, but a wedding coordinator is with you the entire wedding day as the point person in charge. They make sure the itinerary is followed to keep the wedding moving along as it should, they handle any issues that may arise, plus they deal with all your different vendors. The wedding coordinator works to give you peace of mind throughout your planning process and your big day, so you can truly enjoy your wedding and all the guests who are there for you.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How long have they been in business? How many weddings do they coordinate per year?
- Are they available on your wedding date? Will you be their only event for that day? Do they have a staff?
- Have they planned other weddings at your venues?
- What services do they offer and what are their fees?
- Do they have preferred vendors that they work with and will they give discounts?
- Do they have a portfolio of past weddings they have coordinated along with references?

Be sure to get a signed contract with details.

ADDITIONAL HELP TO CONSIDER

Many of the wedding venues offer their own coordinator who is dedicated to working with you, and your event, to help make your day flawless. Talk with them to determine exactly what services they can provide to help you in planning your day before making your decision to hire an outside coordinator. Then determine what works best for you and the level of planning coordination you desire.

GIFT REGISTRIES

REGISTER 6-8 MONTHS BEFORE YOUR WEDDING OR EARLIER IF HAVING AN ENGAGEMENT PARTY
Post registry information on your wedding website and in your shower invitation.

REGISTER TOGETHER

Register online or in the store. Pick styles with which you are both happy. Take turns registering for items geared more towards you or your fiancé. Find out how long your registry will remain active.

REGISTER FOR WHAT YOU NEED

You don't have to scan the china; electronics, appliances and furniture all work too. For the couples that already have everything, register for gift cards, a honeymoon fund or donate to your favorite charities.

CHECK THE STORES RETURN POLICY

What are their return or exchange policies? What if you don't have receipts?

REGISTER FOR ALL PRICE POINTS

Some guests will be able to afford more than others or will want to buy gifts together.

REGISTER ONLINE

Register at a couple of stores and be sure to have at least one, if not all, of your registries available online for your out-of-town guests and online shoppers.

CHECK YOUR REGISTRIES

You may have to add additional items to continue to give price options for guests as you near your wedding.

SEND THANK YOU NOTES

Notes for gifts received before the wedding should be sent out within 2 weeks after arrival of the gift. Send wedding gift thank you notes within three months after your honeymoon. Make it sincere, thank them for the specific gift they gave you or say how you will use it.

HONEYMOON REGISTRIES

What do you get the couple who has everything? Some travel agents are offering "Honeymoon Registries," and they are becoming increasingly popular. They provide an opportunity for friends and family to contribute towards the honeymoon you've always dreamed of. Post registry information on your wedding website and in your shower invitations. Request that your bridesmaids, mothers and relatives spread the word about your honeymoon registry. A gift amount can be paid directly to the travel agency and credited to your account, or a gift certificate can be purchased.

Set a tentative budget for your trip and don't depend solely on your honeymoon registry to get you there. Be sure to calculate some extra "fun money" for special activities you may come across in your travels. Have fun and cherish each other and your destination, it may be awhile before you have the opportunity to travel again.

OUT-OF-TOWN GUESTS

MAKE IT MEMORABLE

For those special people who will be traveling from out-of-town, you'll want to make their stay enjoyable and memorable. Make travel plans easy for them by reserving a block of rooms at a local hotel. Keep your hotel selection to a minimum of 2-3 choices for your guests. Give them a wedding itinerary and direct them to your wedding website containing the hotel rates and information so they can reserve their room. Also, include a list of things to do or see in the city in case they decide to come early or stay longer. If you plan on inviting them to your gift opening or morning after brunch, be sure to inform them in advance so they can make travel plans.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Does the hotel offer a shuttle to your rehearsal dinner, ceremony and reception sites?
- Is it close to drug stores, restaurants and retail shopping?
- Do they offer amenities such as an indoor pool, workout facilities, wi-fi, in-facility restaurant, and complimentary breakfast.
- What is their group rate and how many rooms do they have available?
- Do they offer a complimentary room for the newlywed couple?
- Do they offer a meeting room for gift opening or gatherings?
- What are their policies for reserving a block of rooms? Will they honor the reduced rates after the cut-off date if rooms are still available?

RESERVE A BLOCK OF ROOMS

Reserve your hotel rooms for your out-of-town guests 4-6 months in advance and remember your honeymoon suite if you're staying too. Talk with the hotel to determine approximately how many rooms you will need, use your guest list to estimate. Guests need to book at least one month in advance so the hotel can release any unbooked rooms. Don't expect all your guests to be on one floor. With variables such as smoking/non-smoking, room types, pet accommodations and other hotel patrons, this would be a difficult request to fulfill.

WELCOME BAG

Surprise your guests with a welcome bag after their long day of travel. The bags can be left with the hotel, either to be placed in the guests' rooms, or to be given to the guests as they arrive. Style the bag to match the theme of your weekend.

WELCOME BAG IDEAS

- Your wedding itinerary: list all activities in which your guests are involved. Include key locations and times.
- Contact names and cell phone numbers in case anyone has a question (assign a good friend or family member to help with these phone calls).
- Bottles of water, snacks and maybe some alcoholic beverages.
- Local brochures and coupons (to outlet malls, restaurants).
- Soaps, lotions or pampering products.
- Souvenirs to match the theme of your wedding - (i.e. for a beach wedding include: sunglasses, towels, flip flops, or beach ball).

Your guests will appreciate the extra thought you have given to them on your special day. Providing them with a thoughtful welcome gift makes the wedding all the more memorable for them!

SAMPLE WEDDING DAY TIMELINE

With so many people involved on your big day, it is best to keep everyone organized. We recommend having a wedding day timeline ready for all attendants, friends, and family members helping with your wedding to keep your day on track. By distributing and following the timeline, you will have many helpers aware of what is coming next, and checking the clock for you. Each helper will know when to be where. First start planning your timeline by scheduling the most important events of your day, like the ceremony and reception start time. Then fill in the details as you plan your wedding. Add all information your helpers need to know. Allow extra time for travel, and schedule gaps for the unexpected. You may have a wedding coordinator that will oversee this timeline, but if not, ask a trusted friend to keep an eye on the clock. You may also entrust this friend with the final payments to vendors, so you can savor each moment of your day!

EXAMPLE TIMELINE*

8:00am Arrive for hair and makeup appointments. Wear a button down shirt for ease of changing into gowns. Drive separately as appointments are staggered. Here is the hair schedule...

10:00am Brides and attendants start getting ready at the ceremony site. Remember your dress, shoes, nylons, and jewelry. Photographer arrives for “getting ready” photos.

10:15am Flowers delivered to church.

11:00am Groomsmen arrive with tuxedos, and shoes.

11:45am All flowers are in place: boutonnieres and bouquets.

12:00pm Photos begin in the sanctuary with “first look” shots of the couple. Following photos of the couple will be all wedding party photos.

12:45pm All family to be included in the photos have arrived, and are putting on their flowers (if applicable).

1:00pm Family photos at location.

1:30pm Guest book attendants and ushers in place.

1:40pm Sanctuary is cleared and ceremony music begins.

1:50pm Grandparents and Godparents are seated by the groom. Next, the parents of the couple.

1:55pm Wedding party gathers in the back of the church in order, followed by the bride with her father.

2:00pm Ceremony begins. (You can discuss with the officiant when planning the ceremony the length to allow here.)

2:30pm Limousine arrives at church.

2:45pm Cake is delivered, photo booth and DJ set up at the reception venue.

3:00pm Ceremony ends, newlyweds dismiss guests. (Or ushers dismiss guests and there will be a receiving line as guests leave church.) Wedding party leaves via limousine with photographer to shoot photos at outdoor location.

3:30pm Cocktails and appetizers are served at the reception venue.

4:30pm Wedding party arrives, after being announced by DJ.

4:45pm Couple cuts the cake.

5:00pm Welcome and blessing of the meal. Dinner is served. Rest of cake is cut for guests.

6:00pm Dinner concludes, serve the cake, and toast while you enjoy.

6:30pm Photo booth opens.

7:00pm Dancing and fun begins.

10:00pm Pizza is served for a late night snack.

