

# Bridal Guide



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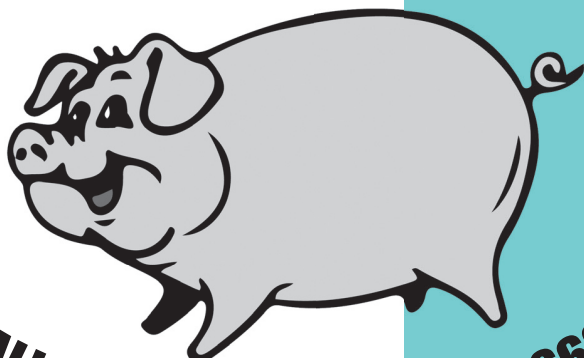


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## BRIDAL GUIDE

### The responsibilities of bridal party members

A couple's wedding day is one they will never forget. Guests' focus is squarely on the happy couple on the day they're set to make their union official. However, happy couples are not the only ones with important roles to play during a wedding.

Being asked to be in a bridal party is a unique honor. With that honor comes responsibility, as each person in a bridal party can do their own part to ensure a couple's wedding day is a success.

A maid of honor and matron of honor perform the same functions. The terms are simply unique because a maid of honor refers to a person who has not yet gotten married, while the term matron of honor is used for a person who has gotten married. Brides also may choose a man to serve as man of honor. Whatever title is appropriate, the person who serves in this capacity will help the bride plan the wedding, including being there to offer insight when shopping for a wedding dress. This person also may coordinate the bachelorette party and periodically speak with bridesmaids to ensure everyone is on schedule. The maid of honor will typically give a bridal toast during the reception.

Don't let the title fool you, as many couples



now choose to have a best woman. Like the maid of honor, the best man may be asked to help with wedding planning and is typically tasked with organizing the bachelor party and toasting the groom during the reception. The best man also can help to ensure groomsmen are on schedule with tuxedo fittings.

Bridesmaids stand beside the bride during the wedding ceremony. They can help with planning and help to resolve any last-minute issues that may arise on the big day, such as a vendor arriving late.

Groomsmen stand next to the groom during the ceremony and may be asked to help the best man plan the bachelor party. Both bridesmaids and groomsmen also may be asked to help host events leading up to the big day, such as a shower or engagement party.

The roles of ring bearer and flower girl are

typically filled by young relatives of the couple, such as nieces, nephews or young cousins. The flower girl walks down the aisle in advance of the bride, spreading pedals as she goes. The ring bearer carries the wedding rings down the aisle.

If they choose to do so, parents of the happy couple can help to pay for the wedding. The custom of the bride's parents paying the entire bill has largely fallen by the wayside, as many modern couples now pay for their own weddings. Parents can offer to pay for the engagement party and/or rehearsal dinner, but such generosity is not expected of them.

Serving in a wedding party is a unique and humbling honor. The roles of each person in the party vary, and party members who want to do their best for the couple can study up on their responsibilities in advance of the big day.



# BRIDAL GUIDE

## Simple tips to plan a fun and relaxing cocktail hour

**W**ITH so much on their dockets in relation to wedding planning, engaged couples can be forgiven if certain components garner less attention than others. The ceremony and reception are bound to stay on couples' radar, but what about the time in between saying "I do" and cutting a rug on the reception room dance floor?

Cocktail hours are a great way to keep guests entertained between the ceremony and the reception. Many couples use this period to take their bridal party wedding photos, so offering guests a little food and some drinks during a

cocktail hour can benefit everyone. Planning a cocktail hour is not a significant undertaking, but couples can keep a few pointers in mind as they plan this interim period between the ceremony and reception.

- Opt for an outdoor cocktail hour when possible. Couples tying the knot in spring, summer or fall at a venue with ample outdoor entertaining space can choose to host the cocktail hour outside. This reduces the likelihood that guests will feel cramped and it also sets a positive tone for the remainder of the evening. A balcony, patio or rooftop entertaining area can be great spaces

for guests to mingle prior to the reception.

