



SPRING
CREEK



Bride
TO DO LIST



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

12 MONTHS OUT

Determine your budget

It's time to do the math and crunch some not-so-fun numbers. Before you can start anything, you have to figure out who's paying for what and determine your wedding's bottom line. From there, you'll want to break down said budget—what's a priority? What's not?—and start allocating funds accordingly. (A little market research here comes in handy.) And since these numbers will change as you plan, it's smart to start a detailed spreadsheet from the get-go. This will help you keep track of your spending and make it easy to adjust numbers along the way.

Make a guest list

If only you could invite any and everyone, right?! Chances are, you can't, which is why you have to put a cap on dishing out invites. When deciding your head count, consider your budget (how much can you afford?) and your venue (how many people does it fit?). Also, who's paying for what? From there, figure out how you're going to divvy up the list. If you and your partner are footing the bill, assume you'll get 70 percent of the invites, while both sets of parents will split the other 30. But if mom and dad are contributing, it's protocol to give all involved parties—your parents, your partner's parents, you as a couple—one third each. Next comes cutting, negotiating, and cutting some more until you reach a final number.

Hire a wedding planner

Again, this will depend on your budget. (Fair warning: Most everything will!) But if your funds allow—or if your peace of mind depends on it—now is the time to tap the manager of your big day. This person will be your right-hand woman (or man!) and will guide you in all decisions, from selecting a venue to tracking your budget and handling all the logistics.

Decide formality and overall theme

Now's the time to sit down and have another heart-to-heart convo with your partner. After all, the vibe of your wedding needs to be a mutual decision between the two guests of honor. To get the conversation flowing, pour a glass of wine/water/tea and ask yourself: What's important to you and why? What do you value? Also, know that your venue—more on that, below—is going to affect all of this. (Because, in most cases, we'd argue against a glam, black-tie theme for a barn wedding.)

Select the venue

OK, you know who you're marrying. Now the real question is where? Trust us: Choosing the venue is one of the most important decisions you'll make right now. Seriously, the location affects almost everything else, from how many people you invite to what kind of flowers go on the table. Chances are, it's also the biggest chunk of change you've put down, like ever. That's why you want to explore your options, visit the top contenders, and ultimately select a place that fits your guest count, style, and budget. (Here are the best venues we'd recommend again and again). But when push comes to shove: Throw out that pros and cons list and trust your gut. This decision is about how you feel when you're there.

Select the caterer

Your wedding is the best (and largest) dinner party of your life. So how exactly do you feed 150 of your nearest and dearest? Well, start with hiring people you trust to deliver—whether that's the venue's in-house caterer, a preferred caterer recommended by your planner, or even your favorite taco truck. And don't be afraid to get creative with your menu! Your guests will enjoy tasting your favorite cocktail as much as they will your grandma's blueberry pie.



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11 MONTHS OUT

Choose color theme and start thinking of overall design

Pull up your Pinterest boards, people! It's finally time to gather inspiration, select a color palette, and create a mood board. If you're struggling for inspo, planner Jessica Sloane recommends taking a step back to look at things that are already in your world—like how you've decorated your house, what you are liking on Instagram, etc.—and draw inspiration from that.

Hire vendors who book up quickly, including your photographer, band, DJ, and videographer

These are the people who will make your night fun—and all those memories last forever (AKA, they're important). Do your research before you hire, ask all the right questions, and maybe even "date" your photographer. Seriously, this could be the start of a beautiful friendship.

10 MONTHS OUT

Start shopping for your wedding dress

You may know exactly what you want or you might not, which is OK too. To get you started, here's an ultimate guide to dress shopping. Also, visit these places in Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York City—because finding a gown may be trial-and-error, but finding a salon shouldn't be.

Book hotel-room blocks for guests

It's a thoughtful gesture to block out rooms (and secure a discounted rate) for your guests. Here's everything you need to know.

Create your wedding website

Get your site running now because you'll need to put the URL on save-the-dates next month. Follow these rules and make it pretty using Riley & Grey, Squarespace, or Appy Couple.

