

Weddings



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Local wedding trends more adventurous, casual

BY DAVE DELUCA

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Local planners say wedding arrangements are becoming more adventurous and creative, with an heavy emphasis on customization.

In Ashtabula County, more people will be having their weddings in historical or outdoorsy places and experimenting with arrangements.

Phil Garcia, owner of Phil's Catering in Ashtabula, said today's weddings seem to be smaller, more intimate affairs.

"I've noticed more

wedding parties of 150 to 250, as opposed to the old days of 400 to 500 people," he said. "I've noticed people have become more creative with the outdoor settings. As far as the food goes, there seems to be more desire for gluten free and vegetarian fare."

He said many weddings are now turning away from elaborate menus and opting for hearty, but well made, old-fashioned cuisine.

Dave DeGeorge, of Lakeway Restaurant and catering services in Ashtabula, agreed with Garcia's assessment.

"There seems to be more requests for glu-



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Phil Garcia is one of the catering businesses that handles wedding needs in Ashtabula County.

ten free or other special dietary menu items," he said. "The food seems

to be more traditional and less elaborate. It all has a more casual flair. As far as the fixings go, many people would just as soon save money by using paper plates rather than have elaborate table settings."

Bernie Muto, owner of Bernie's Designs in Ashtabula, does wedding counseling and decorating.

"We do a host of wedding-related things," she said. "As far as sites for weddings and receptions, people seem to be looking for quaint, large outdoor areas like barns and gazebos. Vineyards have become a popular site for weddings lately. It seems sometimes they don't even mind if the weather is bad. They just want to make a statement with a rustic building or rural or

historical area."

Rebecca Distler, owner of Styling on Broadway in Geneva, said hair styles and wedding styles for everything else have become increasingly less structured.

"Things seem to be more free flavored and softer," she said. "There's less regularity in structure and more adventurousness in looks. We've been seeing a lot of destination parties, which are more adventurous, too. It's fun for them to go to these because it's a different experience. In everything in wedding planning recently we see less preconceived ideas and more easy going or free-spirited things."

Lisa Richmond of Strike-A-Pose in Ashtabula said her company supplies transportation like trolleys and limousines and old-fashioned photo booth photos as party favors, as well as other wedding amenities.

"The photo booth strip is still popular as a party favor," she said. "In fact, it's become more popular than other favors. Another trend is to have the wedding and reception party all in one place and then use the limousine or trolley for entertainment by taking guests to unusual locations for a photo shoot. We've noticed wed-

dings are more creative lately."

Rosemary Timone, bridal consultant at Elegante Wedding Stationery in Ashtabula, said people appear to be interested in custom items. She said she has been creating wedding stationery for decades now.

"People are now more into custom colors and signature fonts for invitations," she said. "Pocket invitations are also growing in popularity. The invitations, RSVPs, reception cards and enclosure cards are all preassembled and placed in a 'pocket' invitation. Matching colors, designs, ribbons and other embellishments are placed inside the pocket. It's definitely a trend this year."

She said just as wedding invitations and stationery have changed over the years, so has the communication level with clients. She said email and electronic communication are the new wave of wedding planning.

"People love customized stationery so much more now, and we stay right there with them to make sure it's right," she said. "I feel the most important trend in weddings right now is allowing the client to have a very personalized touch. We love to supply these customized, personalized touches for them."