- Offer seating. Cocktail hours tend to be stand-up affairs where guests mingle with long-lost friends or relatives while enjoying some light hors d'oeuvres. However, older guests or guests with small children will appreciate some seating. Couples need not ensure there's a seat for each guest, but some strategically located high-tops and more traditional tables for guests with mobility issues can ensure anyone who needs to sit down can do so.

- Give guests something to do. If the cocktail hour will be a full hour or more,

couples can consider ways to help guests pass the time. Some may be content to relax and chat with friends and family over a drink, but others may grow a little bored as the hour drags on. A photobooth or selfie station so couples can have a ready-made wedding album before the reception begins can be fun for guests. For less formal affairs, consider providing some popular outdoor games, like cornhole and bocce.

- Set a tone with music. Music can help set the tone for a cocktail hour, which is not meant to get the ball rolling on the dancing-heavy revelry to come during the reception. Some



simple instrumental music, whether it's provided by a live string quartet or pre-recorded, can establish the cocktail hour as a peaceful period to relax, chat, eat a little, and enjoy a drink before the reception begins. Reserve the dance music

for when the reception hits full swing.

It's easy to overlook the cocktail hour when planning a wedding. However, some simple tips can ensure guests enjoy the time between the ceremony and reception.

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# BRIDAL GUIDE

## Seven reasons to hire a wedding planner

**T**HE average cost of a wedding in 2022 in the United States came out to roughly \$30,000, according to a survey of 12,000 couples compiled by wedding planning site The Knot. The survey also found New Jersey and

Massachusetts topped the list of most costly states to tie the knot. When committing to as significant a financial investment as a wedding, couples may want to do all they can to ensure their big day is a hit. There are many advantages to hiring a professional

wedding planner, who can take the stress out of a process that should be fun.

1. Serves as a sounding board: Wedding planners can take couples' ideas and turn them into reality. Seasoned planners know how to help a couple's vision come alive.

2. Lightens the responsibility load: A wedding planner takes time-consuming responsibilities off couples' plates. These can include scheduling appointments, dealing with vendors, conducting walk-throughs of locations, and more. This can be a big asset to couples who work full-time.

3. Offers a wealth of knowledge: A good wedding planner has years of experience handling weddings and will know which aspects will work and which may not. Also, a wedding planner can likely handle tasks expeditiously, while couples with no experience planning a

wedding may not work so quickly.

4. Helps couples save money: Knowledge and experience also comes with contacts in the industry that can help couples save money. The planner likely knows where to get the best deals, and may be privy to insider pricing and other discounts.

5. Serves as a buffer: While everyone wants weddings to be incident-free, conflicts can and do arise. A wedding planner can serve as a mediator or run interference between challenging family members or even vendors.

6. Reduces overall stress

levels: There's a measurable difference between the stress experienced by couples who don't hire wedding planners and those who do. The main goal of a wedding is for it to be memorable and for couples and their guests to enjoy themselves. By leaving the planning to someone else, couples can arrive at the big day feeling more relaxed and ready to have fun.

7. There is an extra person around: Wedding planners can field questions or handle tipping and other tasks on the wedding day, freeing up time for couples to have fun.



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# BRIDAL GUIDE



## What to know when picking a wedding reception menu

**L**OTS of details require a decision when planning a wedding. Engaged couples may or may not enjoy tending to much of the minutiae involved in wedding planning, but the reception menu is typically one popular point of interest.

When picking a wedding reception menu, couples typically get to sit down with their venue operator or caterer and take a taste test so they can decide what to include and exclude come the big night. That typically results in some happy hearts and full bellies. But there's more to picking a reception menu than taste, and the following are some pointers couples can consider as they aim to provide a tasty meal for their wedding guests.

- Resist the urge to make the menu reflect your personal preference. Couples, particularly those footing the bill for their own weddings, may be tempted to pick exclusively foods they like for the reception. Though it's important that couples get to enjoy their

first meal together after tying the knot, it's good to ensure that guests get to have an enjoyable meal as well. Resist any urge to let personal preferences dictate the menu, particularly if you have a restrictive diet. For example, vegans need not insist everyone eat a vegan meal at the reception nor should meat lovers insist that every plate end up with some red meat on it. Diversify the menu so people with various preferences can fill up and enjoy their dinner.