Take engagement photos

Now is a great time to practice being in front of the camera, especially since most photographers include a session in your package. But don't fret: We have three tips for the camera shy.

Start looking at invitations

The wedding invitation is a guest's first impression of your big day! That's why you want to put your best foot forward with a personalized preview. If you're going custom, start working with a graphic designer or stationer now to create your dream suite. If you're going for a less involved route, you can wait until the six-month mark. (Invites will be sent out just six to eight weeks prior to the big day.) Here are 10 of our favorite sites to look for invites.



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9 MONTHS OUT

Buy your wedding dress

It's time to say yes to the dress if you want to avoid rush fees.

Send save-the-dates

Let everyone officially know when and where you're making it official. And remember: Everyone who gets a save-the-date gets a wedding invite. No exceptions.

8 MONTHS OUT

Register for gifts

Involve your partner this one—after all, you two are building a life (and home) together. When registering, it's smart to ask for staples—like sheets and pots and pans, and so on—but it's even more genius to think about what you really want. Are you adventurers? Aspiring chefs? Charity givers? Consider your hobbies and tailor your registry to your soon-to-be-married lifestyle.

Select the bridesmaids' dresses and schedule fittings within the month

After browsing Brides.com for initial research, ask your bridesmaids to come shopping with you IRL—if they live close by. It will be helpful for you to see them in the dresses, and you could even ask how they feel in the options you're considering. (They do have to wear it in front of a crowd of hundreds, after all!) That said, we're all about the trend of selecting a color palette—like yellow, grey, burgundy, or white—and letting your girls choose what they want to wear. Even better, check out our guide to perfectly pulling off mismatched dresses.

Meet with potential florists

Much like hiring your other vendors, you want to be simpatico with your florist as well. In order to do that, we suggest polling friends for recs, scrolling through Instagram inspo, and asking your planner/venue coordinator who they recommend in the area. It's important that you find someone who is able to deliver on your vision and budget.





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7 MONTHS OUT

Book the rehearsal-dinner venue

Traditionally, the groom's family pays for the rehearsal dinner so treat this as an opportunity to impress your future MIL if that's the case. That said, you still have say in the theme of this party and where it should happen (especially if you're footing the bill yourself). We love the idea of hosting a family-style dinner at your favorite restaurant—here are some great ones in NYC—or even hosting a casual celebration like a clambake or backyard BBQ. Read this before you start hashing out the details.

Hire the ceremony musicians

If your enlisting the talents of a three-piece band, now's the time to do so. As for the actual music, we say don't go generic when you can go personal! Here are 115 song ideas for the processional, 45 for the recessional, and 135 for the ever-important bridal march.

Order rental items, such as specialty chairs, linens, draping, lounge furniture, white dance floor, etc.

You may think of these as "extras," and we beg you to change this way of thought. Great rentals—check out this guide—essentially act as the good bones of your wedding-day decor. Conclusion: Don't skimp on upgraded chairs and cozy lounge furniture (your guests will thank you!) if your budget allows.

Hire an officiant

If you aren't marrying in a house of worship, you'll need to hire someone to make it official. Couples can use a professional (check local listings online on Thumbtack) or take a more intimate approach and ask a close friend or family member to do the honors.

6 MONTHS OUT

Hire a lighting technician

The most important detail brides forget about is lighting. Seriously, the bulbs and candles you select are what will ultimately light your perfect venue, make your photos just right, and keep the party going—even after the sun sets. Here are 24 bright ideas. And another of 31 of picture-perfect candle displays.



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

5 MONTHS OUT

Book transportation for guests, if needed

How do you know if it's needed? Consider your venue's parking situation, guests' access to car services or public transportation, and the cost you're asking them to incur. Good rule of thumb: If it's going to run them \$20 or more—especially if you've already asked them to travel for a destination wedding—think about a shuttle bus. Or, some car services, such as Uber, allow you to book rides on others' behalf. For everything else you need to know about wedding guest transportation, check out our handy guide.

Book the bride and groom's transportation (limo, specialty car, etc.)

Time to think about you two! Whether you're into getting in to a stretch Escalade limo, or all about hopping on a tandem bicycle—get around in a style that's all your own with these 20 creative transportation ideas.

