

elements kitchen

Wedding Timeline & Check List

Sixteen to Nine Months Prior

- Start a wedding folder or binder. Tear out pages that inspire you from bridal, lifestyle, fashion, gardening, design and food magazines
- Work out your budget. Determine how much you have to spend as well as what and how much your families will provide.
- Build your wedding party. All your friends want to know “who’s in” and “who’s out”?
- Settle on a head count. Construct a guest list database with columns for contact info, RSVPs, gifts and any other relevant information. Remember that the best way to cut costs is to reduce your guest list.
- Hire a planner, if desired. A planner has insights about vendors and has already established relationships with them.
- Book the date at the desired venue. Decide if you want separate locations for the ceremony and the reception. If so, start from the most important place and choose your second spot after factoring in travel time between locations.
- Book your officiant.
- Research photographers, bands, florists and caterers.
- Develop spread sheet of vendors and their contact info.
- Now might be a good time to have an engagement party. Note that guests invited to the engagement party will expect to be invited to the wedding. So choose them accordingly.

Eight Months Before

- Book the photographer and/or videographer. You will not need to speak about the specifics but make sure the people you hire are open to doing the range of shots you require.
- Book the entertainment and attend some of the events your vendors are participating in.
- If your location doesn’t offer its own caterers then hiring one this month or the following would be a good idea.
- Purchase a dress. Custom gowns can take months to make, and even if you’re buying off the rack you’ll typically need three fittings. Veil shopping can be postponed for another two to three months.
- Book a block of hotel rooms for the out-of-town-guests. Pick three hotels at different price points close to the reception venue, so setting up early is a good idea.
- Register. Sign up at a minimum of three retailers. Keep in mind that some guests will tap into registries for shower and engagement gifts as well.
- (Optional) Launch a wedding website. Create your own page through a free provider. (Often times, the hotel you choose to book your out-of-town-guests can provide this for you.) On the site note the date of the wedding, travel information, accommodations and any other FYIs for friends and family. Then send the link to invitees. Some sites also offer a free online RSVP service.

Seven to Six Months Before

- Select and purchase invitations and hire a calligrapher if desired. Addressing cards is time consuming. So start now.
- Start planning a honeymoon. Better deals can be found by booking far in advance. If going abroad make sure your passports are up to date and schedule doctors' appointments for any needed vaccinations.
- Shop for bridesmaids' dresses. Getting everyone ready for a shopping trip is tricky; allow six months for the gowns 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.
- Book a florist. It's okay to wait until now to take care of the flowers. It gives you time to let your vision take form.
- Send save-the-date cards
- Depending-book structural and electrical necessities...i.e. portable toilets, extra chairs, lighting etc.
- Arrange transportation. Be careful; low riding vehicles make getting in and out with a fitted dress difficult.
- Start getting together the final information and start drafting a timeline for the day of.

Five to Four Months Before

- Book the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner venues. If you're planning a brunch for the day after, this would be a good time to book that too.
- Check the status of the invitations. Before they're printed ask for a finished sample and make corrections.
- Select and order the cake. Be aware that some bakers require a long lead time.
- Send your guest list to the host of your shower. Since you won't have a lot to do during this time period, it would be nice to have the shower around this time.
- Purchase shoes and start dress fittings. Bring the shoes you plan to wear to your first fitting so the tailor can choose the appropriate length. If your gown takes a while to make, it's perfectly fine to start fittings at the three month period, but after that you're cutting it close.
- Get your veil.
- Book the hairdressers and makeup artists. Make a few trial appointments with local experts (preferably on days when you have fun dinner plans and want to look glamorous). Take pictures so you can see how you look in photos and you both will have a reminder of the exact look down the line.
- Choose songs. What tune do you want playing when the wedding party is introduced? What should play during dinner? How do you want to get the party started? Keep a running list of the songs you do and *do not* want played.
- Plan welcome baskets for guests from out of town-if you choose. Include a detailed itinerary, a list of restaurants in town, transportation options, locally produced gourmet foods, a hand-drawn map of local attractions, and a sweet-smelling candle to freshen the room.

