

20 Secrets for the Perfect Wedding

From timing to budgeting to breaking in your shoes, here are some tips the experts really want you to know. by Jennifer Lazarus



1 What's the Rush? Sure, you're excited when you get engaged, but don't act impulsively, says Cathy Johnson of Cathy Johnson Weddings, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. "So many brides rush out and start putting down deposits without thinking through the logistics of what goes into planning a memorable day," she says. "I advise the bride and groom to let it all sink in and wait for a few weeks after they get engaged. Then start."

2 Get the Big Picture. "You need to envision the kind of wedding you want—outdoors, cocktail reception, beach—and then work inward from there," says Kathi R. Evans, event coordinator for All the Best Weddings and Celebrations, based in Tom's River, New Jersey. When you know it's a beach wedding, for example, you can choose your colors, and the rest of the details—decor, flowers and food—will start to fall into place.

3 Create a 'Wants' and a 'Needs' List. "Try to separate your 'wants' from your 'needs,'" says Samantha Goldberg, owner of Gold Events Planning, in Bridgewater, New Jersey. "The 'needs' list consists of the items you have to have to make your special day work, such as a good photographer and an affordable venue, while the 'wants' are the items you get after the 'needs' are acquired (such as ornate centerpieces or customized favors)."

4 Know Your Budget Really, Really Well. "Do not spend a dime or book a single service until the two of you have thoroughly worked out your budget," says Jean Picard of Jean Picard Wedding Consulting, based in Santa Barbara, California. "This is where a couple can go wrong early in the game and never recover. They fall in love with a venue and book it right away, then find they have to skimp on everything else, including necessities."

5 Don't Cut the Wrong Corners. Sure, Uncle Harry would love to take your wedding photos, but will you be happy with them? Probably not, says Barbara Thleiji of Belle Occasions, in San Francisco. "Always hire professional, licensed vendors," she advises. "You will save yourself a lot of stress by hiring well-qualified people, whose work you can count on."

6 Be True to Yourself. "I tell brides that when they are offered suggestions that they aren't too keen on, they should politely say, 'That's an interesting idea,' and then go ahead with what they really want to do," says Cindy Clearwater of SunCelebrations, in St. Croix, U.S.V.I.

7 Don't Overthink. "Once you make a decision, don't go back and rethink it over and over again," says Sasha Souza, a California-based event planner. "I think that leads to bridal craziness. I understand that it may be hard to make a decision, but

once it's made, check it off the list and quickly move on to the next thing."

8 Don't Multitask. "One thing that always works out really well for my clients is a 'one task at a time' planning schedule," says Kelly McWilliams of WeddingsbySocialites.com, based in Cape Coral, Florida. "Give yourself twelve to fifteen months to plan, and tackle one item on your checklist at a time. Some things will take one hour, others will take three weeks or a month, but having just one goal at a time allows you to focus on the task at hand and not get overwhelmed."

9 Don't Be a Superwoman. "Brides often get this idea that they can do everything," says Terrica R. Skaggs, a wedding and event designer based in Jekyll Island, Georgia. "They'll say, 'it's cheaper' or 'it's more fun if I do it myself.' But it takes over 240 hours to plan a wedding, so get plenty of help from family, friends or a wedding planner."

10 Make It Legal. "One of the most important pieces of advice we give to all of our couples, especially when they're intending to marry in a foreign country, is to make the legal paperwork the first priority," says Stephanie Skiba de Garcia, destination wedding planner and owner of Cozumel Wedding Planner, in Cozumel, Mexico. "The best suggestion we can offer is to get all of those requirements handled and out of the way in the beginning," she says. "They're tedious but necessary. But after that, you can focus on the fun parts of the engagement process." **Continued on page 184**