



Our Guide to Planning the Perfect Wedding

9 To 12 Months Before Your Wedding

- Set your budget. This is, without a doubt, the hardest part because it probably will be the first time you and your intended will talk seriously about finances. The budget and style of your wedding, reception and wedding-related events and who pays for what can make contentious topics of discussion. Consider hiring a bridal consultant or event planner to guide you through the many pitfalls. If your budget can't handle the expense of a professional, ask relatives and close friends to assist you in those tasks where you feel you need help. Selecting a dress, interviewing caterers, etc. are areas that many bride and grooms could use help with.
- Pick your wedding date. This is often the second hardest part because you must co-ordinate your schedule with available dates for churches, reception halls and the officiating person.
- Compile your guest list. Let out-of-town guests know your wedding is in the works so they can make travel plans.
- Reserve your reception hall. (See the floor space guide for estimating the size of the room or tent needed.) Remember, even though June is the traditional month for weddings, July, August, September and October have become popular months so reserving your site early is very important.
- Select your wedding attendants. Both the bride and groom need to select their bridesmaids and groomsmen. Now is the time to choose your master and mistress of ceremonies. They need to be in on the organization and planning so they are intimately familiar with the details.
- Decide on the theme or mood you'd like to establish. This will affect your choice of food, table settings, flowers and entertainment at your reception. Keep a notebook with pictures and sketches of your likes.
- Interview caterers, musicians/DJ's, florists, film/video professionals and cake makers. Get written estimates of their costs. Keep track of your discussions and their bids in your notebook or with wedding planning software.

5 to 7 Months Before Your Wedding

Review your budget and stay within it. Now is the time to maintain your iron will! Get written contracts from all of your service providers. DO NOT accept handshakes or verbal agreements. Read all contracts carefully before signing. Keep all contracts in your notebook.

- Choose your musician(s) for the ceremony and the DJ or band for the reception.
- Book your photographer/videographer.
- Decide on your color scheme.
- Select your wedding gown, shoes and accessories.
- Decide on bridesmaids' dresses.
- Choose your caterer.
- Select your baker and order the cakes.

- Select your floral designer.
- Decide on your honeymoon. Work with a travel agent to book your travel destination and accommodations. If you're traveling overseas, apply for passports and any necessary travel visas.
- Visit the printer and select your wedding invitations. Don't forget to purchase personal stationery for the many thank-you notes you'll need to write.
- Shop for wedding rings with your fiancé.

4 Months Before Your Wedding

- Register at one or more bridal-gift registries. Consider one that is a national chain for the convenience of your out-of-town guests.
- Reserve all rental items needed for the ceremony and the reception. This includes limousine service.
- Help both mothers to coordinate and shop for their wedding-day attire.
- Choose the music selection(s) for your ceremony and the play list for the reception.
- Plan the wedding ceremony including any special readings and prayers. If you are writing your own vows now is the time to do so.
- Plan the rehearsal dinner. Include family and out-of-town guests as well as the wedding party. Reserve the location.
- Arrange hotel accommodations for members of the wedding party who live out of town. Reserve a block of rooms for other out-of-town guests, and let them know the rooms are available. Many hotels offer discount or special packages for weddings. Be sure to ask as they may not offer.
- Make appointments for gown fittings.
- Check the requirements for a marriage license
- Make sure contracts and arrangements are complete with all of your service providers.
- Keep your master and mistress of ceremony "in the loop."

3 Months Before Your Wedding

- Carefully prepare directions, including maps, to help guide guests to the wedding and reception. For guests who will travel a long distance to your wedding and are planning an overnight stay, assemble an information package on fun things to do and see in your area.
- Invitations should go in the mail six to eight weeks before your big day. Addressing invitations and announcements is a big job so start now. Select a special stamp at the post office.
- Give the caterer or other food service specialists an idea of the number of guests you expect.
- Make sure all reservations are in place for the honeymoon.
- Check with bridesmaids to make sure they have their gowns and are getting them adjusted. Make sure all groomsmen have been fitted for their tuxedos.
- It is traditional to give gifts to each member of the wedding party. Shop for gifts for the bridesmaids and groomsmen.
- Select your "going away" outfit and other special items for your honeymoon.
- Make a date with your photographer for any formal portraits you desire.
- Write out your wedding announcement and have it checked for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Make an appointment to have the bride's hair done just before your portrait session

2 Months Before Your Wedding

- Put your wedding invitations and announcements in the mail.