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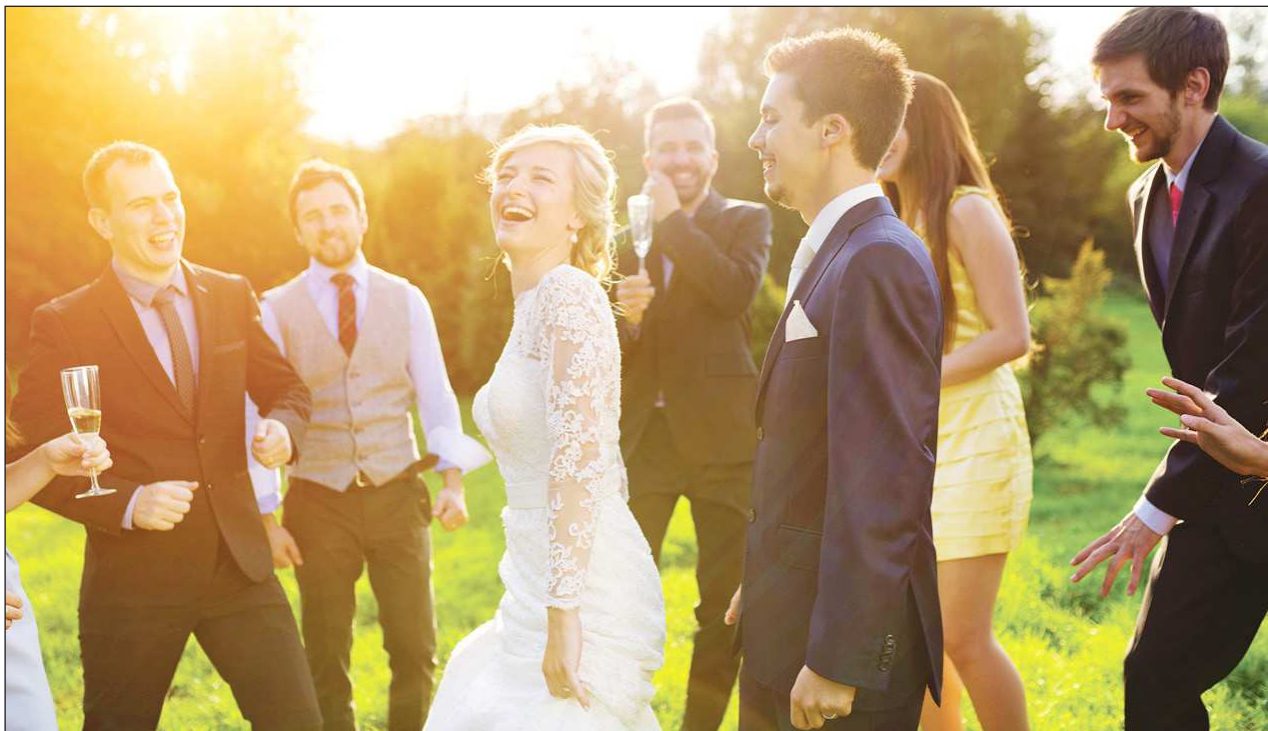
How guests can cut costs and still attend loved ones' weddings

Couples and/or their families can expect to spend tens of thousands of dollars on their weddings before saying "I do," making weddings one of the largest expenses for a couple apart from buying a house or new car.

But brides- and grooms-to-be are not the only ones who may have to invest quite a great deal on wedding days. Guests, including bridal party members, may also be responsible to pay a substantial sum. According to the 2016 American Express Spending & Saving Tracker, Americans expected to spend an average of \$703 per each wedding they attended in 2016.

Few people are willing to miss the wedding of a beloved family member or friend, even when the costs of attending the wedding can be high. Fortunately, there are ways for wedding invitees to attend the festivities without breaking the bank.

• Shop around for lodging. Many couples



The costs of attending a wedding are growing. But savvy guests can save money in various ways.

arrange for discounted hotel rooms for their out-of-town wedding guests. But guests might be able to save even more by shopping around for their own discounted rates at hotels and other lodging accommodations. Websites like Orbitz and Hotels.com can compare rates at all the hotels in a given city, letting wedding guests explore all of their

alternatives in a single search. Guests who are especially patient can use the Hotel Tonight app, which allows users to book heavily discounted rooms no more than seven days in advance of their expected occupancy. Guest also can try finding affordable lodging on the popular homestay network Airbnb.

• Book travel early. Many travelers insist

the best flight deals can be found as late as six weeks before the desired departure date. But there's no guarantee that waiting that long to book flights will benefit wedding guests. If the patient approach does not pan out, guests might be forced to choose between costly flights or not attending the wedding. Budget-conscious travelers may find it less

stressful to book flights as early as possible. Doing so allows guests to find flights at the times they most prefer to fly, and it also makes it possible to spread the cost of attending a wedding out over a longer period of time.

