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February 2022

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Bliss Bridal Makes Wedding Dreams Come True

by Lisa Riggan,

Mid-America Publishing

As soon as you step into Bliss Bridal you realize this is a special place. The huge showroom is dedicated to making dreams come true.

From brides and grooms looking to fulfill visions of what their wedding will be or young men and women headed to prom, owner Jodi Degen and her family are prepared to help.

"We're one of the places still around where you can get a nice dress for a formal occasion like a wedding. We've always done well with mothers and now we're getting a great response to our expanding selections for guests at weddings and other formalwear needs."

Jodi, along with her husband John, opened Bliss Bridal 25 years ago in Rockwell as a destination for those looking for formalwear for weddings, proms, and other occasions. Early each year, proms—and all the excitement that goes along with them—make up a large part of Bliss's business. And while weddings happen all year round, the pace heats up as Spring approaches and lasts through Fall.

Jodi recommends starting your wedding planning a year in advance for a less-stress timeline.

"This year is supposed to be the biggest year yet for weddings. We're excited about that for our couples and ready to help."

According to Jodi, over half of their brides follow that timeline, allowing them to enjoy the process. And while it's great to give yourself that time, Bliss is ready to take care of people who need a dress for the weekend.

"We sell everything right off the rack so you don't have to worry about shipping or anything like that, you can



Bliss Bridal offers a stunning collection of gowns and formal wear for every occasion.



take your dress home today. We offer in-house alterations so our turnaround is quick on that. When you're here you can take care of every little thing and everything's going to match perfectly because you saw it live, in-person, which really helps.

"Our goal is to take the worry out of it for people. There are a lot of things that happen—things you don't think about when you hear it on the news. We lost a huge box of special orders in one of the plane crashes. The designer was lucky enough to have the fabric on hand and was able to recut the dresses and send them. They arrived only about a week later than what we'd planned. With things like that, if you don't have someone holding your back, how would you handle it?" Jodi asked.

Being in business for 25 years has allowed Bliss to become very selective with its vendors and good relationships have been built with them.

"Because of that, they're good about taking care of us when we need a little extra help," adds Jodi.

Bliss can assist with all types of weddings, from traditional, elegant affairs with 500 plus guests, to intimate backyard weddings. There are some constants; the ball gown is always the typical ball gown.

"Everybody wants to be a princess. That's definitely stayed the course and it's coming in big. Opulence is in," says Jodi. "We're kind of trending a little bit away from boho chic and informal weddings. It seems like this year we have people who maybe had a small wedding a year ago, but now they're going to go ahead and do the whole nine yards."

Jodi says she like to have the groom and bride book a



Jodi Degen and her family enjoy helping brides, grooms, prom-goers, and others make the most of their big days.

date night to come into the shop and look at swatches and discuss other details. This way they can concentrate, without the wedding party chiming in.

"It gets to be a circus if you have all the guys making jokes while you're trying to choose color," she says.

It used to be the grooms just showed up and wore whatever the bride had picked out. But grooms are much more involved now and they have so many more choices.

"It used to be black, ivory, or white, and now they've got seven different shades of gray, and plaids, and the blues are coming in big. They can mix and match all their vests and ties and suspenders, or whatever."

Bliss encourages all prospective brides and grooms to give them a look.

"I try to be careful not to assume there's a groom and a bride. It could be groom and groom or bride and bride. That's something that's happening more, but not all of our suppliers have adjusted. The printed forms we get all have "bride" and "groom"

and haven't caught up with the times."

Jodi acknowledges that wedding planning can be stressful for couples and everybody will eventually have their little meltdown. When that happens, she and her team are there to reassure them.

"We always tell the them not to feel guilty, everybody has their moment at some point in the process and everybody ends up enjoying their wedding day."

In the end, Jodi and her family appreciate all of the couples and prom-goers who have put their trust in Bliss by shopping locally.

"Some people think by going to the bigger cities they're going to find a different selection, but when we go to market in Atlanta for prom, we sit right next to the people who have stores two hours from us and we buy the same things. You won't find the same thing 20 minutes from here because we try to differentiate locally, but you'll be just as successful shopping locally as you would be two hours from here."

Unique Proposals and Wedding Ideas

Compiled by Lisa Riggan

PROPOSALS:

Music to Their Ears

Invite your partner to go on a walk through a garden or park after arranging for singers to "spontaneously" serenade you both. When you're ready, drop down on one knee and pop the question!

Pictures Worth 1,000 Woos

Create a photo album or digital slide show of your growing relationship over time. When the reminiscing is at its best, "propose" that you look forward to more good times together.

Wine for the Win

Prepare or arrange an intimate candlelit dinner for the two of you. Create your own wine label with a message that will melt your intended's heart. Add chocolate.

Shop Till You Drop - to your knees!

Send your partner and his/her best friend on a shopping trip where you've arranged for them to receive gifts at each location. Surprise your partner by showing up at the final stop ready with your proposal.

Truly POP! the Question

Leave a trail of balloons to a small space filled with balloons that your partner will wade through to find you down on your knee!

Engagement Escape-Aid

Take your partner on a date to an escape room. At the end, when the clues have all been solved, reveal your final question.

Who Do You Love?

What is something or somewhere your partner really enjoys? Whatever it is—golf, the beach, shopping,

fancy dinners—arrange to do it together. When the moment feels right, ask.

WEDDINGS:

Flower Power

Choose people special to the both of you to be your flower "girl" and/or ring bearer. Grandparents, friends, mentors—anyone you want! It will make them feel honored and guests will love it.

Starting Off Together

If you want to emphasize that you are giving yourselves to each other, not giving yourselves away, start your marriage journey by walking each other down the aisle.

Thankful From the Start

Prepare personalized thank you cards that guests pick up as soon as they arrive at the ceremony entrance. From the moment they ar-

rive they will feel welcomed and part of the big day.