11:00pm Photo booth closes to allow time for final printing of photos and to complete album for the couple.

12:00pm Reception ends. Couple leaves in getaway car. Attendants, or specific helpers clean up and pack decorations and gifts. (Or the venue may take care of all clean-up.) Make sure all tuxedos are given to best man or appointed person for return in the morning.

* Remember this is just an example, it's your day, your way.

MARRIAGE LICENSE

HOW TO APPLY

You can apply for a marriage license in any County Registrar's office in Iowa and it will be valid throughout the state. You, your significant other, and a disinterested witness familiar with both of you, will need to file the application in person and pay a \$35 fee. This fee includes a certified copy of the final marriage certificate. Some counties do allow signed and notarized applications to be filed by mail.

INFORMATION YOU NEED

You will have to provide your legal names before marriage, after marriage, addresses, birth dates, places of birth, social security numbers, your fathers' full names, and your mothers' full maiden names. The applicants and witness will need to bring a current, Government issued photo ID.

WAITING PERIOD

There is a four day waiting period from the date the Registrar accepts your application until it is valid. You can waive the waiting period by completing a waiver application when you apply for your license. You both must go to the clerk of court office in the county that you apply for your marriage license in to have your waiver application signed by a judge. Be prepared to wait until a judge is available. Then you must take your signed waiver back to the registrar's office to apply for your marriage license and have it granted immediately. You will have to pay an additional \$5 fee for this waiver.

GETTING YOUR LICENSE

Pick up your marriage license at the time of application, but remember it is not valid for four days from the time of filing. Have your current, Government issued photo ID. If you choose not to immediately pick up your license, it must be retrieved within six months or it is considered null and void. If it expires, you will need to reapply for a new one and pay the current application fee. The license does not have an expiration date after it is picked up from the County Registrar. Ask for a SS-5 application to complete after marriage to update your Social Security Card.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGES

Same-sex marriages became legal in Iowa on April 3, 2009, making Iowa the fourth U.S. state to legalize same-sex marriages, after Massachusetts, California and Connecticut. Who would have thought that gay marriage would be legal in Iowa before New York? Unbelievable! Iowa's Constitution ensures equal protection. Everyone has the right to marry the person they love. However, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the separation of the church and state, thus no church can be compelled to recognize gay marriage or perform a service. Check with the church in which you wish to be married to be certain they allow and officiate same-sex marriages.

Anyone can be married in Iowa with a valid Iowa Marriage License. Iowa is an appealing place for same-sex marriages because you do not have to be a resident of Iowa to get married here. Same-sex couples go through the identical process as different-sex couples to register for their marriage license.

Benton County Recorder

www.Bentoncountyiowa.org
111 East 4th Street Vinton, IA
(319) 472-3309

Cedar County Recorder

www.Cedarcounty.org
400 Cedar Street Tipton, IA
(563) 886-2230

Jones County Recorder

www.Jonescountyiowa.org
500 W. Main Room 116 Anamosa, IA
(319) 462-2477

Delaware County Recorder

www.Delawarecountyia.com
301 E. Main #204 PO Box 157
Manchester, IA
(563) 927-4665

Johnson County Recorder

www.Johnson-county.com
913 S. Dubuque St. Iowa City, IA
(319) 356-6093

Linn County Recorder

www.Linncounty.org
935 2nd St Southwest Cedar Rapids, IA
(319) 892-5420

CREATING A SEATING CHART

This is one of the last things in your planning process, after the RSVP's are received.

TABLE CHART

To begin your wedding reception seating chart, you will first need to know how many tables will be at your reception, as well as how many chairs will be at each table. Contact your reception location and ask for a chart of how their tables are set up. Ask if you can rearrange to better accommodate your needs. You can comfortably seat 6-10 guests at a 60 inch round table. A 6 foot by 30 inch rectangular table can seat 6 or 8 guests, depending if you sit guests on the ends. Assign numbers or creative names to the tables on the wedding reception table chart.

ASSIGN SEATS

Decide which guests you will sit together in your seating chart. Use your guest list and table chart to assign families and guests to each table. Keep small children next to their parents and attempt to seat guests beside people with whom they will be comfortable. If you are unsure on relationships then ask your parents, they may have good insight on this. When assigning seats, keep in mind that some tables may need to be taken down after dinner to make room for dancing. If you know of people who need a chair, (elderly or handicapped) be sure not to seat them at a table that will be removed.

SEATING FOR THE WEDDING PARTY

Most receptions are set with the head table in the front of the room, however, there are other options. You may want your table in the center of the room, to give your guests a closer view of the toasts and speeches. If both sets of parents get along, you may want to sit with them at a center table, and let your wedding party sit with their families.

UNFORGETTABLE PARTIES

Plan a party as unique as the couple. Keep in mind their style and personality, your budget and guest list. Make it a couple's party so everyone can have fun. Choose a venue the couple will appreciate, a special place which will accommodate your guests and party plans.

CREATIVE PARTY IDEAS

Minute-to-win-it: Buy some inexpensive prizes. Have random plates or cups marked with an X. Those guests who received an X must complete a minute-to-win-it challenge for a chance to win a gift for themselves or to give to the couple. Alternatively, make teams and let all your guests participate.

Honeymoon Party: Bring the couple their honeymoon early. Make the party mirror their honeymoon destination in the décor, cultural food, music, and games! Have guests dress the part and bring money or gifts they can use during their travels.

Team Spirit: Does the couple enjoy watching a specific college or professional sports team? Decorate your party with their theme colors, mascot, and play the team's song when the couple arrives. Is the couple planning on having a room in their home decorated with team memorabilia?

Make Your House a Home: Each guest must bring an appropriate gift for their assigned room in the home. Examples for the Laundry Room are laundry baskets, dryer sheets, iron, cleaning supplies, and a new washer and dryer fund. Bathroom ideas are towels, medicine cabinet supplies, wall art, floor rugs, and a redecorating fund. Living Room gifts can be candles, blankets, wall art, floor rugs, and a furniture or electronics fund. Garage purchases allow for shovels, rakes, gardening tools, gloves, a snow blower, or lawn mower fund.

What's the Time: Each guest brings a gift for the time of day they are assigned. You can also assign an activity with the time. Example: 8:00 am, a coffee themed gift.

Garden Party: Is the couple established in a home and planning on landscaping? Get your hands dirty together. Buy plants with the couple and spend the day planting and beautifying their yard. They will remember your day together for many years!

BRIDAL SHOWER AND LUNCHEON

BRIDAL SHOWER

The bridal shower is traditionally hosted by close friends, cousins or aunts of the couple. Theme parties are a fun way to celebrate! Sometimes a demonstrator is invited to educate and/or entertain the guests. Kitchen product parties, food tastings, recipe showers, or lingerie parties are always crowd pleasers. If you do not know a local consultant in your area, do a web search. Be resourceful when planning the location for your bridal shower. There are many great venues to enjoy the party at without the hassle of having it in your home. Remember to share the couple's wedding registry information in the invitation.

BRIDAL LUNCHEON

The bridesmaids' luncheon is nearly always hosted by the bride, to thank her bridesmaids for their efforts. Attendees may include the bridesmaids, as well as other close female friends or relatives participating in the wedding, including the mothers of the newlyweds to be. The day before the wedding is a popular day to host this event, possibly after decorating for the reception together. However, the event does not have to be a lunch, as the name implies, or even a meal. You could host the event at a local spa for some group pampering, have brunch at the bride's home, or dinner at a local restaurant. Be sure to give sincere thanks to the wonderful women who surround you.

BACHELOR AND BACHELORETTE PARTIES

The celebration of the final days of freedom! While some may watch "The Hangover," to help plan their perfect bash, most couples prefer to have a more memorable and quality night or weekend with their closest friends. Respectively, the best man or maid of honor hosts this event, but all guests can help pay the bill. Be original when planning, but keep in mind the style, personality and budget of the group and the soon to be newlywed. Whatever you choose, liven up the night with some fun games or themed outfits. The most popular games are ones that require interaction between the newlywed-to-be and the public. Make a task list or scavenger hunt to complete, or have him or her adopt a party name or persona for the night.

HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS TO INSPIRE YOUR PLANNING:

- Have a wine tasting party at a local vineyard.
- Plan a destination party: Las Vegas!
- Rent a party bus or limo for a night out on the town.
- Schedule a spa party including facials, massages, pedicures, manicures, cheese, and wine.
- Enjoy golfing as a group.
- Have a backyard BBQ with lawn games.
- Reserve a suite at a sporting event.

REHEARSAL DINNER

CHOOSE THE VENUE

The rehearsal dinner is the traditional meal following the wedding ceremony rehearsal. You can have it at a fancy restaurant, club, hotel, banquet facility, or choose a low-key venue such as a casual bar restaurant or home-catered party. Pick a location that reflects you as a couple to celebrate with your closet family and wedding party. Make reservations early as hotels, restaurants and private clubs book well in advance.

GUESTS TO INVITE

Invite both sets of parents and grandparents, immediate family, close relatives, and the wedding party with their families. Out-of-town guests who have arrived early may also be included, along with the piano player and wedding ceremony officiant with their spouse. If there are too many out-of-towners, you may have to set limits. Invite them to the day after brunch and gift opening instead.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The rehearsal dinner is the perfect time to say thank you and to give gifts to family and friends who have participated in your planning process. Ideally, the couple should stand together, giving special thanks to both sets of parents. Your parents, best man and others may toast to you as a couple. You can return the toast if you wish as there are no set rules. This night allows your attendants and families time to relax, chat and get to know one another, if they don't already. Have fun and enjoy the evening, but don't linger too long, the wedding party needs plenty of rest before the big day. Be careful not to drink too much, you want to look and feel great on your big day!

PHOTOGRAPHY

Your wedding day is one of the most important days in your life and you want to remember it forever. A good photographer will capture all the memories of your special day to be cherished always! Your wedding photos are one of your most treasured keepsakes, they tell your wedding story. You will post your photos to social media, display them in your home and gaze at them 50 years down the road with your soul mate. Your pictures are important, do your research and be selective when choosing your photographer. You've worked hard to make this day perfect and you want to hire a quality photographer to capture it.

HIRE THE RIGHT PHOTOGRAPHER

Start researching photographers soon after deciding your wedding date, location and budget. Check out their websites, price packages, reviews, and online wedding portfolios. If you find a photographer you like, schedule a consultation to meet.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How long have they have been photographing weddings? How many weddings do they photograph per year?
- Do they have an assistant?
- What is their attire for weddings?
- Do they have an album of a complete wedding that they have photographed for you to view?
- Pay attention to the quality and detail of their work. Is that how you want your wedding captured?
- Are you looking for posed photos like your parents' albums. Do you like documentary style, candid or spontaneous photos?
- Do they have references?

Let the photographer know your expectations. Give them details such as your venue, your wedding style and what you visualize when thinking about your photos. Make sure you like the personality of your photographer, you will be spending your wedding day with them and you want to be comfortable. Hire a photographer that fits your personality, wedding style and budget.

BOOK IN ADVANCE

Many photographer's schedules fill fast. It's a good idea to book your photographer at least 10-12 months before your wedding. Each photographer offers different packages to choose from. This may be based on the number of hours worked, rights to photos or prints, and a digital cd. Some packages include free or discounted engagement sessions. Choose a package that works best for you and get a signed contract. Make sure all terms are specified including the deposit, cancellation and payment schedule. Be sure to provide your photographer a list of people you want photographed on your special day. Ask for a time estimate of when you can expect to view your photos after your wedding.

BE INVENTIVE

A professional photographer is an artist. They can change an environment and mood with lenses and lighting. They can transform your pictures. Why not get creative for some unique photos to remember? Look at wedding photographs online, in magazines or flip through your photographer's portfolio. Come up with ideas of your own. Write a list of poses and settings that fit your personality as a couple and discuss your preferences with your photographer.

VIDEOGRAPHY & CINEMATOGRAPHY

Your wedding video is one of the few things that becomes more valuable the older it gets. It captures the events of the day as they unfold, and provides the “smell, taste, and feel” of what actually happens. You will be able to witness your excitement on the big day, your jitters, how you got ready with family and friends, and all the hugs and tears. Not to mention, the ceremony, how your father proudly walked you down the aisle and gave you away to your fiancé, the emotion of the exchange of vows and the final kiss. Then to be able to watch your excitement at the reception and how lively your guests were. Those memories are worth hiring a good videographer or cinematographer. They will make every effort to record your wedding unobtrusively and tastefully.

HIRING A VIDEOGRAPHER OR CINEMATOGRAPHER

Both Videographers & Cinematographers are great and will capture your wedding details, but there are some differences. The term cinematographer implies a deep and thoughtful knowledge base in creating visual art, in their respective medium. Cinematographers are trained to visually craft an authentic documentary story telling approach to wedding films through their knowledge of light and what is important to people narratively. They try to get to know people through their work. The tools they use are only defined by what serves that purpose. It is important you check out their websites, price packages, reviews, and online videos to be sure you find a videographer or cinematographer that best fits your needs. If you find one you like, schedule a consultation to meet.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Do they have a site in which you can view other weddings they have filmed?
- Pay attention to the quality and detail of their work. Is that how you want your wedding captured?
- Do they have references? Let the videographer know your expectations. Give them details such as your venue, your wedding style, and what you visualize when thinking about your wedding video.
- Do they have a drone? Drones are becoming more and more popular as they can capture video and images from above, shots you simple can't get from the ground level. Be sure to follow FAA drone regulations. For example, certain drones use GPS systems to keep themselves level and if the drone is within 5 miles of an airport it won't leave the ground.
- Are there multiple wedding professionals to capture more?
- Do they use wireless microphones during the ceremony?
- Do they film interview, documentary, or cinematic style video?
- Will they give you the master (unedited), final tape, or both?

BOOK IN ADVANCE

Select your videographer 6-8 months before your wedding and get a signed contract. Make sure all terms are specified including the deposit, cancellation, and refund policies. You will be happy you chose a videographer or cinematographer for your special day!

COORDINATE YOUR VIDEO AND PHOTO PROFESSIONALS

Videographers and photographers share much of the same space on your special day, so it's important to have a discussion with them both as to where you need them to be allowing both parties to work together equally to get the best shot.

EXCEPTIONAL FLOWERS

Flowers are everywhere at a wedding, from the ceremony to the reception. They are meaningful, inspirational and beautiful. Flowers have the power to transform a drab room into an elegant setting. Wow your guests with gorgeous flowers. Check out Pinterest and magazines for ideas, then visit your local floral shops to see what unique, handmade wedding flowers and floral arrangements they can offer you for your special day. Choose your florist wisely, floral arrangements are art to inspire and you want a qualified professional for this responsibility. Schedule an appointment to talk with your florist. Let them know your wedding date, style, venues, and budget.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Are they familiar with your locations? Have they done wedding flowers there before?
- How long have they been a florist? How many weddings per year do they create flowers for?
- Can you see pictures of wedding flowers they have done in the past?
- Do you like their work and style?
- Are these the kind of wedding flowers you are looking for?
- What is their pricing?
- Do they have references?

Bring inspirational pictures and fabric swatches to help decide specific flowers that will fit with your style and colors, and will be in bloom during your wedding season. Bring pictures of your venues and places you need flowers, along with your list of flowers to order. Finalize your floral order 2-4 months before your wedding.

FLORAL TIPS

- Flowers beautify and could potentially be in every picture from your big day. Choose inspiration wisely.
- Be realistic about what is available and in season. Your florist will be able to show you comparable options.
- Love your bouquets! It is one of the ladies most important accessories.
- Church flowers can be taken to the reception to brighten the buffet or gift tables.
- Save money by using less flowers and buying larger-sized blooms.

TRANSPORTATION

Celebrate your special occasion by arriving in style! No other automobile generates as much excitement and prestige as a Limousine does. After all, the Limousine is the transportation of Royalty, Presidents, Celebrities, and Industry Leaders! Maybe a Party Bus, Shuttle Bus, Premium Hybrid, or Lincoln Town Car better suites your needs, style, and budget. There are many options available, and best of all, you won't have to worry about drinking and driving!