• Say no to joining the bridal party. While it's an honor when brides or grooms ask certain

friends or family members to be in their bridal parties, guests should not feel compelled to accept that invitation if they cannot afford it.

If money is tight, explain the situation to the bride and groom, who might even offer to help cover some of the costs of the wedding. Even if couples cannot afford that gesture, they will understand if friends or family members cannot cover the additional costs associated with being in a bridal party.

• Split expenses. Another way for guests to save money is to split certain expenses with fellow guests.

Single guests can share hotel rooms with fellow guests attending solo, and even couples can join up with other couples and split the cost of double rooms.

Sharing expenses such as rental cars and trips to and from the airport is another way for guests to coordinate their efforts to save money.

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I do take two: Making a second marriage work

Couples are returning to the altar in increasing numbers, as second and third weddings are becoming ever more popular. Pew Research Center indicates that, as of 2014, 64 percent of divorced or widowed men have remarried, compared with 52 percent of previously married women.

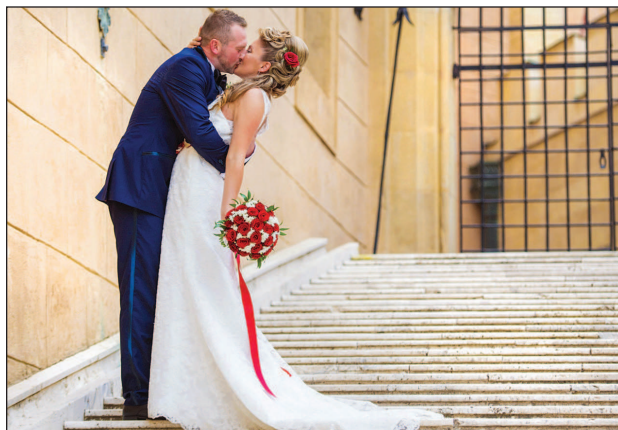
Lavish second weddings were once uncommon, but that trend is also shifting. Couples who are taking another crack at marriage are tying the knot with renewed vigor and with weddings that may rival some first-timers'.

Men and women who are remarrying after divorce or being widowed may not know how to approach planning their upcoming nuptials.

The following are some guidelines to making the wedding sequel a success.

Wardrobe

Couples who have been married before often find that they have more leeway with regard to their wedding wardrobes than they did when tying the knot for the first time. Brides may choose something less traditional than a long, white dress. In fact, this can be a time to let loose and select something that is festive or even funky. This also may provide a great opportunity to choose clothing styles from different cultures or ties into one's heritage. This freedom also allows brides to broaden their horizons



There are no hard rules governing second weddings, so couples can plan their weddings with good times in mind.

with regard to where to buy their wedding wardrobes.

Grooms may opt for something more casual than a tuxedo or coordinate with their brides-to-be so they are on the same creative page. Colored tuxedos and vintage suits are

acceptable, even though such attire might have raised a few eyebrows the first time around.

Guest list

The guest list doesn't have to be a source of anxiety. Others will understand that there may be a melange of people

at a second wedding. Children from previous marriages as well as divorced spouses or former parents-in-law are not out of the question. Even if exes will not be included, make sure they know about the nuptials in advance of others. It's common courtesy, and it can help head off feelings of ill-will.

Some couples choosing to tie the knot again scale back the size of the wedding this time around, feeling something smaller and more intimate — with only the closest of friends and family — is more suitable.

Registries and gifts

Considering couples who have been married previously

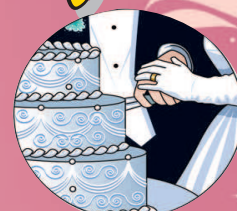
likely have many of the housewares and items for daily living that first-timers may not, registering for these gifts is not necessary. What's more, some of the same guests may have been present at first marriages and gifted then. In lieu of gifts, couples may ask guests to donate to a specific charity or forgo gifts altogether.

Vows

Couples can use experience to draft vows that have personal meaning to their unique situations and make the wedding ceremony even more special.

