

Wedding Checklist

Sixteen to Nine Months Before

- ___ Start a wedding folder or binder. Begin leafing through bridal, lifestyle, fashion, gardening, design, and food magazines for inspiration.
- ___ Work out your budget. Determine how much you have to spend, based on your families' contributions and your own.
- ___ Pick your wedding party. As soon as you're engaged, people will start wondering who's in.
- ___ Start the guest list. Make a head count database to use throughout your planning process, with columns for contact info, RSVPs, gifts, and any other relevant information. (Want to keep costs low? It may be brutal, but the best way to do it is to reduce your guest list.)
- ___ Hire a planner, if desired. A planner will have relationships with—and insights about—vendors.
- ___ Reserve your date and venues. Decide whether to have separate locations for the ceremony and the reception, factoring in travel time between the two places.
- ___ Book your officiant.
- ___ Research photographers, bands, florists, and caterers. Keep their contact information in your binder.
- ___ Throw an engagement party, if you wish. But remember that your invitees should be on your wedding guest list as well.

Eight Months Before

- ___ Hire the photographer and the videographer. No need to talk specifics yet, but be sure that the people you hire are open to doing the shots that you want.
- ___ Book the entertainment. Attend gigs of potential acts to see how they perform in front of audiences, then reserve your favorite.
- ___ Meet caterers. If your wedding venue doesn't offer its own catering service, look for one now and hire the service this month or early next.

- ___ Purchase a dress. You'll need to schedule time for at least three fittings. Veil shopping can be postponed for another two to three months.
- ___ Reserve a block of hotel rooms for out-of-town guests. Pick three hotels at different price points close to the reception venue.
- ___ Register. Sign up at a minimum of three retailers.
- ___ Launch a wedding website. Create your personal page through a free provider such as weddingchannel.com. Note the date of the wedding, travel information, and accommodations. Then send the link to invitees.

Seven to Six Months Before

- ___ Select and purchase invitations. Hire a calligrapher, if desired. Addressing cards is time-consuming, so you need to budget accordingly.
- ___ Start planning a honeymoon. Make sure that your passports are up-to-date, and schedule doctors' appointments for any shots you may need.
- ___ Shop for bridesmaids' dresses. Allow at least six months for the dresses to be ordered and sized.
- ___ Meet with the officiant. Map out the ceremony and confirm that you have all the official documents for the wedding (these vary by county and religion).
- ___ Send save-the-date cards.
- ___ Reserve structural and electrical necessities. Book portable toilets for outdoor events, extra chairs if you need them, lighting components, and so on.
- ___ Book a florist. Florists can serve multiple clients on one day, which is why you can wait a little longer to engage one. Plus, at this point, you'll be firm on what your wedding palette will be.
- ___ Arrange transportation. Consider limos, minibuses, trolleys, and town cars. (But know that low-to-the-ground limos can make entries and exits dicey if you're wearing a fitted gown.)
- ___ Start composing a day-of timeline. Draw up a schedule of the event and slot in each component (the cake-cutting, the first dance).

Five to Four Months Before

- ___ Book the rehearsal and rehearsal-dinner venues. Negotiate the cost and the menu. If you're planning to host a day-after brunch for guests, book that place as well.
- ___ Check on the wedding invitations. Ask the stationer for samples of the finished invitations and revise them to suit your needs.
- ___ Select and order the cake. Some bakers require a long lead time. Attend several tastings before committing to any baker.
- ___ Send your guest list to the host of your shower. Provided you, ahem, know about the shower.
- ___ Purchase wedding shoes and start dress fittings. Bring the shoes along to your first fitting so the tailor can choose the appropriate length for your gown.
- ___ Schedule hair and makeup artists. Make a few appointments with local experts to try them out. Snap a photo at each so you can compare results.
- ___ Choose your music. What should be playing when the wedding party is announced? During dinner? To kick off the dancing? Keep a running list of what you want—and do not want—played.