Everybody Loves a (Love) Parade

If the venue works for it, start the dance music right after the ceremony and waltz or boogie with your guests to the reception.

Memories-Op

Create an entrance arch that matches the style of your ceremony and reception. Include your names and wedding date on the sign to serve as the perfect photo-op for your guests and unforgettable reminder of your special day.

Hold Fast with Handfasting

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Dos and don'ts of caring for wedding and engagement rings

Jewelry is a key component of weddings. The financial resource CreditDonkey notes that, in the United States, the average amount spent on an engagement ring is \$5,500, while Canadians spend an average of \$3,500. Jewelry costs can add up, especially when adding in the cost of wedding bands, which can cost as much as \$1,000. The cost of jewelry only underscores the importance of learning how to care for it and preserve its value.

The best way to maintain jewelry depends on the makeup of the rings. The online jewelry guide Jewelry Notes says gold rings without gemstones can be cleaned effectively with only soap and water. Simply prepare a solution of lukewarm water and mild dish soap in a small

bowl. Soak the rings for 20 to 30 minutes. Use a soft brush or cloth to clean the jewelry of dirt. Rinse the residue under clean water.

Rings with diamonds can be treated similarly with a mild soap-and-water solution. The Diamond Information Center also says to soak the diamond ring in equal parts cold water and ammonia for half an hour and let it air dry. Brand name jewelry cleaner also is another good option. This method only should be used with diamonds; ammonia can't be used with other gemstones.

Maintaining jewelry also should include twice yearly visits to a jeweler who can check the prongs and make sure the setting is not loose; otherwise, the diamond can become dislodged, accord-



ing to Martha Stewart Weddings.

Avoid touching diamonds and other gemstones as much as possible when putting rings on and taking them off. Precious stones often are magnets for dust, dirt and body oil, according to Taylor Lanore, diamond consultant and engagement ring designer for Lauren B. Fine Jewelry and Diamonds. Grab the ring by the band.

Use discretion when wearing rings while engaging in hands-on activities. Activities like cleaning dishes, moving furniture, gardening, or diving through waves at the beach warrant caution; otherwise, you risk damaging or making jewelry unnecessarily dirty. Store the ring in a safe location until you can safely wear it again.

One of the most important steps to safeguard wedding and engagement rings is to insure the jewelry. The description of the ring, its cut, carat weight, metal, and other information offered through a certified independent jewelry appraisal will be needed to insure the ring. Take a close-up photo of the jewelry as well. Other items like laser inscription or a home security system can qualify jewelry owners for discounts on insurance. Consumers also can add a jewelry rider to a homeowner's or renter's insurance policy.

These are some ways to care for wedding jewelry. Always consult with a jeweler before attempting to clean items made of various materials.



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Weddings: What's New in 2022?

by Lisa Riffin,
Mid-America Publishing

A quick look online for 2022 wedding trends will soon have you thinking one thing—anything goes!

After holding back out of an abundance of caution, couples are all about celebrating their big day in ways that reflect who they are. From evolving vernacular such as “groomsgmaid” and “man of honor,” to food truck and cocktail style parties and beyond, couples are incorporating their values, preferences, and childhood dreams in order to fashion celebrations they and their guests will enjoy and remember.

“The trend now is to reflect the personalities of the couples,” confirms Katie Wingert, co-owner and operator of Mojo Productions, a DJ service for weddings and events in Britt, Iowa. “Last year we did 202 weddings and when it comes to the music and program, not one was the same.”

Gone are the days when the show-ers, wedding, and ensuing reception

had to be “just so.” Last year, with all its delays and frustrations, has given us all a better sense of intentionality. We realize that life, with its inevitable twists and turns, is worth investing our best in and ensuring our celebrations reflect that.

The bridal bouquet, boutonnières, and table bouquets are becoming more natural in both arrangement and color, according to Dean Wright, owner of the Red Geranium in Clear Lake.

“Nearly 100 percent of the bridal bouquets we do now are hand-tied in design. The bouquets are more natural looking with the stems showing. The style allows the bouquet to last longer because it can be put in water whenever it’s not being held.

“We’re working a lot with mixed wildflowers in a myriad of colors. The bouquets are loosely tied to give them an airy look. We’ve also seen a lot of movement away from pastels in the last two years. Arrangements are a little more daring now.”

Mary Wise, proprietor of Lanterns and Lace, an event venue in Manly, has noticed a trend towards friends and relatives participating as officiates, noting that a recent couple had the bride’s grandmother perform the ceremony.

“There’s also more flexibility in terms of when weddings are being held,” notes Mary. “Though spring and summer weddings are still considered ‘wedding season,’ we are finding that fall dates seem to fill up first. Since our venue is open year-round, couples can choose whichever season they prefer.”

The practice of holding a wedding week, instead of wedding day, is becoming popular. Varied events from cocktail parties, showers, pool parties, and family get-togethers provide customized experiences for family, friends, and children. Consolidating these events into one week has an added benefit of reducing expenses for guests and members of the wedding party who have to travel long

distances to attend.

A week’s long celebration has other benefits. If you’re having trouble finding venues or booking a DJ or specific entertainment, they might be readily available on a weekday and more flexible on time. With good planning, couples can create a week they—and their guests—will remember all of their lives.

If couples enjoy planning, they can do much of it themselves, but there are more and more wedding-related businesses that go beyond their job description to help with planning and execution.

Mojo is one of those “value-added” kinds of businesses. “We do so much behind the scenes so there are no problems,” Wingert explained. “We’re more than music, we’re the coordinators helping to carry out the couple’s vision. When couples begin planning they never thought they’d have to learn all this stuff on the fly, so we talk to them about the food, the ceremony, all of it, because we’ve

seen so many weddings and can help coordinate it all. We want them to walk into their wedding and enjoy the night. We put other people in front of us. Nothing is above our job description.”