People getting married again can impart their own personalities into the ceremony and party to follow.

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Proposals can be special and successful

A marriage proposal is a couple's first official step toward the altar. Tradition dictates that men pop the question, with their surprised — and hopefully soon-to-be-fiancées — ultimately deciding if wedding bells will be on the horizon.

Proposing marriage can be nerve-racking. However, if the time seems right and love is in the air, popping the question can be exciting.

Turn the tides

An old Irish tradition known as "The Lady's Privilege" was established in the fifth century by a nun named St. Brigid. She decided to create an opportunity for women to propose marriage. This day fell on every leap year, February 29. Centuries later, women can still use this tradition as the impetus to take the marriage reins into their own hands. But women need not wait for the next leap year to propose.

Many women view proposing as an em-

powering action that is tied to the evolving view of independent women. Couples are negotiating more in the marriage process, and the dissolution of commonly held practices is occurring more often.

A sentimental location

Couples will remember the proposal for the rest of their lives. So choose a proposal location that has sentimental connections. Think about where the first "I love you" was uttered or where a first date occurred. These can be prime locations to pop the question.

Note her style

Engagement rings play a big role in many couples' proposals. One person's style is not necessarily what his partner will like. Bigger isn't always better. Rather, choose a ring that reflects your partner's preferences and personality. Take your partner jewelry shopping and see which types of jewelry he or she is most drawn to.

Certain preferences can serve as a jumping off point for ring designs.

The family's blessing

Men no longer need to ask their girlfriends' fathers for "permission"

to wed their daughters. However, asking your partner's family for their blessing is a sign of respect and can add a romantic and heartfelt touch to the proposal.

Capture the moment

Though we live in an age when every moment of people's lives is documented with videos and photographs posted to social media, proposals still stand

out as extra special moments. Hire a professional photographer to discreetly capture the proposal and your partner's reaction so it can be cherished for years to come.

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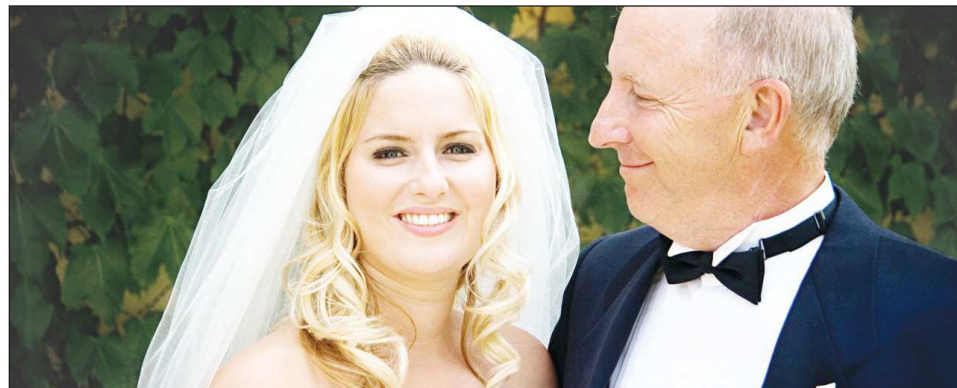
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Roles for bride's father can vary greatly



Expand the father of the bride's role in the wedding by assigning him tasks where he can put his style, experience and excitement to good use.

Popular movies and television shows give the impression that the job of the father of the bride in a wedding is ultimately about making sure the festivities are adequately funded. In the movies, fathers fret about the costs of everything from flowers to photos.

But gone are the days when the father of the bride bankrolls his daughter's entire wedding. The Knot's "2014 Real Wedding Survey" reported that, on average, the bride's parents contribute 43 percent of the total cost of a wedding; the bride and groom contribute another 43 percent; the groom's parents spend 12 percent; the remaining 2 percent of the budget is paid for by family members or friends. That frees up Dad for other roles in wedding planning. With some creativity, couples

can find ways to incorporate the father of the bride into the festivities in even more productive ways.