DETERMINE YOUR NEEDS, STYLE AND BUDGET

When deciding which transportation to use, consider the event you need the service for. Know your budget, theme, and how many people you need to transport. Think about what type of automotive will best serve you and your guests comfortably and offer the right atmosphere for your special event. Call and talk with a limousine service to get ideas and price quotes. Ask to stop by and look at their selection to help visualize it for your big day.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What models, colors, and capacity of vehicles do they offer?
- What are their rates? Do they have a minimum hour requirement?
- Do they have special wedding packages or discounts for renting multiple cars?
- Do they have proof of insurance?
- What is their cancellation policy?
- Can they accommodate special needs (big and tall guests, child seats, handicap access, luggage, etc.)?
- What amenities are included?
- Can food or beverages be brought on board? If so, assign the best man to give the chauffeur food and beverages.
- Can you decorate the transportation or have a "Just Married" sign attached? If so, does the company provide the sign and will there be an extra cleaning or service charge for this?
- Can you bring your own music?
- What is the sound system like and can it hook directly to your smart phone?
- Is there a TV? You can make a special video for your wedding party.
- Is there room to dance?

Give your driver an itinerary if you have multiple stops and don't forget the tip, unless gratuity was included. Book your transportation 6-8+ months prior to your wedding date to insure you'll have the widest selection of elegant transportation alternatives to choose from. Trolleys can book out 18 months in advance.

VENUE SELECTION

There are so many choices, how do you choose? Begin by selecting a location that accommodates your number of guests, your style, your wedding date, and your budget. Decide if you want your wedding hosted in one place from the rehearsal dinner to the gift opening, or if you want several locations. You may want to choose a place special to you and your fiancé. Think about the experience you want for you and your guests. Take a drive between the ceremony location and the possible reception sites. Consider your guests' drive between these locations, and the hotels you are reserving for out-of-town guests. Keep an open mind when choosing your venue, you can transform almost any place with the right décor. Most venues have a professional coordinator or event planner dedicated to helping you plan your special day. Ask them for a list of all the services that they have available to you and for their price list. If you need additional services, ask if they have a list of preferred vendors that they recommend. Most venues have established relationships with the wedding professionals they work with on a regular basis. There are so many choices, how do you choose? Consider the following ideas:

HOTELS WITH GRAND BANQUET ROOMS

Hotels with grand banquet rooms are a popular venue for weddings because of their convenience and all of their wonderful amenities they have to offer to keep your wedding day stress free! You could have your rehearsal dinner, ceremony, reception, and morning-after brunch all in the same hotel if you desire. Your guests, both in and out-of-town, could stay at one location without having to worry about driving after a late night of celebrating.

COUNTRY CLUBS

Country clubs are venues that offer stunning natural settings for outdoor ceremonies, followed by breathtaking views at the reception. Imagine the outdoor pictures you can capture on your wedding day without having to leave for a park! Afterward, the party can move inside into an elegant banquet room set up for dinner and the celebration.

BANQUET HALLS

Consider banquet halls. They can offer an elegant celebration for you and your guests with a beautiful facility, full service catering and bars, friendly staff, ample seating, and outdoor areas for your complete satisfaction.

COLLEGE CAMPUSES, MUSEUMS, AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Other popular venues are college campuses, museums and historic buildings. The character, charm, views, history, and ageless beauty of these venues will WOW your guests and leave them with plenty to look at and talk about!

COMMUNITY CENTERS, FAIRGROUNDS, & LOCAL PAVILIONS

Community centers, fairgrounds and local pavilions can offer spectacular scenery and space without breaking the bank! These locations can welcome your guests with their small town charm and relaxed atmosphere.

BARNS AND RUSTIC BUILDINGS

Barns and rustic buildings automatically set the theme if you are looking for some rustic country charm on your wedding day. Impress your guests by saying your nuptials on the sweeping beauty of the country landscape with the fresh smell of the outdoors! The inspiration will continue as guests celebrate the evening in the beauty of an old building or barn.

LOCAL BAR RESTAURANTS

If you are looking for a more casual reception, then check out your local bar restaurants. The name says it all, they are your bar and restaurant all-in-one making planning easy and convenient for you. Ask about music, some bar restaurants hire weekend DJ's that your guests will enjoy too!

QUESTIONS FOR VENUE SELECTION

Research your venues, check out their websites and ask around about them. Call to make an appointment for a consultation and tour of the facility. Ask plenty of questions to find out exactly what they can offer you on your big day! Take notes on our app or use our worksheets.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING A VENUE

- What is the size of the facility and how many guests can it comfortably hold?
- Can you schedule a tour?
- What is their rental fee? Are there any hidden costs or overtime charges?
- Is there a payment schedule or required deposits?
- What is the style or décor of the venue?
- Can you host your rehearsal dinner, ceremony and gift opening there as well? Where are those sites located? Do they offer a discount for this? Are there changing rooms available?
- How many events do they host at a time?
- If it's an outdoor venue, do they have a backup plan in case of rain or other bad weather? Do they have a pavilion/tent?
- Do they have a coordinator dedicated to working with you and supervising your event throughout the process? Will they be there on your wedding day to make sure your event goes as planned? Can you meet them now?
- Do you have to worry about locking or unlocking the facility or meeting up with a coordinator to get inside?
- Is the venue handicap accessible?
- What special policies or regulations do they have that you should know about?
- What is their cancellation policy?
- Do they have an in-house caterer and can you sample the food? Can you use your own caterer?
- Do they have a kitchen available for you or your caterer to use?
- Do they serve buffet or formal sit down dinners?
- Do they offer cake or can you bring in your own? Will they cut and serve your cake? Do they box up leftovers for you to take the next day?
- Do they offer wine or champagne and can you bring in your own? Will they uncork and serve your wine or champagne?
- Do they have a liquor license? Can you bring in your own alcohol? Do they have a bar? Can you have an open bar?
- Do they provide tables and chairs? How many and what kind? Do they provide linens and what colors do they have? Do they offer head tables, gift tables, food and beverage tables? Will they set out place cards?
- Do they clean for you, or is this your responsibility? When does this have to be completed? Are there additional fees?
- Do they offer decorations or can you bring your own? Any special rules regarding decorations such as burning candles or sending off sky lanterns? When can you begin to decorate?
- Is there a dance floor or space for a DJ or band? How is their sound system? Are there any restrictions?
- Do they have a coat check or similar area for guests to use?
- Do they have adequate bathroom facilities?
- Where do they recommend taking photos?
- Does the facility have air conditioning or heat? Is there inside or outside space available for guests to use?
- Where can guests park? Are there additional fees for this or do they offer Valet?
- Will they notify you of any forgotten items from your guests?
- Do they have any renovation plans scheduled close to your wedding date?
- Do they have pictures of previous weddings they have hosted? References?

OUTDOOR WEDDINGS

I think everyone, at one time or another, toys with the idea of having an outdoor wedding. The fresh air, breathtaking views and the freedom it inspires, fills us with romantic notions of how perfect our wedding could be. However, having an outdoor wedding comes with its own challenges. Consider the climate conditions of where you live and the season in which you are getting married. Is it normally hot and sunny, or does it tend to get quite a bit of rain during the season of your wedding date? How much does it cool down during the evening? If the wedding is in the late afternoon while it's still hot, but the reception goes on late into the night, will guests get cold outdoors?

OUTDOOR WEDDING TIPS

You may want to have a back-up facility in case weather is truly awful. A tent is a good idea to shield people from the hot sun during the day and from any sudden downpours you may unexpectedly receive. You will still have the wind and soggy ground to deal with, but that's much better than the alternative. If the weather is hot, offer ice cold bottles of water at the ceremony and print your programs on fans to cool your guests. Rent fans with generators. If the weather gets chilly by night, remind your guests on your wedding website and on the hashtag included on your invitation to bring a sweater. Rent heaters with generators. Set out blankets for those that forgot. Fill baskets with sunscreen or bug spray. You may also want to rent a microphone or sound system so guests can hear. Ask your DJ if they have something you could use.