Another shift in the wedding industry is a big change in mind-set. Weddings have mostly been couple-centered celebrations, but they are becoming more guest-centered. It may have been a very long time since friends and family have been able to get together. Making guests feel pampered and cared for is becoming a priority. It can be as simple as seating guests in a circle around the couple at the ceremony, allowing everyone to feel included.

If you’re part of a couple planning your big day, never forget that it’s the two of you who make the day uniquely yours, no matter how you do it. Be yourselves and relax, because in the end a wedding is really about love, bringing families together, and looking forward to what’s to come.

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Timeline tips: Factors to consider when planning your wedding day timeline

The notion that “timing is everything” is applicable in many situations, perhaps none more so than on a couple’s wedding day. Many couples spend months, if not years, planning their weddings in the hopes that all that hard work will ultimately result in a day they will cherish forever.

The sheer volume of things to do on a wedding day can make couples feel overwhelmed. Those feelings can be overcome by emphasizing timing on the day of the wedding. Wedding day timelines will differ depending on variables that are unique to each couple’s wedding, but the following are some factors to consider as couples organize the big day.



- **Venue(s):** The schedule couples adhere to on their wedding day will be greatly affected by their choice of venue. Does the venue have somewhere on premises for the couple and their party to get ready? Are the ceremony and reception being held at the same venue? Before creating a timeline, consider the location of the ceremony and reception venue(s) and the accommodations each provides. Getting to and from multiple facilities won’t be an issue if couples choose a multipurpose venue where they can get ready, tie the knot and dance the night away all in one place. Couples who will be moving from venue to venue throughout the day must build the time it takes them and their party to

get about into their timelines.

- **Wedding party:** The size of the wedding party also bears consideration when planning a wedding day timeline. Large parties will require more time to get ready, and that should be factored into couples’ timelines. Large parties also may be harder to corral and transport from place to place, so couples should build some extra time into their timelines to account for that. Small wedding parties can be easier to manage, so couples with small parties may be able to begin their timelines a little later in the day than those with large wedding parties.

- **Weather:** Weather is the most unpredictable variable couples need to plan for on their wedding days. As the

wedding day approaches, couples can monitor the day’s forecast and then make any necessary changes to account for inclement weather. Getting around in a rainstorm will likely take longer than moving about on a sunny day, so some minor tweaks to the timeline may be necessary if storms or another type of inclement weather is in the forecast.

Couples can access wedding day timeline templates on various websites. But it’s important that couples remember that their weddings are unique, so online guidelines might not be realistic. A careful consideration of a handful of variables specific to couples’ weddings can help them craft timelines that make their big day go smoothly.

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Explore various wedding styles during planning

Every wedding is different, even if many share some common components. As couples plan their weddings, learning about some popular wedding styles can help them create a ceremony that suits them.

Classic wedding

Classic weddings are the storybook traditional weddings that many people dream about for years. Key elements include a tuxedo for the groom and a white gown for the bride. Formal attire is reserved for the rest of the wedding party. The ceremony is conducted in a place of worship before everyone retires to a fancy catering hall for the reception. Traditional weddings also may include the time-honored customs like toasts, cake cutting, bouquet toss, and parent-child dances.

Beach wedding

Beach weddings often are casual, laid back affairs. Dresses may be less structured and flow with sea breezes, while guys may even don shorts with linen shirts or jackets. Guests can expect the party to be much more free-flowing and the traditions of classic weddings may not be part of the celebration.

Bohemian wedding

Free-spirited individuals may dive head first into a bohemian style wedding. According to wedding planner David Tutera, a boho wedding is casual and comfortable. It tends to come off chic but appears that way with minimal effort. Decor is typically humble and blends harmoniously with nature. A boho wedding may take place outdoors or in another



less traditional venue, such as a farmhouse or botanical garden. Wedding party attire may be mismatched and showcase each person's individual style.

Modern wedding

Brides and grooms who crave contemporary and current trends may prefer a modern wedding. Graphic color schemes, clean lines and minimalistic flowers

might be part of a modern wedding. Attire may be angular and edgy, and the venue may run the gamut from sleek museum to a city rooftop.

Destination wedding

Couples who love to travel and don't want to worry about the minutiae of wedding planning may find a destination wedding is a good fit. Destination weddings last more than one day and focus on relaxation, activities and lots of fun. Destination weddings tend to be less formal and less traditional than classic weddings. Due to the remote locations, destination weddings also can be smaller and more intimate, as many invitees may be unable to attend. Yet those who can attend often get to enjoy tropical islands or mountain retreats.

Wedding styles are as unique as the people getting married. Choosing a theme that has the right feeling can help couples make the most of their special days.



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Moorman Clothiers: It's All About the Service

by Lisa Riggan,

Mid-America Publishing

It may be cold outside, but for the folks at Moorman Clothiers in Mason City, now is the beginning of wedding season.

"Every Saturday we'll be busy with wedding people," explains Scott Moorman. "If it's a really busy weekend there could be a dozen weddings. There are always at least three or four we're working on each week through the Fall."

Scott started the business with his wife Susan in 1993. This year marks their 29th year of helping outfit grooms for one of the most important days of their lives. "We've built a reputation over the years and are sought out for our tuxedos. We're extremely competitive in pricing and have an on-premise tailor. If



Scott Moorman is proud of the service Moorman Clothiers provides to its customers.

there's an issue at 5 p.m. on Friday night, we're going to fix it," Scott promises.

For most of their first de-

cade in business Moorman Clothiers was strictly a men's clothing store. With the opening of a second store in Clear Lake they added women's clothing to the offerings. "Fourteen years ago we moved into our current location on Federal and brought the Clear Lake and Mason City stores together." In addition, Scott's oldest son operates a Moorman location in Ames, Iowa.

Scott notes that social media has had an impact on the expectations some people have in mind when they walk in.

"They'll see something online that they think they can rent and it might easily be a \$2,000 tuxedo. You're not going to find that in a rental, but we'll work with them and find a tuxedo they will feel great in and can afford."