• **Wedding sites:** Assign dear old dad the important task of looking at potential wedding reception sites prior to visiting them yourself. He may have certain connections through work or attended business or leisure occasions at catering halls and other venues. Dad's connections can pay off. Let him impart his negotiating skills and find the best deals with the ideal backdrop for the festivities.

• **Wardrobe:** Let your father assist the best man and other groomsmen in securing their tuxedos or other wardrobe essentials. Dad also can step in and return rented items following the wedding.

• **Beverages:** Dad may

be fitting to keep tabs on what is occurring at the bar during the reception, ensuring that guests' needs are being met. He also can keep an eagle eye trained on anyone who may have overindulged and needs to take a break.

• **Speech:** Give your father an opportunity to shine by letting him make a speech. Remember, this is a momentous day for Dad as well, as he may be trying to come to terms with his daughter starting a new life.

• **Father-daughter song:** Let Dad pick father-daughter song, and go with his choice even if you had something else in mind.

• **Ceremony:** Even if you prefer a less traditional wedding ceremony, let your father walk you down the aisle. This will likely be a moment he'll remember for years to come.

Nontraditional families can have seamless weddings

Families come in all shapes and sizes. During special events — particularly those steeped in tradition, such as weddings — blended families may have to employ certain tactics to ensure the events go off without a hitch.

When planning their weddings, couples must give consideration to the needs of their families. Even though a wedding is about the union of two people, oftentimes couples engaged to be married must contend with the politics of divorce or other familial issues. This includes if and how to incorporate stepparents and stepsiblings into the ceremony and celebration.

There are no traditional rules regarding how to handle blended families, so brides-and grooms-to-be can customize their decisions based on their own unique situations. Even when families have been happy through the years, the unique circumstances and traditions surrounding the nuptials can dredge up former insecurities, and certain aspects may require extra patience and tact. Here's how to navigate the process.

· Consider stepparents and stepsiblings VIPs. Brides and grooms who are not particularly close to their stepfam-

ilies still have to recognize the role they play in the family dynamics. These people are still family, so respect and courtesy should be offered. If there is any lingering animosity, extend the olive branch on this day and try not to let anyone be made to feel as if they are unimportant. A simple announcement of who stepparents are at the wedding reception or inclusion of their names on wedding itineraries can help smooth over any potential bumps.

· Put others' needs before your own. While the wedding may be about you and your future spouse, you must consider the feelings of others. Biological parents and stepparents may act defensively if they feel uncomfortable or hurt, and that can create an air of negativity to the day. Try to avoid this by considering potential areas of conflict. For example, mothers might be hurt if their ex-husbands' new girlfriends are asked to be in a group family photo. Instead, select separate times to have everyone included. Remember to give parents and stepparents priority seating as well, and they each should be seated next to someone they love and someone with whom they can converse comfortably.

You may think everyone can play nice, but it's best not to push the issue just to make a point at the wedding.

· Recognize that some families break the mold. Recently, a father made waves on the Internet when a video of him pulling the bride's stepfather up to assist in walking her down the aisle went viral. This was a wonderful image of families making it work despite their differences or the awkwardness that can result when brides or grooms have parents and stepparents in attendance. Although this scenario might not play out for all, find ways to impart a special touch, especially if you're close to both your biological parents and your stepparents. For example, your biological father may walk you down the aisle, while your stepfather may enjoy the first dance.

· Order flowers and gifts for all. Purchase flowers and wedding party gifts for all of the special people in your lives, including your stepfamily.

Weddings can be complicated affairs when factoring in blended families. With patience and compassion, such families can enjoy a beautiful and happy day.

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Determining wedding day dress codes

Wedding invitations do more than merely announce that a celebration is on the horizon. Invitations provide key information about the ceremony and festivities to follow. Many details, including the location, time and date of the wedding, are spelled out on the wedding invitations. However, invitations can sometimes leave guests confused about the appropriate style of attire for the occasion.

Even though wedding invitations rarely offer specific information regarding attire, chances are the wording will provide clues that



Black tie weddings require men to wear tuxedos.

can help guests interpret the desired dress code.

