

Your planner

MAKE
IT
EASY

Here's everything you need to know to plan the day of your dreams –without turning up the dial on your stress-o-meter!

So you're engaged, and the reality of planning your dream wedding has begun to sink in. You've got to organise a big party for the most important people in your life, with fab food and drink, and decide on flowers, table decorations, cake and what seems like a million other things. Where should you have the ceremony? What vows will you make? And that's before you've even started to think of your outfit! If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't worry – You & Your Wedding's expert team has put together this simple planning guide and checklist so you can organise your day. Our readers spend an average of nearly £20,000, but your figure may be much more or less. So work out your budget and stick to it (the online budgeter at youandyourwedding.co.uk is brilliant!). Memorable weddings aren't always the most extravagant ones, so be imaginative rather than just flash with your cash. What guests really want to see is a happy couple who are madly in love – and that doesn't cost a penny.

TURN OVER FOR MORE PLANNING IDEAS...

TOP TIPS

- Get web-friendly: visit youandyourwedding.co.uk
- Start a special wedding file for everything to do with the day.
- Open a special bank account to keep all funds in one place.
- Stick to your budget. If you do overspend on one thing, cut back somewhere else.

The first big decision you'll have to make is the type of marriage ceremony you want. If you live in England or Wales, you have two main choices: a religious ceremony or a civil wedding in a licensed building or register office. Under a recent White Paper, proposed changes in the law would allow you to marry almost anywhere. There is no set date for when this will become law but it's worth checking on the most recent legislation. But in Scotland you can have a religious or civil wedding just about anywhere. Or you might want to get married abroad. Check with the wedding department of one of the big tour operators to find out about legal requirements.

The church wedding

As long as you're both free to marry and one of you lives in the parish, or you're on the electoral roll, you should be able to marry in your local church. Regular church attendance isn't always necessary but some ministers insist on it, so make sure you check with your local church first.

The civil wedding

Since 1994, a change in the law has meant that couples in England and Wales (but not Scotland, Northern Ireland or Ireland) can marry in any building with a wedding licence. At present there are more than 3000 licensed properties (your local authority can give you a complete list). A civil ceremony is conducted by the local registrar, who travels to your venue to perform the marriage. This ceremony can have no religious connotations, including words and music, but you can have readings of your choice provided they're approved by the registrar. The other type of civil wedding in a register office is a quick, simple service. You can book both types of civil ceremony up to 12 months before your wedding.

The overseas wedding

About 30,000 UK couples now marry overseas every year. In most countries it's possible to arrange a civil or religious ceremony and all of this can be organised by an experienced tour operator. A change to European marriage law means that weddings in countries such as Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Germany are now easier to organise.

Your ceremony

There's no set formula for the perfect ceremony because every couple commits to marriage for different reasons. They also like different readings, poems and music and want to express their feelings in different ways. It is, of course, perfectly acceptable to go along with the service

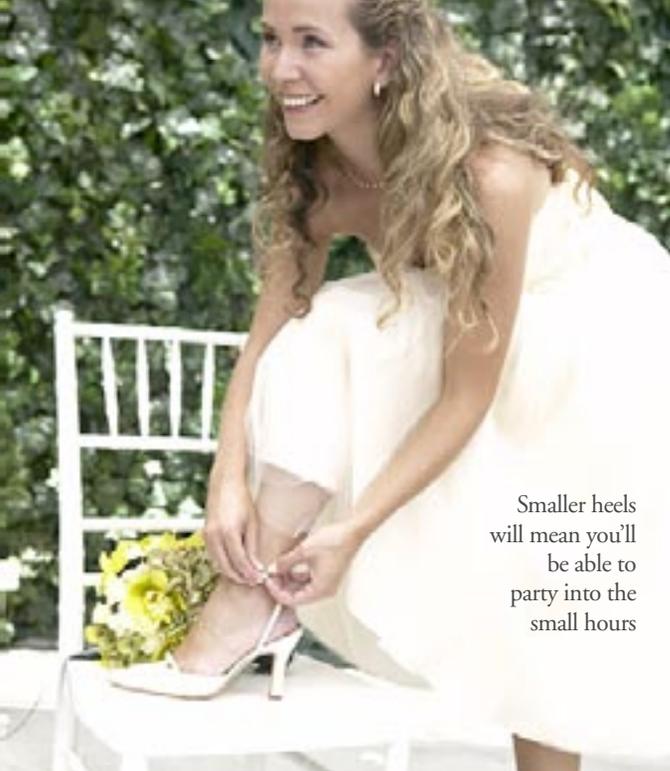
Get creative and mix fruits into your floral centrepieces



Legally binding

To be legally married in the UK...