Going to prom or being a groomsman is when a lot of young men have their first encounter with renting a tuxedo and Scott and his team work to make it a great experience. They know that any one of these guys may themselves be getting married in a few years and want to be the first place that comes to mind at tux time.

One trend Scott has noticed building over the last few years is customers buying a suit instead of renting a tuxedo that you have to bring back on Monday.

"I'd say about 25% of our clients buy them. It's really not a lot more than renting a tuxedo. Of course, you'll still need a shirt and tie and some guys will want a new belt and shoes, but now, for about the same amount of money, you've got a suit for interviews and attending formal occasions. It's a great way to do it."

There have been a few brides who've chosen their dresses from the women's clothing

Moorman offers. More often they find they are helping the mothers of the couple find a dress suited to the occasion.

"When there were more casual weddings taking place we saw more brides choosing their dresses here, but mostly she's here to help her husband-to-be with his choices."

With the increasing number of weddings predicted this year, Moorman Clothiers looks forward to taking the stress out of shopping for a tux. There's a lot going on behind the scenes—measuring, ordering, checking against

specifications. Scott and his team check every piece to make sure it's correct.

"We don't just hand them the tux and say 'good luck' like some of our competition. You can sell anybody one time. I want people to come back and tell others I got this tuxedo at Moorman's. Same way with prom dresses. We treat every one of these young kids like they're future customers—which they are. We have people all the time who'll say, 'the last time I got a tux was prom time' and it was from us."



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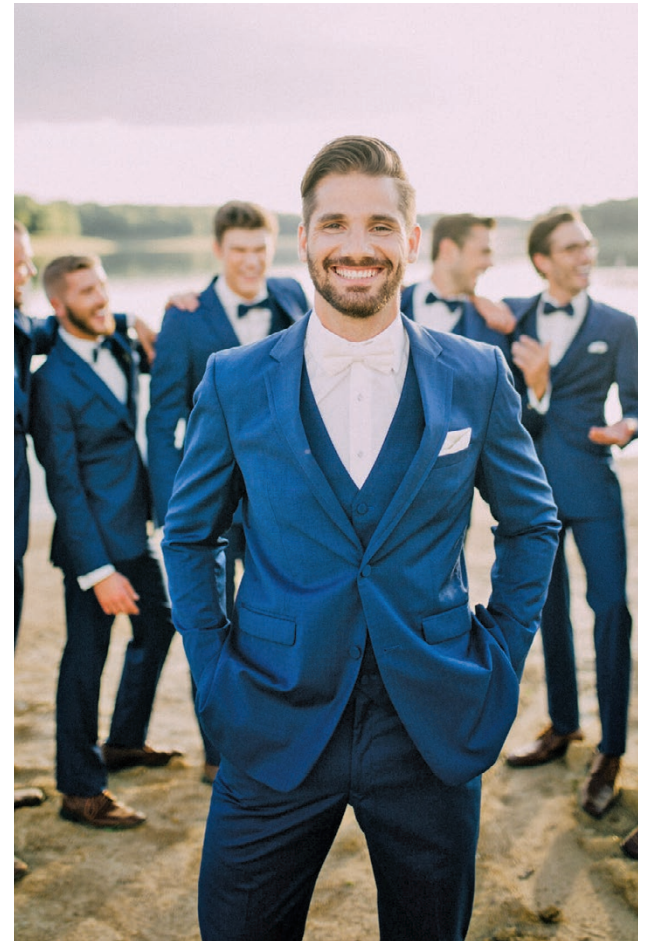
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Pro Tip: 10 Essential Wedding Survival Kit Items Most People Would Never Think Of

By Edward Lynn
Editor,
the Eagle Grove Eagle
Proprietor,

Edward Lynn Photography

In my many years as a professional wedding photographer, one of the things my clients raved about was that I was prepared for things that tend to happen at weddings, even if they weren't directly related to taking the photos. What can I say? If you go to enough weddings in any capacity, you're going to learn from experience what the most common pitfalls are, and in hindsight, how to deal with them.

Which is why I always carry a wedding day emergency kit that goes a little

beyond what you might find on some trendy list on a blog somewhere, whenever I shoot a wedding. Now, don't get me wrong. Those lists that tell you to bring safety pins, and q-tips, and blotting paper, and flossers, and medications, and deodorants, and a good sticky tape, and super glue, and bandaids and more are all good. And you should definitely have all those things on hand. But there are some things that a true professional knows to have, that most people would never think of.

So let me share with you the 10 essential, absolute save the day things to make sure you put in your wed-

ding day survival kit, that you almost certainly won't read about from anyone else. 9 of which are cheap, and 1 of which is spendier, but so worth it that it may literally save a life.

1: Baking Soda.

Every wedding survival kit list you'll find is liable to have super glue on it. It's incredibly useful for fixing everything from broken shoes, to open wounds, and so much more. But there are some things that can break and you'd need a stronger bond and a thicker material than super glue alone can provide. And yet you need it to form and hold instantly. But if you combine super glue and baking soda,

you get an instant hard plastic like substance with real strength that can handle the fixes that superglue can't. And, baking soda is even useful as an antacid. A small vial or ziploc baggie of it is all you need. If you're taking one, be sure to take the other.

2: Silica gel packets.

Sold as damp-rid and the various generic versions, and found in all sorts of packages in little packets that say "throw away" and "do not eat" silica gel is a highly active mineral that literally sucks humidity out of the air. A great source for it is the shoe store, as most new shoes come with some of those packets to keep them

from humidity damage in shipping and storage. Well, at a wedding you just never know about the humidity. Even in a room full of people exerting themselves in heavy dress clothes on a dance floor, you can quickly find yourself in a pretty dank space. And that's not good for camera lenses. And if those fog up, good luck taking photos at this once in a lifetime event you want to remember forever. Which is why a silica gel packet or two in the same pocket as your cell phone, or in your camera bag, is a good thing to have.

3: Coffee filters.