Casual

If the invitation mentions casual at-

tire, it's important to realize that everyday casual is different from wedding casual. Jeans, shorts and tank tops are unacceptable unless otherwise noted. Err on the side of caution and go with business casual, which includes chinos, slacks, a polo shirt or button-down shirt for men. Women can wear a sundress or slacks or a skirt and an attractive blouse. If the invitation mentions beach casual, shorts and even sandals

are likely acceptable.

Semiformal

Semiformal dresswear, sometimes referred to as "dressy casual," is a step up from casual clothing. Cocktail dresses or a more elegant skirt and top are the norms. Gentleman generally wear a suit and tie. Coordinate the colors of clothing to the time of day. Fabrics should represent the season. A linen suit will not pass in the winter.

Formal

Formal attire is the default dress code for the majority of weddings. When the invitation does not specify a dress code, it is safe to assume formal attire is expected. Men can choose among a dark suit and tie or a tuxedo. Women can opt for a formal cocktail-length dress, a classic suit or a long dress. Select among tones that are gray, black or brown.

Black tie

Black tie events also

require formal attire. Black tie typically goes hand-in-hand with an evening wedding. Black tie is more rigid for male guests, who should wear a tuxedo, black bow tie, cummerbund, and patent leather shoes. Women have a little more leeway with their attire at such gatherings. A long evening gown might be preferable. However, a chic cocktail dress also can be acceptable, and darker, neutral colors are most appropriate.

White Tie

The most formal of occasions will request white tie attire. Ball gowns and tuxedos with tails are the norm, as are dramatic jewelry and hairstyles. White tie attire is akin to what one might see worn to awards shows.

When attending a wedding, it is always better to be overdressed than underdressed. Consult with fellow guests or the bride and groom if unsure of the dress code.

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Master the wedding save-the-date

Many couples' weddings take more than a year to plan. Couples want all of the special people in their lives to witness their vows, and giving guests advance notice can ensure as many loved ones as possible attend the ceremony.

To be certain that guests have ample notice to clear their schedules, many couples now turn to save-the-date cards, which announce weddings well in advance of the actual wedding day.

Save-the-date cards once were reserved only for weddings that required travel or special circumstances, such as destination weddings. But such cards have now become commonplace for all weddings. That's because many people plan vacations or business trips anywhere from four to six months in advance. Busy people require plenty

of notice to include this important date on their calendars, particularly when wedding dates fall during popular travel seasons or around the holidays.

Kleinfeld Bridal, a premiere New York bridal boutique, says that save-the-date cards are typically mailed six to eight months prior to the wedding, though some are sent as early as a year before the big day. Once a date and a location is secured, save-the-dates can be ordered and mailed.

Save-the-date cards require couples to assemble their guest lists well in advance of the wedding. The leading bridal resource The Knot notes that everyone who will get a wedding invitation should also receive a save-the-date card. There's no turning back once cards are sent, so couples will need to be certain

everyone they want to attend is getting advanced notice.

It's acceptable to mail save-the-date cards even if some wedding day details are still up in the air. Guests really only need to know the date and location of the wedding. Couples also can use the save-the-date card to direct invitees to a wedding website where guests can learn the details of the wedding as they unfold.

RSVP information does not need to be included on the save-the-date card.

Save-the-date cards are much less formal than invitations, so couples can have fun with them. They can showcase couples' clever personalities or funny quirks. Keep in mind it is in poor taste to mention gifts or registries on save-the-date cards. There will be plenty of time to direct guests to registries later on.

Tips for trimming the guest list

Weddings are a time to celebrate, and many couples hope to invite as many people as possible to share their excitement. A 2014 study by researchers at the University of Denver found that couples who invite at least 150 guests to the wedding may have happier marriages. The study examined 418 people who were single at the beginning of the study and married five years later. It found that 47 percent of those people who had gotten married in front of at least 150 guests had "high-quality marriages," while those with 50 or fewer guests fell short.

While guests make weddings more enjoyable, and may increase the propensity to enjoy a more successful marriage, couples must be practical and consider their wedding budgets when creating their guest lists. The average American wedding includes 120 guests, according to a 2015 Newlywed Survey released by WeddingWire. Couples who are finding it difficult to create and pare down their guest lists can employ the following tips.