- ♥ You and your fiancé must be at least 16 years old (in England and Wales, if either of you is under 18, your parents or guardian must give their consent).
- ♥ You must not be closely related.
- ♥ The marriage must take place in premises where marriage can be legally solemnised. These include register offices, licensed buildings, parish churches and those places of worship registered for marriage.
- ♥ The ceremony must take place in the presence of a registrar or other authorised person.
- ♥ The ceremony must take place between 8am and 6pm.
- ♥ Two witnesses must be present.
- ♥ You must both be free and eligible to marry.



Smaller heels will mean you'll be able to party into the small hours

as outlined by your officiant. But for something more individual, consider adding a couple of lines to the service itself or a piece of music that means something to you both. If you're planning a civil ceremony you have much more freedom and can stamp your mark on almost the whole service. But the act of marriage is a legal procedure and you have to stay within the guidelines laid down by the law. Work closely on your plans with your minister or registrar, getting their approval well in advance of the day.

Second time around

If you're divorced and your former spouse is still alive, you'll find it very difficult to have a full marriage service in the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church, although this is currently under review. Some denominations, such as the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, will make exceptions based on individual cases. For couples with strong religious convictions who aren't able to get married in church, a blessing is a popular alternative. This can be held after you've had a civil ceremony at either a register office or a licensed venue. Widows and widowers are free to remarry in a church or a synagogue as they please.

A question of faith

If you and your fiancé are of different faiths, organising the ceremony is likely to be more tricky, and you may not be able to have a religious ceremony at all. You might need a combination of ceremonies or blessings so a civil ceremony followed by two separate blessings may be the only solution. Contact the respective ministers involved to find out exactly what will be possible. Some religions forbid marriage to members of other religions and it's important to check this at an early stage by consulting the respective authorities. ▶

What the experts say

Little gems of advice for you from top wedding planners



♥ "Be honest. If you don't like something, speak up. You won't offend anyone. There's nothing worse than coming away from a meeting wishing you hadn't lied and told them you love pink!"

Susanna Richardson, Bride Camp (bridecamp.co.uk)

♥ "Don't forget to pay attention to the little details. An ivory umbrella inscribed with your names at the church gate, or a cone of confetti to throw at the appropriate time go a long way to making your wedding day even more memorable."



Kelly Chandler, The Bespoke Wedding Company (thebespokeweddingco.com)



♥ "A contact list is invaluable. Put together a list of your suppliers' names, what they're providing and their contact number for the day. Give a copy of this

list to your venue and to your chief bridesmaid. Then, if something hasn't arrived or things go wrong, the right person can be contacted quickly."

Kathryn Lloyd, Kathryn Lloyd Wedding Design (kathrynlloyd.co.uk)

♥ "When you choose your venue, think about what style and mood you want to achieve. What's the venue like in terms of decor? Does it fit your wedding style?"



Will you have to spend a lot of money on flowers and decorations to make it beautiful?"

Sonita Gale, Time 4 You (07956 602898, time4you.co.uk)



♥ "Take advantage of free wedding-planning tools such as budget planners (see youandyourwedding.co.uk) to help you keep track of your plans, save time and ease stress!"

Nafisa Mark, Nafisa Wedding Events (nafisaevents.com)

♥ **NEXT ISSUE:** We'll be asking real-life brides how they found the perfect reading for their ceremony. Out 8 February.

SAMPLE INVITATION WORDING

Traditional (bride's parents as hosts)

Mr and Mrs John Smith request the pleasure of ... at the marriage of their daughter Jane to Mr Jack Jones

Bridal couple as hosts

Miss Jane Smith and Mr Jack Jones request the pleasure of ... at their marriage

Divorced parents as hosts

Mr John Smith and Mrs Liz Smith request the pleasure of ... at the marriage of their daughter Jane

Remarried mother/father as host

Mr and Mrs James Brown/Mr and Mrs John Smith request the pleasure of ... at the marriage of her/his daughter Jane

Widowed mother as host

Mrs John Smith requests the pleasure of ... at the marriage of her daughter Jane



Check out the Real Wedding section at youandyourwedding.co.uk

THE SEATING PLAN

The reception seating plan can cause sleepless nights for the bride and groom. Don't let it become a headache. If certain members of your family don't get on, just break with tradition and sit them separately. Your aim is to create a stress-free day and if this means having a top table with just the two of you, then so be it. Create a balance on each table with an even number of men and women, and avoid mixing age groups too much. Sit families together and put all your workmates on the same table as they'll have more things in common.