Every wedding kit list you'll ever see will probably

have blotting paper on it. But blotting paper is expensive, sold in packs of ten or twenty sheets, and only useful, well, blotting makeup and sweat. And almost always gone as soon as the bridesmaids figure out where it is. Ordinary white coffee filters, on the other hand, are cheap, sold in packs of a hundred or more for a fraction of the cost, and useful for so much more. They make a decent blotting paper because they don't come apart when they get wet like ordinary tissues do. Which is sort of essential for brewing coffee, when you think about it.

**WEDDING SURVIVAL
KIT ITEMS to pg. 15**



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**WEDDING SURVIVAL
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But they also make excellent flash diffusers for the pop-up flash on your average digital SLR. Or strategically held over your cell phone's flash, if you're willing to look ridiculous (or clever, depending on how you look at it) for a few seconds to get gorgeous diffuse light. They also work well as the padding in makeshift bandages. They're decent for polishing your camera lens in a pinch. And you can brew coffee in them, which actually has come in handy at more than a few wedding receptions.

4: Sticky back velcro strips on the roll.

Safety pins are great and super useful at any wedding to fix a quick loose strap, or replace a snapped off dress hook. But sometimes you need to close a big area, and with real strength, and be

able to take it off without help later. Like, when you go to the restroom. Those sticky backed rolls of velcro strips about a half inch wide and a few feet long you can buy at the hardware store or the craft store are life savers for these situations. The sticky backing won't hold them in place for long on fabric but they will let you stick them in place so you don't need a third hand while you use your sewing kit or safety pins to tack them in place more firmly. Be sure to buy both black and white, because those are the two colors you're most likely to need. And whatever color they have that's closest to your bridesmaids dresses is a good idea as well.

5: Command strips and hooks.

When you set up your little command center at the church and reception venues, you're going to find

you need to post notes on a wall, and organize all sorts of little things. Everything from somewhere to hang your purse, to something to hang your necklace on so it doesn't get tangled, to places to hang all the little t-shirt bags from stores you'll use for all sorts of supplies. But the problem is, this isn't your place. You can't mark up the walls, or punch holes in them, or mess up the finish on the furniture. Command strips and hooks are the ideal solution. How you'll use them will vary, but I guarantee if you have some, you'll use them and be glad you did. You can set up whatever you need, and later take it down without damage, or the resultant fees, or apologies.

6: Corn starch.

Another thing nearly every wedding survival kit list has on it is baby powder. But some people are allergic to

baby powder, and in a gathering like a wedding, the odds of one of those people being present go way up. Corn starch is all natural and can be used in nearly all the same ways as baby powder. But it can also be used to help soak up a spill, remove a stain in carpet (let it soak it up, then vacuum it away), minimize the damage to clothing (soak up as much stain as possible instead of letting it soak into the fabric, then shake it off), polish dinnerware or wood (mix one part water with one part cornstarch). And yes, thicken a soup or gravy (and don't think that doesn't ever happen).

7: Small toys and googly eyes.

One constant at every wedding I've ever been to are kids who've just had it with the whole ordeal (from their point of view). And there's nothing more likely to throw a wedding into sudden turmoil than a frustrated child who's fed up, and throwing a tantrum. Small, cheap toys that fit in the pocket and are age appropriate (so get a little variety) that can be suddenly produced at just the right moment can distract a child from their frustration, and derail the fit they were fixing to throw. You can get a good variety cheaply from those vending machines at the exits of grocery stores, meant to suck loose change

from parents. Or from a party supply store. And since you can only carry so many such peace offerings, a handful of sticky backed googly eyes in your pocket can save the day. Stick them to anything, and kids older than toddlers (who you have to worry about eating them) are transfixed. Disposable cutlery plus googly eyes = crisis averted.

8: Black electrical tape

Black vinyl electrical tape is the ideal tape for so many uses that come into play at weddings. And at about a dollar a roll (more than you'll need) it's a no brainer. Useful for everything from making skin friendly makeshift bandages (with your coffee filters) as well as for fixing a nicked cord on a coffee filter, or a DJ's extension cord, or for keeping a bouquet of flowers together, and so much more. I defy you to take some to a wedding, and then not end up using any, and being darn glad you had it.

9: EMPTY zip up baggies.

The average wedding survival kit includes a lot of zip-up baggies. But they all have stuff in them. And when you need to put something in one that's no good. Bring empties! Lots of them. Trust me, you'll need them.

**10: A serious first aid kit.**

One maddening thing about the typical wedding survival kit is that the extent of the first aid included is usually some pills, some bandaids, and some tampons. No, no, no! You NEED a serious, professional grade, hard core first aid kit. I mean the kind an EMT would have. Think about what this event is, besides one of the most special days in the lives of the bride and groom. It's a gathering of a bunch of people, in an emotionally charged circumstance, where not everyone likes each other, some people are in frail health, and some people will get drunk, or high. So buy the best first aid kit you can find. And you're renting a lot of other things, be sure to rent an emergency defibrillator too. You want to be able to deal with a broken leg, a heart attack, someone who got beat up, took a bad fall, or even someone who got stabbed or shot. Hopefully you barely use it. But isn't it better to have it? And anything you don't use now, well, you've got your whole lives together. Think of it as a very sensible wedding present to yourself.

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How to find your wedding florist

Weddings join the lives of two loving individuals so they can share their future with one another. Various elements help make weddings both momentous and magical.

Some weddings adhere to themes that are designed to make an impression and showcase couples' personalities. Floral arrangements are key components of wedding themes, as they help to establish ambiance at both the ceremony and reception.

Flowers can easily help couples achieve a desired vibe, whether that's rustic, romantic, modern, or even whimsical. Skilled florists may use a variety of flowers and foliage, as well as dramatic displays to help create the couple's wedding day vision. According to an internal study from the wedding advice and planning resource The Knot, which surveyed more than 27,000 couples who got married in 2019, the average cost of wedding flow-



ers was \$2,000 in 2019. However, the cost of floral arrangements can vary depending on the scope of the arrangements and choice of flowers, including whether they're in season or not.