· Create initial lists. When jotting down potential guests' names, write down everyone you want to invite,

regardless of budget. Then list the must-have guests for the wedding. This should include the family and friends with whom you interact on a regular basis. Create a separate column for guests who don't make the must-have list.

· Separate friends from friends' friends. If you don't see people outside of events set up by mutual friends, you should not feel obligated to invite those people to the wedding. They are more likely friends of your friends and not your close friends.

· Know the guest list

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Engagement ring alternatives abound

Even though diamonds may be a “girl’s best friend,” they may not fit every woman’s style, particularly the bride who likes to buck tradition and think outside the box. According to Money magazine, the average engagement ring costs more than \$5,800. In addition to being one of the most expensive gemstones, diamonds have become quite commonplace. Some women even eschew diamonds for moral reasons.

Whatever the driving force behind shopping

for alternative gems, women who want to set themselves apart from others — and men who want to “wow” their significant others with unique and eye-catching rings — may opt for other dazzling stones.

- **Moissanite:** This crystal naturally occurs in meteorites and is nearly as hard, dense and scuff-resistant as a diamond. Some feel moissanite offers more brilliance and fire than diamonds. Moissanite is a white-colored stone, so it can mimic the look of a diamond. A nearly



flawless one-carat moissanite gem can cost less than \$1,000.

- **Lemon quartz:** This is the trade name for a lemon-yellow stone that is a variety of

color-enhanced transparent quartz. Quartz is turned into this sunny hue through an artificial gamma ray irradiation process. Like other quartz gemstones, lem-

on quartz is considered to be very durable and is therefore suitable for all types of jewelry.

- **Sapphire:** Sapphires tend to be blue stones (of varying intensity), but they also come in peach, pink, yellow, green, and white. Sapphire may not sparkle as much as a diamond or even moissanite. However, with the right cut, it can be hard to distinguish any lack of luster.

- **Morganite:** According to the blog Bridal Musings, morganite is currently one of the

most popular choices for engagement rings. Its pretty pink hue is romantic and feminine. It also sits at around the same hardness as sapphires, ensuring the rings will endure.

Vividly cut rubies, emeralds and tanzanite — all gems that are rarer yet less expensive than diamonds — can make beautiful engagement rings. Some couples also may opt for rings without gemstones, such as traditional Claddagh or “true lover’s knot” rings to signify their union.

TRIMMING: Tips to cut down wedding guest list

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ceiling. Catering halls or reception rooms often can only accommodate a certain number of people. Know this number before making a final list. The limits of the space may serve as the catalyst for trimming the guest list.

- Consider coworkers carefully. Think about whether you’d still be friends with your coworkers if the company dissolved tomorrow. If not, you should not feel obligated to invite them.

- Have we met? If

you don’t remember interacting with a person (your parent’s long lost friend from high school) or the person has never met your significant other, then they probably can be cut. If parents insist on inviting someone you barely remember, they should help defray the costs.

- **Cut out the kids.** Even though children’s dinner costs may be lower than adults’, inviting children can significantly increase the guest list. A no-child policy at the reception can save money.

- **Avoid uncomfortable situations.** Unless you have remained particularly close, keep former boyfriends and girlfriends off of the guest list.

- **Ask for an unbiased opinion.** Give the editing pen to someone else if you cannot make a decision. This person may help weed out extraneous guests.

Paring down a wedding guest list can be a difficult process, but couples should work together and respect each other’s concerns when creating their final list.



The reception space may dictate the number of guests couples can invite to their weddings.

7 ways to recycle a wedding gown

When planning their weddings, many brides-to-be devote a large portion of their wedding budgets to their wardrobes. Statistics released by The Knot in 2014 indicated the amount the average woman was willing to spend her gown was \$1,281.

Wedding gowns are among the most costly wedding expenditures. Because wedding gowns can be so expensive, many brides elect to have their gowns cleaned and preserved. Reusing a wedding gown is a cost-effective and earth-friendly idea. Women have many options when it comes to putting their wedding gowns to use after they have tied the knot. The following are just some of the ideas couples can explore.