ON-SITE CONSULTATIONS

Make sure to have on-site consultations with all your vendors, including the caterer, the tent rental company, the florist, the decorator, the musicians, etc. Let each of them know how you want the area set up and where items and people will be located. Make sure they know how to accommodate, and are prepared to handle an outdoor wedding. Determine with your vendors how much time they will need to set up. Be sure to make arrangements to have everything dismantled after your wedding. Remember to budget this into your costs. It might be a good idea to hire someone to oversee the setup on the day of the wedding to insure all goes as planned. Having an outdoor wedding can be very romantic and fun, but it does require a lot of advance planning and coordination.

COUNTRY WEDDINGS

by Karen Petersen

What was once considered an “across the board traditional wedding” has evolved in recent years to be as unique as the bride herself! Many traditions have fallen by the wayside and wedding civilities have become more suited to today’s lifestyles, personalities, and budgets.

The traditional ceremony in a church, and reception at the local dance hall are no longer the “norm”. There is a new trend toward simpler weddings with a bigger focus on family and friendships. Many couples are choosing wedding venues with fun, unique, and scenic backdrops. Couples are looking to the rustic elegance and simplicity of rural locations to say their nuptials.

A blanket of green grass, rolling cornfields, and a beautiful sunset make for an outstanding backdrop to a night of celebration! This way of thought might actually be closer to your families’ traditional Iowa wedding. Was this the same setting our great-grandparents enjoyed on their wedding day? Did they enjoy flowers that were in season from neighbors’ gardens and fresh local grown food? Take time to ask some family history questions and you may see how you and a relative still share the blessings of our surroundings.

So...be creative and make your special day your own! We have those unique locations for Iowa girls and guys to celebrate their heritage. A vineyard in the fall, a lake at sunset, or the rustic charm of an antique barn – these are all perfect settings for a beautiful wedding. From the ceremony to the reception, these locations can be as dressed-up or as dressed-down as the bride and groom choose.

TRANSFORM YOUR VENUE

Create the ambiance of your reception with unique and exquisite decorations that match your style, theme and budget. The decorations you choose should inspire and excite your guests, and reflect who you are as a couple. Take a look around your venue for all possible places to decorate: the entry ways, staircases, reception room, dance floor, and food and beverage tables. Think about the lighting at the time of your reception. Choose décor that highlights the season of your wedding and the venue you have chosen. Research party scapes for ideas and inspiration, then call a local decorator or rental company to see what's possible. Check out their websites and make an appointment to share your vision.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What quantity of items will you need to order based on your guest list?
- When will the rentals be delivered, or will you have to pick them up?
- Who sets up?
- Do they clean up and return the décor, or will you? By when?
- What happens if something breaks?
- What is their pricing? Are there any additional fees?
- Do they have references?

UNIQUE DECORATING IDEAS

- Table linens, napkins, and chair covers or nice-looking chairs are simple solutions that automatically give an elegant feel to the room.
- Hang fabric/chandeliers from the ceiling.
- Hang monogrammed garland, flower garland or fabric on chair backs.
- Use figurines/decor at your tables that highlight your interests.
- Create custom lounge areas for your guests to gather and converse.
- Lighting, whether up, textured, or monogrammed, is a great way to make any room pop with color or highlight key spaces such as your cake table, head table or dance floor.
- Add lighting to highlight your flowers or centerpieces, and to illuminate the room.
- Rent a LED dance floor to mesmerize your guests as the colors and patterns change all night long.
- Hire a balloon decorator to create arches, centerpieces, unique sculptures, or to transform entire rooms to match your theme. This will impress your guests while giving them something to talk about and a fun place to take selfies!

Order your décor 6-8 months in advance. Choose your vendors wisely. Make sure they give you the personalized service you deserve.

KEEP YOUR RECEPTION ON TRACK

Everyone looks forward to a good reception! By staying organized, you will keep the flow of your wedding moving, making the day more enjoyable for all. Post your itinerary on your wedding website to keep your guests in the loop. Give a copy to your wedding party, your reception site coordinator and all of your vendors, including your DJ. Ask him/her to make announcements and keep your party moving. Here is an example:

SAMPLE RECEPTION TIMELINE

- 2:00 pm** The ceremony begins (Catholic ceremonies take longer).
- 3:30 pm** Guests arrive at the reception and enjoy drinks and appetizers.
- 4:30 pm** The wedding party arrives and DJ announces the wedding party.
- 4:45 pm** The couple cuts the cake.
- 5:00 pm** Dinner begins, cut the cake while your guests eat.
- 6:00 pm** Dinner concludes, serve the cake.
- 6:00 pm** Toast while you enjoy your cake.
- 7:00 pm** Dancing and fun begins.

BEFORE ARRIVING

If your ceremony is at 2 pm, remember your guests will arrive at the reception about 1 ½ hours later. Have a plan for your guests to continue to enjoy the day. Serve appetizers, offer drinks or plan interesting entertainment. Try and keep photo sessions brief prior to the reception. Alternatively, you could take some, or all, of your photos before the wedding. If you stop at a park for pictures make it brief. Remember, your guests have sacrificed and taken time out of their busy schedules to be there for you, and you want to be there for them. Also, your guests and their children may be hungry, so you need to be there to keep the schedule moving so dinner can be served on time!

AFTER ARRIVING

It's a good idea to cut the cake after arriving so your photographer can capture the last of your pictures of your wedding day, unless you have them contracted for the entire night. This also allows for you to have the cake cut while your guests enjoy dinner. Once guests have finished their meal, start serving the cake. This is a great opportunity to make any toasts. Your guests will all be contentedly seated in one room enjoying a slice of wedding cake or cupcakes. After that, let the dancing begin!

Remember, these are just suggestions, this is your special day and you must do what works best for you and your wedding.

GIFT TABLE

Assign a friend or family member to the gift table. Equip your attendant with a roll of clear tape to secure loose gift cards. Ask him or her to keep an eye out for anyone not invited in your reception who may have sticky fingers. Ask your gift table attendant or caring family members to help transport gifts from the reception site to your residence. If your gift opening is at the same location, the venue staff will most likely take care of this for you. For convenience, many guests are now shipping their gifts directly from the couple's online registry to their home.

A MEMORABLE CELEBRATION

While you and your wedding party are at the church or park finishing up the last few photographs, your guests will be arriving at the reception. Get the party started and keep your guests entertained until you arrive. Add some flair to your reception with these fun ideas!

TABLE ENTERTAINMENT

Have party favors for guests to enjoy. Consider using thick paper tablecloths for guests to draw masterpieces or play games on. List an email address for guests to email their wedding photos to, or ask your guests to include your #wedding on their Instagram posts. Give each table a task list of photos to take. (A happy child, a person touched by a great speech, etc...) Place small cards along the tables to write marriage advice or tips. Lay out Mad-Libs or other word games, cards, or trivia to entertain and spark conversation between guests.

TAKE CARE OF THE KIDS

Fill a bag or box with treats, toys, stickers, glow sticks, paper, crayons, or small games. If you have a seating chart for your guests, you can have the bags or boxes ready on the appropriate tables. Consider hiring a balloon artist to entertain the kids. This allows the parents to relax and enjoy other adults that they have not seen for years. Another option is to hire a baby-sitter or to appoint a couple of your teenage relatives to help supervise the kids.

LET THEM EAT

If you had a late afternoon or early evening ceremony, chances are your guests are famished. Serve appetizers, kids as well as adults will appreciate it. If you will be a while, you may want to let them begin the buffet or dinner. You and your wedding party can make your grand entrance later. If you have a long reception, offer late night snacks such as pizza or hardy appetizers.

SATISFY THEIR THIRST

Decide if you want a full bar, house wine and/or beer for your guests. You could serve a signature drink or one that matches your theme, maybe margaritas. An espresso bar will warm your guests on a cool day and give them a boost of energy for the dance floor! The kids at your reception might enjoy chocolate milk, blended fruit smoothies, juices, and kiddy cocktails.

LOCAL FLAVOR

Use local products everywhere you can. Think about the places and things you enjoy as a couple in your community. You could serve your guests your favorite local micro-brew beers, apples, pies, pastries, and chocolates. Shop your farmers market for ideas.