It is essential for couples to spend time vetting potential florists to

find one who will produce their desired vision at a price that fits their budget. These guidelines can make the process go more smoothly.

- Establish your theme early on. Floral arrangements will complement and enhance other elements of the wedding, including color

scheme and the wedding theme. If your wedding theme ties into a specific season, you will work with the florist to find blooms and other pieces that coordinate. For example, winter weddings with white, ice blue and silver color schemes may coordinate with white ranunculus flowers, dahlias, dusty miller foliage, and viburnum berries.

- Bring swatches and photographs to consultations. It is easier to explain color palettes to a florist with examples in hand. Show the florist the types of arrangements you prefer and have actual fabric swatches from bridesmaid gowns or groomsmen vests so that colors can be complemented.

- Create a list of desired items. Florists may sell items a la carte or have packages of common floral pieces for wedding celebrations. Types of floral arrangements include bridal bouquet, bridesmaids' bouquets, maid of honor bouquet, corsages for

mothers/grandmothers, boutonnieres for groomsmen and fathers/grandfathers, flower girl headpiece, petals to sprinkle, table centerpieces, altar arrangements, pew or chair decorations, and cake decorations.

- Go easy on aroma. Tread lightly when selecting blooms that have strong aromas. They may be beautiful, but many people are sensitive to smells. Allergies also may be exacerbated by flowers with strong aromas. Discuss options with the florist before proceeding.

- Explain your budget. Research the average cost of floral arrangements and let the florist know what you can afford. This can help the florist narrow down options or make substitutions that fit your theme and your budget.

Couples can take certain steps as they choose floral arrangements for their weddings. Cost should not be the only factor in the decision, even though it is an important one.

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Consider food allergies when planning wedding menu

Wedding guests will remember many aspects of the ceremony and reception. For guests who have food allergies or require specialized diets, dinner can be memorable for all of the wrong reasons. But it doesn't have to be.

Even though weddings are all about the happy couple's wants and needs, special attention should be placed on ensuring guests' comfort. Individuals with allergies and dietary restrictions warrant extra caution. Any food can cause an allergic reaction, but eight types in particular, often referred to as the "Big 8," are responsible for the greatest numbers of adverse reactions. Milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soy comprise the Big 8. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Food Allergy Research and Resource Program says the Big 8 accounts for about 90 percent of all food allergies in the

United States.

Couples need to recognize the likelihood that at least one person at the wedding will have a specialized food need. Most people with dietary restrictions will be very understanding that eating out is a challenge, especially at a wedding. But couples can take steps to ensure that guests with food allergies don't go hungry.

- Ask about allergies on the response card. Some couples request that guests choose their food preferences on their RSVPs. Include a spot where guests can mention serious food allergies.

- Choose a caterer very carefully. Caterers are increasingly adapting to common food restrictions. Express specific food avoidances or what you want to be included and find a caterer who specializes in this type of cooking.

- Offer allergen-free appetizers. Martha Stewart

Weddings suggests serving customized bite-sized hors d'oeuvres during cocktail hour to allow for easier customization. This gives guests with allergies the ability to pick and choose their pre-entrée bites.

- Label foods and let guests with severe allergies dine first. Buffets should be clearly labeled so those with allergies can avoid certain foods. Also, those with severe food allergies should have first shot at the buffet to limit cross-contamination from serving utensils.

- Create separate meals. A caterer may be able to make separate meals for certain guests, particularly if they have advanced notice.

- Don't forget desserts and drinks. Allergens can be included in drinks and desserts as well. Offer gluten-free desserts and gluten-free beer as well.

Dietary restrictions are another factor that couples must consider when planning their weddings.



Fun ways to utilize social media in your wedding

Young couples tying the knot today grew up with social media, so it's no great surprise that so many want to utilize various platforms when planning their weddings. In fact, the Brides 2018 American Wedding Survey found that 87 percent of brides turned to the social media platform Pinterest for inspiration when planning their weddings.

On the surface, modern wedding ceremonies and receptions may look similar to the nuptials of yesteryear. However, engaged couples have increasingly incorporated social media into their weddings, and the following are some fun and creative ways to embrace that trend.

- Create a social media photo booth. Guests may take more pictures at modern weddings than the photographers who were hired to document the happy couple's big day from start to finish. Social media boards are digital screens that display social media walls. Live event social media boards collect and curate content from social media channels and display it on a single

digital screen. Users, in this case a couple's guests, simply use a predetermined hashtag when posting photos and the images are then displayed on digital screens in real time. This can be a fun way to engage guests during the reception.

- Live stream the wedding. Live streams became very popular during the pandemic, when couples getting married had to pare down their guest lists in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines. But live streams can continue to be used after the pandemic, as there will always be guests who can't make it to the wedding. Facebook Live was a go-to social media platform for live streaming weddings during the pandemic, and it can be utilized to involve loved ones in the festivities even if they can't be there in person. Live streaming via social media may be especially useful for couples who want to enjoy destination weddings, which tend to be small affairs due to travel constraints.

- Hashtag the wedding. A couple-specific hashtag can

serve as something akin to a wedding album, only it's one everyone can easily access via the couple's chosen social media platform. Encourage guests to hashtag photos from the wedding so everyone can have a good time looking back on the ceremony and reception once the day has come and gone.

- Plan with your party. Social media can be as fun, inclusive and useful when planning the wedding as it can during the wedding itself. Brides and grooms can create their own private Pinterest boards and share them with the wedding party. Everyone can then use the private board to bounce ideas off each other. Couples can infuse a little fun into the Pinterest board by encouraging their groomsmen and bridesmaids to post outrageous outfit ideas or submit sing-along song requests to be played during the reception.