Book the honeymoon

Traditionally, wedding etiquette states the groom plans a surprise honeymoon for the bride. But, if you guys are tag-teaming your honeymoon strategy, try to have things semi-sorted out by this five month mark. That means being on the same page about budget, timing, travel arrangements, and a semblance of an itinerary. You don't have to schedule every minute, but each of you should share the most important takeaways you want from this trip, and act to ensure those activities will happen. Then, grab our top 13 tips to create the trip of a lifetime.

Buy or rent the groom's tuxedo

The groom walks out first, remember? Make sure that first impression on your guests is a good one. Step one is choosing between a tux or suit, based on the formality of your wedding, and then deciding whether to buy or rent. When selecting the actual ensemble, focus on fit and function. A well-made outfit will be flattering, but also allow your groom to show off any and all embarrassing dance moves without fear of splitting any seams. Finally, if you're going the renting route, avoid these five mistakes grooms make when renting a tux or suit.

Begin premarital counseling

Whether you come from a religious background or not, pre-marital counseling has worked wonders for countless couples. (The experts say so, and so do the couples.) It's helpful to have an objective third-party encouraging you to address issues that haven't come up yet in your relationship. And, counselors can provide you with healthy conflict resolution tactics so you'll be ready when the inevitable disagreement does present itself. Plus, some states offer a discount on your marriage license if you undergo counseling. Check it out, and here are [seven questions to expect] (<https://www.brides.com/story/top-premarital-counselor-questions>) from the counselor.





YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

4 MONTHS OUT

Have your final tasting with the caterer

At this point, you've asked your caterer to talk the talk through these questions. Now it's time to taste what they're really made of. The tasting has become increasingly important as more and more couples choose to customize everything from their signature cocktails to their desserts. If you're nervous about heart-eyes obstructing your taste buds' judgment, bring your planner or consultant. They've likely attended dozens of tastings, and will be your clear-eyed troubleshooter—paying attention to the detailing of the food and the attentiveness of the service, while you're crying over crab cakes to bae about how “It's just starting to feel so real, you know?” Here's more info on what to do and what not to do.

Choose your cake

We'll hit you first with the pinspiration: Check out these gorgeous photos and delicious flavoring descriptions. Now, you and your partner should settle on a look and flavor profile you both love. Don't stress about pleasing every one of your guests! This is your cake as a couple; it's about expressing you guys! (You can also consider a groom's cake.) Got the cake(s) decided? You need a baker. Find a reputable one who's available on your date, and happy to take on your dream design for an equally dreamy price. (Ask them these questions and here's what to expect at your cake tasting!)

Buy wedding bands

Does your fiancé (or you!) know the difference between an engagement ring and a wedding band? Read up, and then look through some of our favorites for him and her.

Select groomsmen's attire and schedule fittings within the month

Do you want the groom and his guys to be matchy-matchy? How can you [ensure the entire entourage gets fitted on time], (<https://www.brides.com/story/groomsmen-fitting-etiquette>) if they live all over the place? What else could go wrong? Breathe. You've got this, and don't be afraid to get the groom involved. He may be able to easily pull rank and get his men in line—a very neat, orderly, and well-dressed one, at that.

Hair and makeup trial

Help your stylists help you by researching some particulars before you come in for your trials. Look back at old photos of yourself so you can find something that's worked before and ensures you still look like yourself. Next, feel free to search social media for other inspiration; just don't delude yourself with highly-filtered Instagram expectations.

Bring photos and be as specific as possible about what you want and don't want. And if the whole thing still turns out a disaster, we've got advice for that too: our Hair and Makeup Trial Did Not Go Well — Now What? story has you covered.



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

3 MONTHS OUT

Order the invitations and hire calligrapher

There are a few ground rules when it comes to ordering your wedding invitations: order enough of them and account for some mistakes, make sure they will arrive in time, set up a system for recording RSVP replies, and confirm all addresses and spelling. But when it comes to design and wording, the options are endless. Need a little advice to rein it all in? Keep reminding yourself that the theme of your invites should match the vibe of your wedding and express you as a couple. If you commission a calligrapher, here's everything you need to know about calligraphy. Make sure your calligrapher knows it too, and can prove it before booking him or her.