- Inquire about food allergies. When inviting guests, ask them to cite any food allergies they may have when they RSVP. Many banquet halls and caterers are now accustomed to accommodating diners with food allergies, but the earlier that information is communicated, the more time couples have to pick delicious foods that won't compromise the health of guests who must avoid certain dishes or ingredients.

- Align food with degree of formality. It's important that couples consider the ambiance of the wedding when picking a reception

menu. A pig roast might be ideal for a backyard wedding, but something more formal is called for when dining in a lavishly decorated banquet hall. Couples can keep this in mind when choosing the menu. It's also notable that caterers tend to have a creative side, so they might be able to present certain foods in ways that match the vibe of the wedding even if those dishes would not ordinarily align with the ambiance of the reception.

- Leave the experimentation to the cocktail hour. If couples have certain exotic foods in mind, they can still serve those items but do so during the cocktail hour. Guests can simply turn down the chance to try exotic foods during the cocktail hour without going hungry. But a sit-down dinner should ensure every guest has something to fill their belly.

Picking a reception menu is a fun and filling component of wedding planning. Keeping some simple pointers in mind can help couples pick a menu everyone can enjoy.



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# BRIDAL GUIDE

## Options abound when shopping for wedding reception venues

A wedding ceremony is a joyous occasion couples will remember forever. As couples walk down the aisle after making their union official, the focus then shifts to the reception, where a fun-filled night of food, laughter and dancing awaits.

Nothing can trump the ceremony in terms of meaningful moments, but wedding receptions tend to last far longer. That's why couples devote so much effort to finding the right reception venue. As couples get to work on planning their post-ceremony party, they can consider a wide range of reception venue

options.

Banquet halls are perhaps the most traditional option for hosting wedding receptions. They're also among the most popular, as the The Knot 2022 Real Weddings Study found that one in five couples had their wedding receptions at banquet halls. There's no end to the options available to couples who want to host their receptions at banquet halls, which run the gamut from more intimate venues to larger sites that can host hundreds of guests. Some banquet halls offer various rooms and even different styles of rooms, from traditional to modern, all at one site. Because banquet halls

are designed to host special occasions like weddings, couples may find they are an especially planner-friendly option.

Beach reception venues are not limited to coastal communities. Though oceanfront venues are an option for couples who live on a coast or those opting for destination weddings, even landlocked locales have beach venues along rivers and lakes. When considering a beach venue, couples should inquire about contingency locations should Mother Nature not cooperate come the big day.

Keeping with a water theme, couples may want

to look into celebrating on a boat or yacht. This option can make for an especially memorable and unique experience, but it's important to keep guests in mind before booking a boat or yacht for your reception. Some guests, such as aging relatives or loved ones with young children (at home or at the reception), may want to attend the reception but not stay for its duration, which is not an option on a boat or yacht. Others may be hesitant due to seasickness or another preexisting medical condition. If no such issues are likely to present, couples may find it hard to beat the ambiance of a reception aboard a boat



or yacht.

The Knot reports a surge in the popularity of campground receptions in recent years. A campground reception can be ideal for couples who love the great outdoors and prefer a less formal and more

fun-focused reception.

This option may require a little extra coordinating on couples' part, as they will likely need to supply all of the food and beverages and may even need to arrange for guests to safely access the venue.

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# BRIDAL GUIDE

## Questions to ask when vetting wedding vendors

**T**HE process of planning a wedding involves the coordination of many different components, including people. It can be stressful and it can be exciting. Chances are the couple-to-be will be handling conversations with vendors they may have never worked with before.

It may be tempting to simply sign on the dotted line when hiring wedding vendors and hope for the best. But the process can prove more fruitful when couples prepare for it by compiling a list of questions designed to ensure they know what they're getting before they enter into a contract.

The most important question to ask is whether

the vendor is available on the day you have chosen to get married. The house of worship or place where you will be exchanging vows should be set first, and then additional vendors can be interviewed to confirm their availability and the scope of their services.