Social media is a big part of modern couples' lives, so it makes sense for them to find fun ways to incorporate various platforms into their weddings.

Music is an important component of wedding celebrations

Few things set the mood of a wedding more effectively than music. Beautiful songs often are incorporated into wedding ceremonies, and romantic or upbeat songs intermingle to create a festive mix at receptions.

Playlists curated specifically for weddings can be found online to help couples narrow down their options. According to Wedding Forward, a wedding planning guide, wedding planning experts and modern couples agree that wedding playlists should have a 60/40 split of classics and new wedding songs.

Music is a personal choice, but couples may benefit by considering who will be in attendance at their weddings. In so doing, couples can ensure the music played at their weddings reaches as many people as possible there:

- Wedding processional song: The wedding processional is the



moment the wedding party walks down the aisle. Music may be a traditional hymn, classical music

or a favorite contemporary song.
 • Bridal processional song: In many traditional wedding cere-

monies, the bride walks down the aisle separately, with her father or both parents. She customarily will have a different song from the rest of the wedding party. While "Bridal Chorus/Wedding March" is a traditional choice, some brides may prefer a different tune.

- Wedding recessional song: Again, depending on the ceremony location and choices, the recessional may be a classical piece or a hymn. Some couples choose an upbeat song for their first official promenade as a married couple.

- Wedding party entrance song: Couples can ask their music vendor to put together the majority of the songs for their reception, but they may want to choose their own wedding party entrance. This song typically is a fast-paced, upbeat song that gets the crowd pumping and ready for a fun night. Think "Dynamite" by Taio Cruz or "Can't Stop the Feeling!"

by Justin Timberlake.

- First dance: The first dance song is another personal choice for the couple. Slow songs traditionally are chosen, but couples who want something a little different have increasingly selected faster songs and paired them with rehearsed choreography. "Thinking Out Loud" by Ed Sheeran has become a popular first dance song.

- Other songs: Couples also will select songs to complement dances with their parents, cake cutting, garter toss, and any other special traditions or moments. They also can make requests to include songs of different eras to appeal to guests of all ages.

Music is an important component of wedding celebrations and deserves some extra consideration to ensure everyone has a great time while cutting a rug.



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How to take the hectic out of your wedding day

Weddings are among the most complex events many people will ever plan. Couples often try to go the extra mile in an effort to make the day memorable for themselves and their guests. That pressure can make a wedding day feel a little frenzied. Thankfully, there are various ways to ensure the vibe of the big day is happy and not hectic.

Hire a wedding planner/coordinator

Leaving the nitty gritty to a professional wedding planner takes a lot of pressure off of couples. The renowned wedding resource The Knot says wedding planners are clued into everything there is to know about a wedding and they can be tapped to take care of just about anything on couples' to-do list.

Consider a package deal

All-inclusive resorts are popular vacation spots because variables like entertainment, lodging, food, drinks, and more is all taken care of, leaving vacationers with little to do other than show up and relax. Couples can apply that same approach on their wedding day. Host the ceremony and reception at the same site, which takes the potentially problematic issue of getting guests to and fro out of the equation. Some venues may even provide in-house vendors like photographers and florists. Such vendors' familiarity with the venue reduces the risk of surprises that can derail wedding day schedules.

Pick your priorities

Avoid getting bogged down on a million details by making a list of your priorities when planning. Couples can revisit this list a couple of days before their wedding so they remember what's most important to them on the big day. This refresher can ensure couples don't get too concerned if minor issues arise during their big day, helping them remain calm and keeping a focus on all the fun to be had during the day.

It's easy for couples to feel a little overwhelmed on their wedding day. Some simple strategies can take the hectic out of couples' wedding day and ensure they keep their focus on one another and their loved ones.

'Plus one' etiquette for wedding guests

Making a wedding guest list is seldom an easy task. Couples often find that many people are worthy of an invitation, which can make creating a guest list tricky for those with budgets in mind.

According to data from the online wedding resource The Knot, the average wedding catering cost per guest is roughly \$70. However, catering costs will vary depending on the reception venue, the number of guests, the foods chosen, and the region of the country where the wedding takes place.

When creating their guest lists, couples may wonder if they have to offer all guests the option of bringing a "plus one" to the occasion. As with other wedding day etiquette questions, the plus one concept is not set in stone.

Any guest who is married

It's typically standard to invite a couple as a whole to the wedding, even if you've never met the spouse. This often comes up when inviting work friends, according to Vogue magazine. Even if you have never interacted with a coworker's spouse, etiquette dictates that all married guests be allowed to bring their spouses along.

Any guest who is engaged or is in a serious long-term relationship

It can be challenging to know the relationship status of everyone who will be invited to the wedding, but chances are you'll have a good idea of those people closest to you. Include a plus one for guests who are engaged or in long-term relationships.

Consider guests who may not know others

Weddings often are times when childhood friends reconnect, or people who haven't seen each other in a while come together. If there's a good chance someone who is single and is invited to the wedding may not know anyone else there except the couple, extend a plus one as a courtesy.

Include the wedding party

All members of the wedding party should be offered the option of bringing a date to the wedding.

Apart from these guidelines, couples can establish any other rules, such as no plus ones for guests under a certain age or those who are not in serious relationships. The Knot also says it is polite to find out who the plus one will be so that wedding reception seating cards include that person's name instead of "and guest."



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Factors to consider before booking a holiday wedding

Holidays are conducive to festive atmospheres. Whether it's seasonal celebrations for Christmas or Chanukah or summertime soirees on Fourth of July or Labor Day weekends, there's no denying festive vibes tend to prevail when holidays turn up on the calendar.

Weddings also are marked by festive atmospheres, and many couples are tempted to make their nuptials even more jovial by saying "I do" during holiday weekends. Before making that decision, couples may want to consider a host of factors as they try to determine if a holiday weekend wedding is for them.