1. Save it for younger generations. One of the primary reasons to preserve a wedding gown is to save the dress for a daughter, granddaughter or another relative to wear at her own

wedding.

2. Transform it into other attire. There are a number of different occasions when wearing white is acceptable. Religious ceremonies such as baptisms and communions qualify, and a wedding gown in the hands of an experienced seamstress or tailor can be transformed into a baby's Christening ensemble or a beautiful dress for a youngster about to receive First Holy Communion.

3. Donate the gown. Brides in need may not have the funds to purchase their own beautiful gowns. Work with an organization that will provide dresses to the less fortunate. Or donate it to an organization that can sell the gown to fund projects for others in need. Another option is the Mary Madeline Project, which uses wedding dress fabrics to create burial outfits for stillborn infants.

4. Cut it up into usable fabric. Wedding gown fabrics can be

used in various applications. Dresses can be transformed into decorative pillows or other wedding mementos. Stretch the fabric across a frame and use it as a blank canvas for a photo keepsake. The fabric also can work for baby cribs and infant basket skirting.

5. Use it as a Halloween costume. Dress as a bride for Halloween. Otherwise, tailor the dress to fit a child and she can use it for any number of dress-up opportunities.

6. Donate it to a costume archive. Theatrical companies may be able to use the fabric to create costumes for their productions.

7. Create a keepsake. Cut a small piece of the fabric and put it into a pendant or locket. A piece of tulle or lace also can be placed inside a clear Christmas ornament and hung on the tree.

Wedding gowns can be upcycled into many new and innovative items.



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Selecting a comfortable wedding gown

Many brides-to-be visit bridal shops with specific goals in mind regarding the style of their wedding gowns. Some women come equipped with magazine tear-outs or pull up ideas on their mobile phones. Others may have an entire scrapbook filled with various ideas they've been compiling for years.

Much consideration is given to wedding gowns. The cost and silhouette of the dress may garner the bulk of that consideration, but brides might want to spend more time considering comfort.

Depending on the time of day their weddings take place, brides can spend 12 hours or more in their wedding gowns on their wedding day. However, when shopping for their gowns, brides may prioritize beauty over comfort, even though it's entirely possible to find a gown that's both stunning and comfortable.

When staff and friends or family who have come along to offer advice start to blush over wedding gowns, brides-to-be may feel pressured to downplay any discomfort they feel.

To make sure brides look flawless and elegant but are still comfortable in their wedding gowns, consider the following tips.



Wedding gowns can be both beautiful and comfortable for those who know how to shop.

- Know what to highlight and what to cover up. No two body types are the same, and many women feel certain parts of their bodies are their best assets while they want to downplay others. Try on gowns that play up your best features. If you have shapely legs, consider a dramatic gown with a slit to show them off. Certain gowns can enhance the décolleté or show off

an hourglass shape. Remember, many gowns can be modified so that you feel secure and confident. Sleeves can be added or fabric placed to cover up any perceived flaws. Confidence and pride are important parts of the comfort factor.

- Get sized correctly. Bridal gown sizes do not coincide with street sizes. Depending on the manufacturer, brides may have to

select gowns that are several sizes larger than they would normally wear. This should not be a cause for alarm. Brides should go by their measurements. Attempting to squeeze into a dress that is too small will only lead to discomfort on the wedding day.

- Purchase the right undergarments. Improperly fitting bras, shapewear and other undergarments can lead

to discomfort as well. Some seamstresses can sew in supportive cups to remove the need for separate bras. Brides can explore various options to reduce their visibility.

- Move around in the gown. Brides should not just stand in front of the mirror and smile when trying on gowns. Put them through their paces. Try sitting, bending and even a little dancing. Make sure the

dress is comfortable to move around in.

- Try different options. The gown brides have in mind may not be the one they ultimately go home with. Explore different styles and materials. Choose cooler, breezier fabrics and lightweight gowns, like crêpe, georgette or organza, for summer weddings. Heavier fabrics, such as brocade, may be more comfortable in the winter.