Create or plan your menu

Once you've undergone a successful tasting, you'll have a good sense of your caterer's style and offerings, so you're ready to finalize your food! Maybe you're the couple who's hand-selected every hors d'oeuvres, main, side, dessert, and drink situation. Or, perhaps you just told your chef to "handle it" and called it a day. Either way, now is the time to stamp your approval on a completed menu that fits your budget, tastes, and timing. We present: Everything That Needs to Be Considered When Selecting Your Wedding Menu

Brainstorm guest favors and gift bags

You don't have to do favors or gift bags, but now's the time to decide. Here are some of our favorite options for favors, and these are Lauren Conrad's thoughts on welcome bags. Go forth!

Book a photo-booth rental

Photo booths have become a reception staple, but if you're hoping for something with a little more pizzazz than your standard step-and-shoot, check out these seven creative alternatives.

Write your vows

If you've opted to write your own promises to one another, start thinking about what those should sound like for you two as a couple. Traditional? Tear-jerking? Feminist? Fill-in-the-blank? Millennial? Pop-culture inspired? We've got guides for them all.

Select readings

Bible verses are an obvious choice here (Thanks, Mandy Moore a la Walk to Remember), but there are plenty of non-religious options as well. If you'd like for your readers to choose their own, make sure you give them as much guidance as possible.

Meet with the officiant and invite him or her to the rehearsal dinner

Lots of things to consider when asking someone to marry you, but your main concerns are availability, eligibility, fee and fit. Can your officiant of choice lawfully, affordably, and meaningfully help you two become one? Once you've chosen, make sure he or she is on the same page as you about your expectations and the overall tone you want for your ceremony. And if you've recruited a recently-ordained bestie to head up the charge, here's an article on how to perform and officiate a wedding ceremony" you can send along.



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

Start crafting any DIY items if you haven't already

Whew! Let's hope you were able to control yourself scrolling through our DIY inspo and only have a few projects to tackle at this point. (Read this if you're overwhelmed.). Get to crafting—and make it anything but crappy with good friends, good music, good food, and good breaks regularly!

2 MONTHS OUT

Send the wedding invitations (with RSVPs due one month before the wedding)

You already did the hard part—the selection process. Now, just print and assemble.

Send out rehearsal-dinner invitations (these can be included with the wedding invitations if you like)

If your partner and his or her family are handling the rehearsal dinner, make sure you give them an accurate list of addresses, and feel free to discuss the design and overall aesthetic of the rehearsal dinner. You don't want it to be an exact replica of the reception that will follow the next night, but you may also want to confirm you don't show up to an "eat with your hands" BBQ buffet in black tie.

First dress fitting

We know you've been following along on our Ultimate Wedding Dress Shopping Timeline, but just to remind you: your first fitting should be anywhere between two to three months after ordering, and your second one around the six-week mark. More questions? Here's an exclusive interview with Monique Lhuillier's Director of Alterations on how to have the "perfect" wedding dress fitting.

Pick up your marriage license

Ah, the fine print. There are five things to know when getting your marriage license:

- 1) Where to go
- 2) What to bring
- 3) How Much It'll Cost
- 4) How Long It'll Take
- 5) How Long It'll Last.

Every state has different laws and requirements, so Google yours. If you're having a destination wedding, whether domestic or international, you'll need to research those paperwork requirements as well. Then, make sure you as a couple, your witness(es), and your officiant sign it! (Here's what to do if, God forbid, you lose it!)



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

☐ **Buy wedding-party gifts**

How much you spend on your bridesmaids gifts is determined on an individual basis, but no matter your price point, your goal should be something that's as thoughtful, functional, and personalized as possible. Here are some suggestions from real brides, from real MoHs, and from the BRIDES team.

☐ **Do a floral mock-up with your florist**

Floral samples vary depending on your florist and your own wedding decor choices, but most of the time they'll include a mock reception table set-up, centerpiece, and bouquet. Now is also the time to talk tweaks and finalize your delivery and care strategy.