Availability

Guest availability is a big consideration for couples as they try to decide if holiday weekend weddings are a good



fit. Many families have holiday traditions that they might be reluctant to give up. For example, families who build their annual vacations around the Fourth of July may already have booked their trips by the time the wedding date is announced. Couples who antici-

pate inviting a sizable number of guests may want to avoid holiday weekend weddings to ensure all of their friends and family members will be in attendance.

Travel

Travel is another potential flag for holiday weekend

weddings. Asking guests to travel during weekends that are notoriously busy in regard to travel may be asking too much or it might make things more convenient for some guests. A 2019 report from the Transportation Security Administration indi-

cated that nearly 27 million passengers were expected to pass through airport screening checkpoints during that year's Thanksgiving travel period. Some guests may be reluctant to travel on busy holiday weekends, while others who are already traveling to the wedding destination may see holiday weddings as a great way to see their families and attend a wedding without having to pay for separate flights. In addition, some guests may be more likely to travel during a holiday weekend knowing they can return home at their leisure since they don't have to work on Monday. Couples can gauge their guests' temperatures on holiday weekend travel before making their decision.

Cost

Cost is always a consideration when planning a wedding, and it merits consideration for couples toying with

the idea of getting married on or around a holiday as well. Venues tend to be less expensive on Fridays and Sundays, so couples who tie the knot on holiday weekends when no one has to work on Monday might save a considerable sum of money by tying the knot on Sunday. But venues and vendors may charge couples more if they get married on the Saturday of a holiday weekend. Competition for venues and vendors also may be greater during holiday weekends as people celebrate the holiday. That means couples may have to spend more to book their desired venues and vendors if they hope to get married during holiday weekends.

Couples must consider a host of factors as they try to determine if holiday weekend weddings are right for them.



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How to host a socially distant wedding

It's likely that few people heard of "social distancing" prior to 2020. That changed as the novel coronavirus COVID-19 spread rapidly across the globe and the world found itself in the midst of a deadly pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines social distancing as keeping a safe distance of at least six feet between yourself and other people who are not from your household. Public health officials continue to champion social distancing while acknowledging the fatigue that many people have experienced as the pandemic stretched on for months. Though much of the world hit the proverbial pause button, life went on during the pandemic. Perhaps nowhere was that more evident than at the altar, where many couples still tied the knot, albeit in scaled back ceremonies that adhered to social distancing guidelines in their communities.



Engaged couples who have yet to tie the knot no doubt recognize that planning a socially distant wedding will not be the same as organizing more traditional ceremonies and receptions. While planning a socially distant wedding

presents some unique challenges, couples can take certain steps to ensure their big day is memorable and safe.

• **Spread the socially distant word.** Let guests know what they're in for should they decide to take

part in the festivities. Many people have strictly followed social distancing guidelines, while others have been reluctant to do so. Couples intent on keeping themselves and their guests safe from COVID-19 should emphasize that their weddings will be socially distant affairs so there's no confusion come the big day.

• **Stream the wedding online.** Stream the wedding online for those guests who won't be in attendance. By the end of 2020, millions of people had already "attended" weddings via platforms like Zoom, so loved ones may be experienced virtual guests by the time couples walk down the aisle in 2021. Couples who may need some help planning virtual affairs can visit the virtual wedding coordinators at Wedfury.com, who recently partnered with Zoom to help couples bring their ceremonies online.

• **Pare down the in-person guest list.** Couples who planned large weddings prior to the pandemic can still invite all of their loved ones to witness the festivities online, but pare down the in-person guest list to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. Limit in-person guests to immediate family and those people who are part of your social distancing bubble.

• **Plan a party for down the road.** Couples can still celebrate their nuptials with family and friends down the road. Plan a post-pandemic reception and let guests know you will fill them in on the details once social distancing restrictions have been lifted.

Socially distant weddings may require couples to take some unusual steps as they try to tie the knot while keeping themselves and their loved ones safe.

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Picture perfect wedding day photography tips

Few things document weddings more effectively than photographs. Carefully curated wedding albums and portraits hung on walls serve as daily reminders of a couple's special day.

Photography is often left in the very qualified hands of professional photographers. However, couples can pitch in to make their photos really pop. These picture pointers from industry insiders can help couples put their best smile forward.

Leave ample time

A carefully orchestrated timeline can ensure photos are the best they can be. Why? Because a couple who is relaxed and not overwhelmed will notice that attitude translates to their photographs. When planning wedding timelines, couples should leave ample oppor-

tunities for getting dressed, chatting with the wedding party and going through various photography settings to grab great photos, advise the experts at Martha Stewart.

Put together a short list

The photographer will have his or her ideas of which shots to cover, but a couple with specific goals in mind should relay that information to their photographer. For example, if a grandparent is getting up in years, request some solo photos of that person so you can look back on happy times together. Certain couples want to be snapped posing with a beloved pet. Putting that on the list helps ensure it will happen.

Enlist a family photo coordinator

If the photographer does not have his or her own as-



sistant, recruit someone who is assertive to help wrangle everyone for the family shots. Attempt to get family photos when family members are relaxed but not too far ruffled by dancing or having a good time.

Play your style safe

A wedding day is not a time for the bride or groom to try a dramatic new style, according to photographer Amanda Lamb. Resist the urge for a daring cut or color. It's also likely not the place to try

out new facial hair or heavy makeup. A couple unaccustomed to the way they look may be shy in front of the camera.

Delve into the details

Prepare wedding details, like gowns, shoes, accesso-

ries, etc., in advance to save time once the photographer arrives, suggests Desi Mendoza, a pro from Dez and Tam Photography. Invest in a beautiful hanger for the wedding gown as well, because you may want to photograph that on its own.

Learn to pose

Couples can practice posing in front of mirrors to get a feel for body positions that put them in their best light. A photographer's advice in regard to posture is invaluable as well. Create space between arms and the body and learn how to angle the body so you look your best.

Photos will capture wedding day memories forever. Couples can put themselves in the best positions for success by following some photography guidelines.

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