DELICIOUS DESSERT OPTIONS

Instead of cake, consider serving cheesecake or have a buffet of desserts for your guests to enjoy. Offer a chocolate fountain with fruits, marshmallows and pretzels. Rent a snow cone machine or a cotton candy maker for the day. Set a table with the couple's favorite candies and popcorn, include gift bags with a special note.

ENTERTAINMENT

Not all guests dance. To prevent them from becoming wallflowers, consider some alternative entertainment options. Book professional entertainers such as singers or dancers to perform during cocktail hour. Other ideas may include a magician, hypnotist, comedian, or a balloon artist. Set up a game table with options for all ages. Lawn games are fun if it works for your wedding, or you could spray paint a Twister board on the grass. Imagine a fireworks show to end your evening with a bang!

CHOOSING YOUR CATERER

Whether your budget permits an elegant sit-down dinner for hundreds of guests, or an intimate gathering of family and friends, your caterer settles the crowd and takes the worry out of wedding receptions. Select your caterer 8-10 months before your wedding. Imagine the setting and style of your wedding, and your food preference to decide what you want from your caterer.

DETERMINE WHAT SERVICES YOU NEED

Talk with your event or banquet facility coordinator to determine what catering services they offer, and what services you will still need to arrange. Some venues have their own full service catering in which they offer menu choices, services and prices, depending on the number of guests and type of catering desired. Other facilities may offer their own catering, but allow you the option to bring in some, or all of the catering. There are venues which do not offer catering at all. Each caterer offers different services for your needs. Talk to multiple caterers to determine which one will work best for you.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Do they have sample menus and price quotes for their food specialties and services? Any additional fees you should know about?
- What are their payment options and cancellation policies?
- How often do they cater weddings of your size?
- Have they catered at your venue?
- Do they provide child, vegetarian, gluten free, or kosher choices?
- Does the caterer prepare food from scratch?
- Can you schedule a tasting?
- How many servers will you need?
- What attire will they wear?
- Who will serve the meal and cut the cake? Are cake plates included?
- Do they offer cake and will they cut and serve it? Will this cost extra?
- How often do they refresh the buffet?
- What are their beverage options? Are they licensed?
- Are linens included in the price?
- What tableware do they use or offer?
- Will they set up the tables, place cards and favors?
- Do they clean up?
- Do they have references?

TASTE YOUR MENU SELECTION

After you have narrowed your choices to two or three caterers, ask for a taste testing of the proposed menu. When selecting your menu, consider keeping your meal appealing to all. You may want to provide options for those with special dietary needs.

WAYS TO REDUCE COSTS

Holding your wedding and reception during an unusual time of day, or day of the week, is one way to reduce your catering costs without reducing the number of guests. A morning wedding could offer a brunch reception, reducing the cost of food and alcohol. Guests will expect dinner after a late afternoon or early evening wedding, but you can serve a less expensive cut of meat, like chicken rather than beef. If children are attending your reception, ask if they will provide a children's meal at a lower cost.

Continued on the next page...

CHOOSING YOUR CATERER *Continued...*

GET A SIGNED CONTRACT

When plans are finalized, request a complete list of the foods, services and prices you agreed upon and sign a contract. A deposit may be required at this time. Keep in touch with your caterer during the months/weeks before the wedding. Let them know of any change in plans or guest count. Your caterer will give you a date to confirm quantities. Once the final number is given, you will be obligated to pay for that number of meals or servings.

Impress your guests with a delicious meal after the ceremony! Here are a few ideas:

BUFFET STYLE

Everyone loves choices. This can range from prime rib and scalloped potatoes to simple sandwiches, fruit and veggie trays and pasta salads.

PLATED

Have a traditional sit down multi-course meal. This is an elegant dining choice that will lengthen the time spent enjoying the meal.

FAMILY STYLE

This creates a relaxed and sharing atmosphere as guests pass the tasty dishes around the table for all to enjoy.

FOOD STATIONS

Keep guests moving and mingling as they check out the different selections. This adds variety and excitement to dinner.

HORS D'OEUVERS

Presentation makes anything look fabulous. Hire waiters to walk around and serve your guests, or alternatively set up an appetizer table. You could place your appetizer tables throughout the room encouraging guests to get up and mingle. You may serve wine, beer and punch as beverages or have an open bar. Try to avoid the dinner hour.

CAKES AND SWEETS

There are so many wonderfully yummy and beautifully decorated wedding cakes and options to choose from. You can select your flavorings, shapes, frostings, and colors. Select your cake designer 4-6 months in advance. Schedule an appointment to look at pictures of their past wedding cakes and enjoy some samples. Ask for pricing and references. Take in pictures, fabric swatches and lace patterns from the bride's dress to help create your confection perfection. Once you've made your selection, get a signed contract.

WEDDING CAKE

Choose large cakes, individual table cakes, sheet cakes, or a variety for your guests' pleasure. Don't forget the cake topper, monograms are vogue. Cakes are being decorated in pearls, crystals and lace embroidery, all made of sugar. Cakes can also go bare; naked wedding cakes make a perfect addition to a country or rustic wedding.

CUPCAKES

Cupcakes are a fun treat to serve your guests. They are convenient, with no worries about cutting the cake or servings. There are many cupcake display stands available to show off your cupcakes and give the look of a tiered cake. Consider all the flavors, fillings and toppings available. Some cupcakes have even been topped with a tube of liquor! You will be amazed with the selection that cupcake shops have to offer, and your guests will enjoy tasting the assortment.

CAKE POPS

Cake pops are an enjoyable dessert served on a stick and covered in chocolate. You can match the chocolate coating to your wedding colors. Then cover it in candy sprinkles, sanding or sparkling sugar, edible pearls or glitter, chocolate jimmies, finely chopped nuts, crushed cookies, dried coconut or even your favorite crushed candy. Cake pops come in a variety of flavors and frostings for your guests to savor.

DESSERT BARS & CANDY BUFFETS

Everyone loves cakes and cupcakes, however, a popular addition to go along with them are candy buffets such as popcorn, chocolates, fudge, jelly beans, and other sweet treats. These add variety for guests and can also serve as favors. Include take-home bags or boxes for your guests with quotes such as "Love is Sweet, Take a Treat" or your "Name and Wedding Date" is always classic.

A TOAST TO THE HAPPY COUPLE

Toasts are an important part of the cherished memories from the rehearsal dinner to the reception. A good toast is usually funny and sentimental all in one. Typically, toasts are made by the best man, maid of honor, both sets of parents, and the couple themselves, but like everything else, anything goes.

BEST MAN AND MAID OF HONOR

The best man and maid of honor's toasts are similar. They both rehash childhood memories or college days together, making it both humorous and sentimental. They may throw in a story about when the couple met and how things changed...for the better. They tell how wonderful each person is and the love and happiness they have for the new couple, followed by best wishes.

THE PARENTS If the bride's family paid for the wedding, traditionally the father makes the toast. If it was a joint effort to pay, both sets of parents usually stand together to toast. If the couple solely paid, then the parents can still give the same speech, but omit toasting. The toast usually welcomes all guests and thanks them for coming. They can announce how happy they are to gain another family member.

THE HAPPY COUPLE

Together they may thank everyone for coming. Thank their parents and wedding party for everything they've done. One spouse may thank the guests, his/her parents and his/her spouse's parents. Be sure to let your in-laws know how happy you are to be part of their family. Finish by turning to your spouse and letting them know how lucky and happy you are. Seal it with a kiss!

PHOTO BOOTH

Everybody loves a good photo booth! Many couples insist on having one just as they would music and food. After all, having a photo booth at your reception can serve many purposes. The booth typically opens after the meal and stays open until the end of the reception for hours of fun. This becomes a crowd pleaser as guests are asked to enjoy the experience as much as they like.

FAVORS

Photo strips are instant wedding favors that offer long lasting memories for wedding guests. Many of the latest style booths offer a custom photo strip frame design that sports the wedding couple's name, wedding date and wedding theme graphics. Guests can take the photo memory with them to frame or to add to their own scrapbook memories of the event. Some photo booths even make video clips to share online.