Three Months Before

- Finalize the menu and the flowers. This may seem awfully late in the game, but since both food and flowers are affected by the season, you should generally wait to see what's available.
- Order favors, if desired. Guests always appreciate edibles. Safe bets: monogrammed cookies or a treat that represents your city or region. Also a "candy station" is fun for guests of all ages to enjoy.
- Make a list of the people who are giving toasts. Aside from the standard people (the best man, the maid of honor, the couple's parents), is there any other loved one whom you would like to speak? If anyone fits the bill, ask him now so he can plan what to say.
- Finalize the readings. Determine what you would like to read at your ceremony and who will do the reciting. Call the readers and find out their interests.
- Purchase your undergarments and have your second fitting. Always save the fabric that's cut off your dress; you never know when it might come in handy.
- Finalize the order of the ceremony and the reception.
- Print menu cards, if you like, and programs. If they aren't in your stationery budget, consider whipping up something on your computer and having copies printed at a local office-supply store or on a copier.
- Purchase the rings. By doing this now, you'll have time for resizing and engraving.
- Send your event schedule to the vendors. Giving them a first draft now gives enough time for changes and feedback.

Two Months Before

- Meet with the photographer to discuss shots and locations. Complete a walk-through of the locations and point out spots that appeal to you for posed photos.
- Sit down with the band or the deejay and review the playlist. Come prepared with your wish list, and ask that band (gently) to learn any songs not in their repertoire.
- Send 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.
- Touch base with the vendors. Make sure you have gotten feedback and have answered all questions about the schedule you sent the previous month. If the day is especially complex, consider getting them all together for lunch to iron out the kinks.
- Submit a newspaper wedding announcement. Note that some publications have strict rules about how the photograph should look; check your local paper's website for specifics.
- Enjoy a bachelorette party. Usually the maid of honor, with the help of the bridesmaids, will plan a night out for you. If your friends haven't mentioned it about two months before the wedding, feel free to ask-for scheduling purposes.

One Month Before

- Enter RSVPs into the guests-list database. Phone invitees who haven't yet responded.
- Get your marriage license. The process varies by state and county and can take up to six days, but it's good to leave yourself lots of time. Mail the rehearsal-dinner invitations.
- Visit the dressmaker for your last fitting. For peace of mind, it may be a good idea to arrange a fitting the week of the wedding. If you try on the dress that week and it fits like a glove, cancel the appointment.
- Stock the bar. Now that you have a firm head count, order accordingly.
- Send out as many final payments as you can.
- Confirm times for hair and makeup and all vendors.
- Email and print directions for drivers of transport vehicles. The chauffeurs will have ample time to navigate a route.
- Assign seating. Draw a large diagram of the room on a poster board or a piece of cardboard the same way they appear in the room. Write the names of female guests on pink sticky notes and male attendees on blue ones, and stick them to the tables. This way, you can move people around without resketching the setting.
- Purchase bridesmaids' gifts to present at the rehearsal dinner.
- Write your vows, if necessary.
- Get your hair cut and colored if you choose.

The Week of the Wedding

- Reconfirm arrival times with vendors.
- Delegate small wedding-day tasks: someone to bustle the dress, someone to carry your things, someone to be in charge of gifts (especially the enveloped kind), someone to hand out tips, and someone to be the point person for vendors.
- Send a timeline to the bridal party. Include every member's contact information on the document, along with two or three point people for vendors to call if there are problems.
- Make arrangements for the dress to be delivered or picked up.
- Supply your photographer with a list of moments that you want captured on film.
- Set aside checks for the vendors and tips in envelopes to be handed out on the wedding day.
- Book a spa treatment (like a massage), if only to preserve your sanity, and a manicure/pedicure appointment for the day before the wedding.
- Send the final guest count to the caterer and the venues hosting any other wedding related events. Typically, companies close their lists 72 hours in advance.
- Break in your shoes. Turn up the stereo and dance away.
- Assemble and distribute the welcome baskets.
- Pack for your honeymoon.