Three Months Before

- ___ Finalize the menu and flowers. You'll want to wait until now to see what will be available, since food and flowers are affected by season.
- ___ Order favors, if desired. Some safe bets: monogrammed cookies or a treat that represents your city or region. If you're planning to have welcome baskets for out-of-town guests, plan those now too.
- ___ Make a list of the people giving toasts. Which loved ones would you like to have speak at the reception? Ask them now.
- ___ Finalize the readings. Determine what you would like to have read at the ceremony—and whom you wish to do the readings.
- ___ Purchase your undergarments. And schedule your second fitting.
- ___ Finalize the order of the ceremony and the reception.

___ Print menu cards, if you like, as well as programs. No need to go to a printer, if that's not in your budget: You can easily create these on your computer.

___ Purchase the rings. This will give you time for resizing and engraving.

___ Send your event schedule to the vendors. Giving them a first draft now allows ample time for tweaks and feedback.

Two Months Before

___ Touch base again with all the vendors. Make sure any questions you or they had on your first draft have been answered.

___ Meet with the photographer. Discuss specific shots, and walk through the locations to note spots that appeal to you.

___ Review the playlist with the band or deejay. Though you probably won't be able to dictate every single song played, you should come prepared with a wish list.

___ Send out the invitations. The rule of thumb: Mail invitations six to eight weeks before the ceremony, setting the RSVP cutoff at three weeks after the postmark date.

___ Submit a newspaper wedding announcement. If you're planning to include a photograph, check the publication's website: Some have strict rules about how the photo should look.

___ Enjoy a bachelorette party. Arranging a night out with your girlfriends generally falls to the maid of honor. But if she hasn't mentioned one to you by now, feel free to ask—for scheduling purposes, of course!—if a celebration is in the works.

One Month Before

___ Enter RSVPs into your guest-list database. Phone people who have not yet responded.

___ Get your marriage license. The process can take up to six days, but it's good to give yourself some leeway. If you are changing your name, order several copies.

___ Mail the rehearsal-dinner invitations.

___ Visit the dressmaker for (with luck!) your last dress fitting. For peace of mind, you may want to schedule a fitting the week of your wedding. You can always cancel the appointment if you try on the dress then and it fits perfectly.

- ___ Stock the bar. Now that you have a firm head count you can order accordingly.
- ___ Send out as many final payments as you can.
- ___ Confirm times for hair and makeup and all vendors.
- ___ E-mail and print directions for drivers of transport vehicles. This gives the chauffeurs ample time to navigate a route.
- ___ Assign seating. Draw out table shapes on a layout of the room to help plan place settings. Write the names of female guests on pink sticky notes and the names of male guests on blue sticky notes so you can move people about without resketching the entire setting.
- ___ Purchase bridesmaids' gifts. You'll present them at the rehearsal dinner.
- ___ Write vows, if necessary.
- ___ Get your hair cut and colored, if desired.

Week of the Wedding

- ___ Reconfirm arrival times with vendors.
- ___ Delegate small wedding-day tasks. Choose someone to bustle your dress, someone to carry your things, someone to be in charge of gifts (especially the enveloped sort), someone to hand out tips, and someone to be the point person for each vendor.
- ___ Send a timeline to the bridal party. Include every member's contact information, along with the point people you've asked to deal with the vendors, if problems arise.
- ___ Pick up your dress. Or make arrangements for a delivery.
- ___ Check in one last time with the photographer. Supply him or her with a list of moments you want captured on film.
- ___ Set aside checks for the vendors. And put tips in envelopes to be handed out at the event.
- ___ Book a spa treatment. Make an appointment for a manicure and a pedicure the day before the wedding. (You might want to get a stress-relieving massage, too.)
- ___ Send the final guest list to the caterer and all venues hosting your wedding-related events. Typically, companies close their lists 72 hours in advance.



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____ Break in your shoes.

____ Assemble and distribute the welcome baskets.

____ Pack for your honeymoon.

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