ENTERTAINMENT

From the kids to the grandparents, you'll find that just about everybody loves to smile for the camera. Photo booths are certain to capture those comical moments that may otherwise be lost forever. Many photo booths provide quirky props to add to the excitement. Props often include hats, glasses, masks, boas, scarfs, and tiaras. Some photo booth operators even create personalized balloon wear-ables, which can be worn on the dance floor and add to the fun. Others include a chalk board for the guests to write their own messages. This will keep them chuckling all night.

MEMORIES

Scrapbooks are a favorite for preserving wedding memories. Set up a scrapbook table and invite each guest to make a page including his or her photo strip and a note or marriage advice. You will enjoy reading this together. You may also receive a CD/DVD of all the photo booth photos and videos to post to your wedding website for guests to enjoy.

MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC

CHOOSING A DJ OR BAND

The best way to find a band or DJ is from firsthand experience. Think about who you like to watch perform at local bars or clubs. Have you been to a wedding recently where the band rocked? Your DJ or band is your entertainment and you want them to do just that. Select your DJ or band 6-8 months before your wedding. Choose a reputable, experienced DJ or band that fits in your budget. Your DJ can add extra value by acting as your MC: announcing your arrival and introductions at the reception, the first dance, the dollar dance, and other events such as the garter and bouquet toss. Be sure to give them a copy of your wedding itinerary and ask them to help keep your party on track. At your consultation, let them know the venue size and details, how long you are planning to book music, and song ideas for key events. Ask for their suggestions.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Can you see them perform?
- How many weddings do they work per year?
- Have they worked at your venue?
- What are their price options? Are there any additional fees?
- What are their payment options and cancellation fees?
- Do they take requests?
- When will they set up and tear down?
- What attire will they wear?
- Will they act as your Master of Ceremonies (MC)?
- Do they have professional equipment?
- Will they play a variety of music?
- Do they have references?

DINNER MUSIC

During dinner, you may opt for some gentle background music, such as a string quartet or a harpist. Light instrumental background music will add a festive atmosphere during this time while still allowing your guests to converse.

RECEPTION MUSIC

Let your DJ or band get your party started. Prepare your DJ with a vast selection of songs you enjoy as a couple. Include any guests' preferences by asking for song ideas on your RSVP's or wedding website. Play a variety for all of your guests to appreciate from slow to fast, and country to rock. Have your DJ get your guests up and moving with different interactive or participation songs.

YOUR DESTINATION WEDDING

MEET WITH A TRAVEL AGENT

Do you dream of your wedding happening in a setting other than Iowa? If so, a destination wedding specialist is committed to making your wedding an event to be cherished. They will help you find intimate beach resorts, scenic vineyards, or rustic lodges on the mountains. Travel agents know the reputable “hot spots” and have the connections to help plan your perfect wedding. They know which venues host beautiful weddings with exceptional quality and service, and which do not! Together you will find the perfect setting for your destination wedding.

PLAN YOUR EVENT

Travel agents recommend choosing a venue that caters to couples or specializes in destination weddings to be sure your day is flawlessly planned. Many hotels or resorts offer wedding planning services for their guests. They can help you prearrange everything from the ceremony site, to the flowers, to the food. Your agent will work diligently with your venue to make sure your plans are accomplished. They will also handle flights and accommodations for your guests, so you can let go of your worries and cherish your memories in the making!

YOUR HONEYMOON

HONEYMOON

Your honeymoon is a celebration just for the two of you. Enjoy it soon after your big day to truly relish being newly married, and to relax and unwind from the excitement of your wedding. Choose a destination together. Get online, look for ideas, but don't be too quick to book, be sure to consult with a travel agent first.

Travel agents know the great destinations available and can offer helpful guidance and recommendations for your longings. Plus, travel agencies can offer deals you can't find online, or they may be able to match prices! Put some thought into planning your honeymoon and enjoy your trip.

Be sure to book your flight tickets under the name on your driver's license. Airlines require that the name on your ID matches the name on your ticket, and if they don't, you may have issues.

HONEYMOON REGISTRIES

What do you get the couple who has everything? Some travel agents are offering "Honeymoon Registries," and they are becoming increasingly popular. They provide an opportunity for friends and family to contribute towards the honeymoon you've always dreamed of. Post registry information on your wedding website and in your shower invitations. Request that your bridesmaids, mothers and relatives spread the word about your honeymoon registry. A gift amount can be paid directly to the travel agency and credited to your account, or a gift certificate can be purchased.

Set a tentative budget for your trip and don't depend solely on your honeymoon registry to get you there. Be sure to calculate some extra "fun money" for special activities you may come across in your travels. Have fun and cherish each other and your destination, it may be awhile before you have the opportunity to travel again.

COOKWARE

As you plan your future together you think of many things, but cookware is not one of them. The average couple doesn't think twice as they scan their pots and pans for their registries. Then, five years down the road when your lids are warping and the Teflon is peeling off, you start to re-think your decision. I know, because I've been there. Do some research and read reviews before selecting cookware for your home. Even if you start with a couple of quality pots and pans for your kitchen, you can always add to them over the years.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Is there a warranty, and if so, how long? Some companies do offer extensive warranties.
- What is the cookware designed for? Is that how you like to prepare food and is that the food you, your spouse, and possible future children will enjoy over the years? Sometimes when you buy a set, you will not use all the cookware. You may be better off buying individually.
- Stainless Steel Cookware is non-reactive – you can cook any kind of food in it. It's heavy, durable, and dishwasher safe. However stainless steel can have poor heat transfer and distribution. Quality stainless steel cookware can offer even heat technology plus waterless and greaseless cooking allowing you to easily prepare healthy and flavorful meals in a fraction of the usual cook time.
- Copper cookware looks great, cooks evenly, and lasts, however you have to polish and maintain it. Copper is also reactive to alkaline or acidic foods. You can buy copper pots with stainless steel or tin lining.
- Cast Iron pots are durable and they add iron and flavor to your meal. However, they are heavy and more maintenance to clean, plus you have to season them. Cast iron is reactive. You could opt for enameled cast iron to still get the benefits, but without the hassle.
- Aluminum is lightweight and affordable. However, it is soft and tends to warp in high heat and scratch easily. Raw aluminum is reactive to alkaline or acidic foods. You can buy anodized aluminum that has been chemically treated to harden it, solving some of its cons.
- Non-stick pots and pans are nice and easy to clean, but eventually will scratch and the Teflon will wear away. Use plastic or rubber utensils, and stay away from metal utensils to help your pans last longer.
- All cookware should have a heavy thick bottom.

There are a lot of options when choosing cookware. Think about your preferences, your budget, and your future family. Do you want to look back in 20 or 30 years and know that the cookware you started with is still in your kitchen providing healthy meals for your family?

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Marriage is a legal union of two people, and once you are married, the rights and responsibilities of your relationship are defined by the laws of the state in which you reside. Legally, you are responsible to support your spouse and future children. This includes medical coverage, family expenses, education, food, and housing. Here are responsibilities to address and update:

FINANCES

Ideally, couples should talk finances and prenuptial agreements before getting married, however, that doesn't always happen. It's important to take your finances seriously, sit down as a couple to talk. Let your partner know any assets, debts and income you may have. Discuss how you feel about each other's spending and saving habits. Decide whether or not you want joint bank accounts after marriage. Make a list of assets you both want to save for and rank those assets in order of importance. Discuss how you plan to invest for your future. There is a lot to consider when discussing investing for your future, which is why meeting with a financial advisor or your local banker is beneficial. They are responsible for helping you reach your financial goals by recommending investments or financial solutions based upon your assets and needs throughout the years. Whatever you decide to do, make sure it is a joint decision.

BENEFICIARY RIGHTS ON INVESTMENT AND RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS

You can choose to merge your investment accounts or hold them separately. Retirement accounts remain separate. Designate your spouse as the beneficiary of any insurance policy, stocks, trusts, bonds, securities, pension plans, health insurance plans, and any other employment benefits you have. If you don't, the original party listed on your account will be the beneficiary after your death, regardless of any directions included in your will.