How long a company has been in business, and more importantly how much experience they have with weddings, can be a telling detail. Experience is not always indicative of ability, but vendors with long track records of success may prove easy to work with.

Check if the vendor is insured. It can be a risky proposition to work with vendors who are not in-

sured.

From florists to private caterers to specialty performers, it is acceptable to ask vendors if they will be there the day of the wedding to manage things or if it will be a third party or another representative. Confirm all pertinent details, including who will be there on the day of the wedding, in advance.

Understand how the vendor expects to be paid. Many businesses require a deposit up front to book the date. Some may want payment in full a week or so before the wedding day. Others may enable you to make monthly payments for a set period of time. Ask how the vendor handles cancellations, and whether any

deposit or portion of the money already paid will be refunded.

Know how long you have to make any changes to your plans, colors, music choices, or other details.

It's important to determine if gratuity, travel, overtime charges, clean-

ing fees, or any other charges are included in the contract or if it leaves room for additional expenses.

Figure out if the vendor handles just one wedding per day or if they have staff to cover multiple weddings on a given date.

Certain dates are busier

than others. Find out if the vendor charges a premium for holidays or particular times of the year.

Couples are urged to exercise due diligence and ensure contracts with vendors specify all details before signing on the dotted line. contract with a wedding vendor.

A photograph of a bride and groom standing together outdoors. The groom is wearing a dark suit and the bride is wearing a white wedding dress. They are smiling and looking at each other. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and flowers.

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# BRIDAL GUIDE

## Dig into these wedding cake options

**S**OMETHING sweet comes near the end of a wedding reception and that is the joy the couple experiences knowing they have their entire lives ahead of them to enjoy together. However, there is another sweet treat that is shared

near the conclusion of the wedding and it is typically served with tea and coffee: the wedding cake.

Wedding cake traditions can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Cakes represented good luck and fertility for the couples tying the knot. The

first wedding cakes were rather bland and bread-like, representing purity and virginity. Some were quite like the fruitcake now enjoyed during the holiday season. Eventually wedding cakes transformed into the sweet confections that are known today. The

modern wedding cake as most know it debuted at the 1882 wedding of Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany. His wedding cake was actually the first to be completely edible. Previously, some cakes featured wooden broomstick pillars covered in icing, but the Duke's cake used a hardened type of icing, according to Edible Art Bakery and Dessert Café.

Couples today have many options when picking their wedding cakes. The following are some wedding cake tidbits to chew on.

- Couples can choose among various cake styles. Many opt for a classic style, which is typically a white or ivory tiered cake with simple, elegant decorations. Rustic cakes may be much less ornate, while modern cakes may be rectangular or square and feature clean lines and minimalist decora-

tion. The cake should fit the overall theme and scope of the wedding as it is another complementary component of the larger celebration.

- Wedding cakes can be quite costly. Wedding Wire estimates the average wedding cake costs around \$500. One way for couples to save on their cake is to have a faux cake on display, with one tier that is made from cake and can be cut. Guests will then be served slices of a sheet cake that is much less expensive.

- Couples have many flavors to choose from. Vanilla is classic and quite popular because it appeals to a vast number of people. Lemon, chocolate, and carrot are some other popular cake flavors.

- When it comes to frosting a cake, there are various outer coatings that will encapsulate the cake to make it both beautiful and durable. Buttercream,

Swiss meringue, fondant, cream cheese, and ganache all can be used in various applications. Some bakers attest that Swiss meringue, due to the addition of egg whites, makes it a more stable option over traditional buttercreams, particularly during warm weather. Of course, couples can opt for a "naked cake," which usually has a scant amount of frosting so that the cake underneath peeks through.

- A groom's cake used to be tradition, but largely fell out of favor, although it is still alive and well in the American South. The groom's cake typically is less ornate than the wedding cake, and favors the groom's choices in style, interests and flavors.

Couples and their guests look forward to indulging in wedding cake near the end of the reception. The looks and flavors of a wedding cake can be as unique as the couple saying, "I do."

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