- Have wedding portraits taken.
- Send bridal portrait and announcement to newspapers for publication.
- Review and finalize the music selections that will be played during your wedding
- Meet with musicians or DJ who will provide entertainment during your reception and tell them precisely what you want and when you want it played. Don't be shy to voice your preferences, down to the volume, favorite songs you'd like to hear, or songs you don't want played.
- Review the plans for your rehearsal dinner.
- Purchase special accessories for your wedding-day attire.
- Make appointments for a hairdresser, makeup artist and manicurist. If the budget permits, consider including the bridesmaids in a "day of beauty" before the wedding, with manicures, hair styling, massages and makeup sessions. The groom should also make hair appointments at this time.
- Finalize honeymoon plans.
- Gather necessary birth or baptismal certificates you may need in order to apply for your wedding license.

1 Month Before Your Wedding

- Apply for your wedding license.
- Brides have a final fitting of your gown and make sure the attendants have theirs. Double-check the tuxedo reservations for the groomsmen.
- Check with your caterer and make sure your menu selections and service plans are finalized. If you plan a formal dinner for your reception, it's time to draw up a seating plan and make up place cards.
- Purchase a notebook to keep track of wedding gifts as they arrive.
- By now you both have many people to thank. Start writing those thank you notes on a daily basis!.
- Check with your florist to confirm dates and times of flower deliveries. Place someone in charge of corsages and boutonnieres. On the day of the wedding they need to make sure everyone gets the correct flowers.
- Review your wedding-day transportation plans and make sure drivers are clear about addresses, times and number of passengers.
- Make name or address changes official on documents, including driver's license, Social Security forms and financial accounts. Fill out change-of-address forms at the post office.
- Meet with your photographer to talk over the pictures you want taken of the bridal party, as well as any candid shots you'd like taken during the reception.
- Review the video plans with your videographer.

2 Weeks Before Your Wedding

- Keep writing those thank-you notes for wedding gifts!
- Pick up your wedding rings. Make sure any special engraving appears precisely as you wish.
- Begin packing for your honeymoon.

1 Week Before Your Wedding

- Make final checks with all your vendors: officiate, musicians/DJs, florist, photographer, videographer, transportation provider, caterers and baker.
- Ask a friend or family member to arrange for wedding gifts that may be brought to your reception to be delivered to your home or another safe spot.

- Wrap gifts for wedding attendants and have them ready for the rehearsal dinner.
- Purchase travelers' checks and reconfirm honeymoon travel and hotel plans.
- Now is the time for checks are written to all vendors. Place in envelopes and give to the master or mistress of ceremony to hand out at the agreed on time.
- Inform your caterer of the final number of guests. Confirm that out-of-town guests are set with hotel accommodations, transportation and wedding-day directions.

The Day Before Your Wedding

- Take time to relax. Do something just for yourself.
- This is the day for your rehearsal ceremony and rehearsal dinner. Have fun!
- Turn in early for a good night's sleep.

Your Wedding Day

- Allow plenty time for dressing, makeup and hair styling.
- If you plan on photography before the ceremony, allow ample time so you're not rushed.
- This is your special day. Now it's time to enjoy the result of all your careful planning.

West Michigan Event Outfitters hopes your wedding day will be everything you want it to be. We hope that you share a happy and rewarding life together. A good marriage is based on mutual respect and love. Communication is the key that unlocks its full potential. It's not always easy but it is always worth it.

Sincerely,

Jim and Sherri