INHERITANCE

Planning ahead and drafting a will can ensure your property will be handled correctly. Without one, you will not be able to decide how your estate will be divided between your surviving spouse, your children or other heirs. Nor will you be able to designate a guardian for your children.

MARITAL PROPERTY

Without a prenuptial agreement, marital law assumes that each partner's personal assets become assets of the marriage. Marital assets are also everything you earn after your marriage date. In the event of a divorce, the court will equitably divide all assets.

UPDATE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

www.socialsecurity.gov

Many times, the Records office will give you the SS-5 application when applying for your marriage license. If not, find your SS-5 form online with detailed instructions for both a name and address change. Fill it out and return with a copy of your certified marriage license.

UPDATE YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE, VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS, AND CAR TITLES

www.mymvd.iowadot.gov

Bring a copy of your certified marriage license to the Department of Motor Vehicles to update your license. There may be fees. When the DOT updates your information, the Treasurer records will also be updated for your vehicle registrations and car titles.

Continued on the next page...

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Continued...

UPDATE CREDIT CARDS

Change the name on your credit cards, you may have to call and talk with a service representative for this change. You may also want to consider adding your spouse as an authorized user. Some banks still allow joint applications. Banks may vary.

HEALTH INSURANCE

If you wish to add your spouse to your plan and have employer-provided insurance, contact your HR department for the proper forms. Most will allow the change mid-year for a life changing event such as marriage. If you have individual plans, compare plans to find the best rate for a joint health insurance account.

LIFE INSURANCE

Beneficiaries should always be updated when a life changing event occurs. If a couple remarries, and the ex-spouse is still the beneficiary when the insured dies, the ex-spouse will get the money. It is also a good idea to assess your insurance needs and get the proper amount of coverage after marriage.

AUTO INSURANCE

Combine your auto insurance policies soon after marriage for coverage and to take advantage of the two-car discount.

HOME OWNER'S INSURANCE

If you own a home, you will need insurance. Make sure to shop rates and find an agent that will properly assess your needs. Having multiple insurance policies with one agent can save money. You may also want to inquire about insuring your jewelry, you just made a substantial investment for it.

THINGS TO UPDATE

- o Social Security Card
- o Driver's License, Car Titles
and Vehicle Registrations
- o Bank Accounts & Checks
- o Business Cards
- o Credit Cards
- o Health Care Records
- o Employer Records
- o Library & Membership Cards
- o Passport
- o Post Office
- o Utility Companies
- o Property Titles
- o Telephone Directory Listings
- o Voter Registration
- o Insurance Policies (beneficiaries)
 - o Auto
 - o Home
 - o Life
- o IRA Accounts (beneficiaries)
- o Pension Plans (beneficiaries)
- o Stock, Securities, Bonds (beneficiaries)
- o Wills (beneficiaries)

A HOME FOR YOUR HAPPILY EVER AFTER

By Kathleen Klarenbeek

The excitement of two lives joining together often means you will be moving into a different home. Whether you have never owned a home, or you want to sell your existing house(s) and start fresh, this is a terrific time to buy! Interest rates are near all-time historic lows, and this gives you more buying power. Lenders can explain your options and help determine just the right loan product for your needs, and your Realtor® will work hard to help you find just the right home for your Happily Ever After. Here are some helpful tips to guide you through the home-buying process.

MEET WITH YOUR LENDER

An initial meeting with a loan officer is important. At this point you can get pre-approved, learn what types of loans are available and the steps you need to take to get financing, and identify any potential roadblocks that need to be worked out. Of course it is fine to talk with your own bank, but don't be afraid to talk with other lenders to compare what they have to offer. Taking the time to shop around can save you thousands!

TALK WITH YOUR REALTOR

There are several ways you can find a skilled agent, if you don't already have one who came highly recommended. You want someone who will focus on your specific needs and help make the process go smoothly. After meeting the agent, ask yourself how comfortable you are around him or her. You will undoubtedly have many questions along the way, and you will also be sharing information you feel is important to choosing your next home. Thus, it's important you feel you are being heard and understood. You most likely plan to live in your next home for years to come, so a good rapport with your agent is vital.

Your agent can help you determine what you want and need in your next home, and how to prioritize accordingly. Most people feel pretty strongly about the minimum number of bedrooms and bathrooms they want, but there are so many other factors to consider. Do you mind taking care of a yard? What size of garage will work for you? Is the school district important? Other things to think about include how long you hope to live there, whether you are willing to commute, and features that may help or hinder resale value.

SEARCHING FOR YOUR HOME

Many people start their search on-line, either on their own or with their agent's guidance. Numerous web sites are available where you can input your desired price range, location, and features to narrow down your choices and view pictures. It's important to know that what looks perfect in pictures may be disappointing in person, and conversely, pictures don't always do justice to a home's true appearance. Your agent may also have knowledge of homes that are coming on the market soon, so utilize his or her resources as much as possible.

Now for the fun part... previewing homes with your agent! Whether you visit only a couple houses or a couple dozen, only you will know when you have found just the right home that fits your needs. A good real estate agent will explain your options and educate you about the pros and cons of your choices.

MAKING AN OFFER

When you have found the home you love, the next step is making an offer. Your agent will assist you throughout this process, which involves much more than just agreeing on a price. Other important terms to consider include how soon you want to move in, whether it is worth asking the seller for help with closing costs, and what type of financing you will be using.

Continued on the next page...

A HOME FOR YOUR HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Continued...

OUR OFFER WAS ACCEPTED, HURRAY! NOW WHAT?

Your agent will make suggestions regarding what types of inspections you may want. If an inspection brings up a major concern, you may wind up going back to the negotiating table to determine who will remedy the problem. Once any hurdles in the inspection process are cleared, you will be in the home stretch. You will have a few responsibilities to be mindful of as you approach your closing date. These include following your lender's recommendations regarding credit and finances, selecting home insurance, and arranging to have the utilities put in your name. Your lender and your agent may need information from you – and will also have information for you – during this time, so be on the lookout for their e-mails and phone calls. On closing day, you will sign all the necessary paperwork and then be handed the keys to your new home. Congratulations!

MOVING IN

Moving can be stressful, so consider having a professional moving company help with the move into your new home. Take time to ask potential movers about packing and unpacking, loading and unloading, and transportation of your belongings. Full service movers can also provide temporary storage and car hauling, if needed.

Follow these steps, and you could begin your Happily Ever After in your very own home!

HOME DÉCOR

REGISTER FOR HOME DÉCOR

Registering for gifts together is one of the more enjoyable wedding planning tasks. Don't stop with the pots and pans, register to make your house a home by setting up a home décor registry. If you've combined furniture to move in together, but it doesn't mesh, maybe move some of that furniture to the basement and use this opportunity to create the ambiance that you're both looking for.

MEET WITH A DESIGN EXPERT

If you don't know what style you're looking for, meet with an expert. Take pictures and measurements of the space you're looking to fill, along with photos of the rest of your home. This will help to design a plan that will work with the space and flow with the rest of your home, and maybe even future projects. As always, bring in your Pinterest pins for inspiration and ideas of what you both like. Keep in open mind and have fun making your home beautiful together!

NEWBORN PHOTOGRAPHY

Expecting a child is one of the most exciting times in your life and you want to remember this moment. The period in which newborn sessions take place is usually within the first two weeks. There are so many options when deciding who to hire for your newborns very first photo session. Like wedding photography, you only get one chance to get it right. Newborn photography is growing in popularity, and in this digital age it is important to look at many factors before hiring a newborn photographer.

First, look at their portfolio. Review their website and Facebook page to see their work. Does their style fit with what you are looking for? This is a moment in time you will never get back, so you want to make sure you find a photographer whose style you love.

Second, experience. An experienced newborn photographer will know how to pose and handle your baby. The safety of the newborn is very important, which means it's important to find someone that knows how to pose your newborn properly.

Finally, cost. Digital photography has made it easy to become a photographer, so the price range varies greatly. This is one time where looking for the least expensive photographer is not the answer. Inexpensive often means inexperienced. Don't book solely based on price.

Your newborn is only this little for a short amount of time, and you will cherish these images for a lifetime.