Setting your budget

It may not sound very romantic, but it's absolutely essential to set a realistic budget. As soon as you can, decide how much you can afford. Allocate about 50% for the reception and 10% each for clothes, flowers, photography and entertainment. The last 10% is for invitations, thank-you gifts and unexpected bills.

Now imagine your ideal day and rein in your ideas to make them financially viable. All but the most lavish of weddings involve compromise. Start a wedding file and open a designated wedding bank account to keep an accurate running total, so there are no nasty financial surprises to spoil your day.

Where do I start?

The sooner you start looking for your outfits, venue and suppliers, the more choice you'll have. This is especially true if you're planning a wedding between May and September, when your first choices may get booked up if you leave it too late. Once you've set the date, shop around and ask all the major suppliers for quotes.

Your dream team

To get value for money and good service, finding the right suppliers is crucial. Once you've drawn up a shortlist, visit each one to see if you get along. Ask florists, photographers and videographers if you can see their portfolios and call several of their previous brides for a reference.

When it comes to the food and drink for your reception, sample everything before deciding on the final menu. If you're just hiring a venue rather than having your reception at a hotel, it's worth asking the manager about reputable catering companies he may have worked with in the past.

Vows and readings

In a traditional Church of England ceremony, the bride and groom speak in front of the congregation on three occasions. First, they vow to love, comfort, honour and protect each other. Next, they recite the age-old words that begin, "To have and to hold". Finally, they exchange rings ("With this ring I honour you"). These are all legal requirements, but you may be able to write your own vows or promises, so check with your minister.

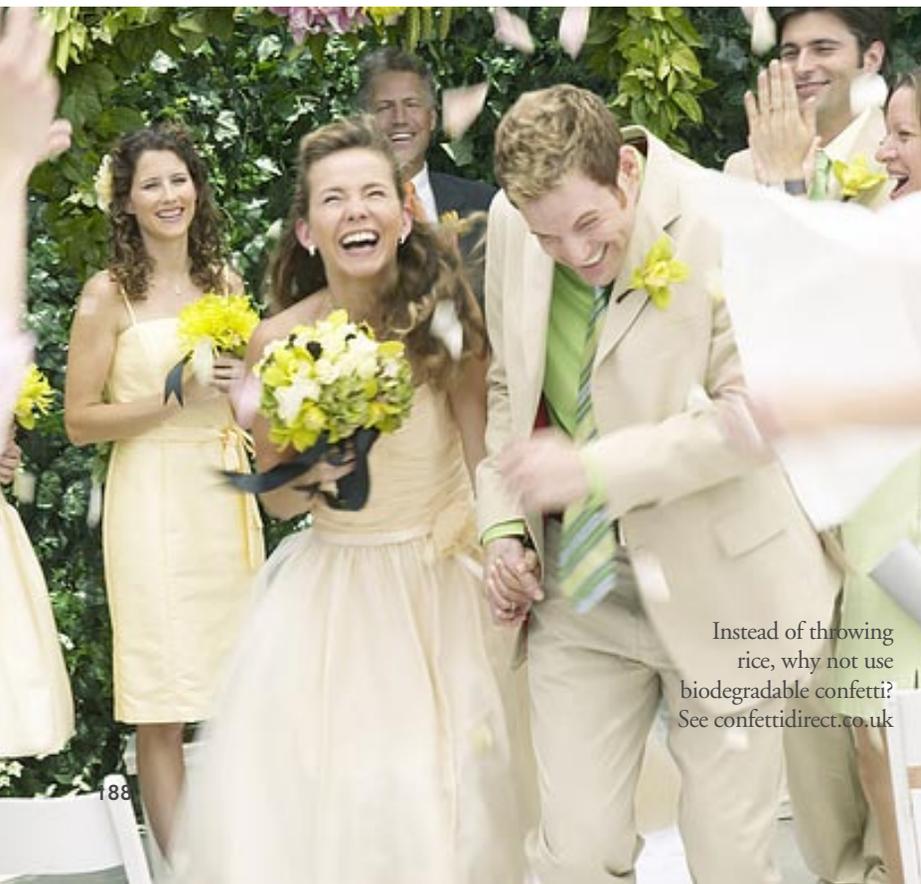
With a civil ceremony, much depends on where you want to marry. The 20-minute register-office ceremony offers little scope in terms of music, readings and vows. The two statutory declarations may be followed by a short reading but it must have no religious overtones. In licensed premises, on the other hand, you can introduce personalised vows and readings though, again, they can have no religious content.

Step this way

For a traditional church wedding or a ceremony at a licensed venue, the groom and best man arrive first and the ushers show guests to their seats: friends and family of the bride to the left, groom on the right. The bride's mother arrives with the bridesmaids just ahead of the bride, who arrives with her father or whoever is giving her away. At a register-office ceremony, the bride and groom usually walk in together. During the ceremony the chief bridesmaid holds the bride's bouquet, handing it back to her as the bridal party moves forward to sign the register. The best man is responsible for the safe keeping of the wedding rings.

Wedding toasts

The "honour" of making a speech and proposing a toast traditionally rests with the groom, best man and father-of-the-bride, but increasingly the bride is also likely to say a few words – usually between the groom's and best man's speeches. These speeches have specific functions: the father-of-the-bride speaks first and toasts the bride and groom; the groom thanks the guests for coming and toasts the bridesmaids; the best man rounds things off by replying on behalf of the bridesmaids and making the much-anticipated final speech.



Instead of throwing rice, why not use biodegradable confetti? See confettidirect.co.uk

The checklist

Your essential, at-a-glance planning guide

Do it now

- Tell relatives and close friends of your plans.
- Arrange the first meeting with your minister, priest or rabbi to set the date.
- If it's a civil ceremony, book the register office/civil venue.
- Set a budget and decide who is doing what.
- Choose your chief bridesmaid, best man and other attendants.
- Decide on the number of guests and draw up a list with both sets of parents.
- Visit possible venues.
- Discuss menu options with caterers and get estimates for food and drink.
- Make all bookings for the reception.
- Start looking for your wedding dress and attendants' outfits.
- Begin a beauty regime.
- Book your photographer.
- Organise wedding insurance if necessary.

Three months to go

- Arrange a second meeting with your minister, priest or rabbi to discuss the

service and agree a date for publication of the banns. If the wedding is in a church other than the Church of England, notice of the impending marriage must be given to the superintendent registrar.

- Choose the hymns and music; book the musicians for the reception.
- Order the wedding cake. Place an order for all your wedding stationery.
- Decide on your florist and discuss requirements.
- Arrange wedding-dress fittings and plan your going-away outfit.
- Discuss your hairstyle with your hairdresser.
- Book both the hotel for your first night and the honeymoon.
- Check passports and arrange any inoculations.
- Choose wedding rings.
- Book wedding cars.
- Organise your gift list.

Two months to go

- Finalise your order of service and order printed sheets.
- Reconfirm all your

prior bookings.

- Post invitations with gift-list details.
- Send out thank-you notes as gifts arrive.
- Buy all your accessories.
- Check the groom and best man have organised their wedding clothes.
- Choose presents for all your attendants.

One month to go

- Book hairdresser and make-up appointments for the wedding morning.
- Write to banks and other official bodies if you are changing your surname.

Two weeks to go

- Try on your full wedding outfit and practise walking in your shoes.
- Confirm the number of guests with your caterer and draw up a seating plan.

One week to go

- Arrange a rehearsal at the venue, if required.
- Confirm all reception arrangements in writing.
- Confirm photographer, flowers, transport etc.



Use fresh flowers on your cake to tie in with your bouquet

- Type up a list of any must-take shots and send it to the photographer.
- Pack for your honeymoon and order travellers' cheques if necessary.

The day before

- Help decorate the reception venue if necessary.
- Arrange for the cake to be delivered to reception.
- Have a manicure.
- Have your honeymoon luggage sent to the reception venue.
- Relax, have a long bath and an early night.

On the big day

- Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to

get ready in the morning.

- Have the bouquets, buttonholes and corsages delivered or send someone to collect them from the florist.
- The mother-of-the-bride and bridesmaids leave first, followed by the bride and her father.
- The groom and best man make their own way and should arrive at the ceremony venue 15 minutes before the bride.
- Speeches are usually made after the food. The bride's father speaks first, followed by the groom and the best man.
- Traditionally, the bride and groom leave the party before their guests.

USEFUL CONTACTS • Baptists Union (01235 517700) • British Humanist Association (020 7079 3580, humanism.org.uk) • Church of England (020 7898 1000, cofe.anglican.org) • Church of Scotland (0131 225 5722) • General Register Office for England and Wales (0151 471 4200, ons.gov.uk) • GRO Guernsey (01481 725277) • GRO Jersey (01534 502335) • GRO Northern Ireland (028 9025 2000) • GRO Scotland (0131 314 4447) • Greek Archdiocese (020 7723 4787) • Jewish Marriage Council (020 8203 6311) • Marriage Care – Catholic (020 7371 1341, marriagecare.org.uk) • Methodist Church (020 7222 8010) • United Reformed Church (020 7916 2020)