☐ **Give the song selections to your band or DJ**

Guys, if you need music suggestions, please hit us up:

- 105 Wedding Entrance Songs to Start the Reception Off with a Bang
- The 200+ Most Requested Wedding Songs of All Time
- Listen to the Most Popular Wedding Song in Every State

☐ **Give the song selections to your ceremony musicians**

And, again:

- 25 Best Classical Music Wedding Songs
- 45 Wedding Recessional Songs You'll Love
- 115 Wedding Processional Songs to Set the Tone for a Magical Day

☐ **Buy all small items**

Just off the top of our heads, those include table numbers, toasting flutes, cake topper, cake stand, cake knife, guest book, card box, ring-bearer accessories, flower-girl accessories, a cute hanger for your dress, and a garter. Also consider purchasing pashminas, flip-flops, and/or sunglasses for guests to change into at the reception, as well as baskets to hold them. Then, don't forget your signs ("Welcome," "Guest Book," "Dancing Shoes," etc.)!





YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

1 MONTH OUT

Assemble gift bags

Follow the same guidelines as you did for your DIY projects to ensure this task is fun, not frustrating.

Pay your vendors in full

The last awkward situation you want to deal with right before your wedding day is a vendor chasing money. Avoid that by keeping careful track of when and how much you pay each vendor. If there are some vendors who must be paid the day-of, or you're distributing tips, give your most trusted bridesmaid or relative a heads-up that come wedding day, you'll be counting on them to handle the labeled envelopes you're going to put together.

Create a seating chart

You thought the guest list was a pain in the hiney, and now you've arrived at the seating chart challenge—another daunting balancing act of relationships, egos, potential, and crisis-management. You'll want to think about your venue's floor plan, whether or not you'll have a head table and who will be sitting at it, and choosing a cool design. Here are twelve tips for creating the perfect wedding seating chart, and a digital planning guide, in case that helps too.

Order or make your escort cards and place cards

First, you should know the difference. While both place cards and escort cards designate where each guest will be seated at a wedding, place cards are more specific—and also more formal—than escort cards. A place card not only directs guests to the table where each will sit during the reception, but also points each guest to his or her particular seat at the table. Whichever you choose, you'll want your cards to complement the overall theme of your wedding, but again, the possibilities are unlimited. Here are some tips for making the process as stress-free as possible.

Have a final venue walk-through

Make a list of questions beforehand, and bring your planner or another close friend or family member to bring up anything you forget.

Put cash in tip envelopes for your planner/delegate to distribute

Remember those labeled envelopes we talked about for last-minute checks or tips? (By the way, here's a complete tipping guide on much and to whom). Primarily, you don't need to tip people who own their own business—such as photographers, videographers, and florists. It's customary to tip the following vendors: musicians, DJs, hair stylist, makeup artist, drivers, bartenders, and servers. Many couples tip the wedding planner as well.

Break in your wedding shoes

Walk around your hallways! Dance in your kitchen! Do everything in your power to avoid painful blisters on your wedding night.



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

FINAL WEEK

Take care of things like:

- Refreshing your hair color
- Getting your eyebrows done
- Manicure/pedicure
- Getting a massage (why not make it a couple's massage?)
- Final dress fitting (a friend or bridesmaid should come with you so she can learn how to bustle if your dress requires it.)
- Pack your bags for the honeymoon (don't forget your passport if you're leaving the country!), and confirm your travel arrangements
- Any edible crafting! Yum!
- Clean your ring (head to your jeweler to get your engagement ring professionally clean so it's extra sparkly on your wedding day.)
- Chase any RSVP stragglers and deliver the final head count
- Clear your work to-do list so you can only focus on wedding festivities and take it all in!
- Practice your vows out loud
- Write your partner a note



YOUR 12-MONTH WEDDING-PLANNING CHECKLIST

The big day is finally here! All your careful preparation and creative planning have come to fruition, and it's time to enjoy the wedding. Here's what to do...

NIGHT BEFORE

- Eat a healthy meal
- Pack a clutch or small bag of personal items
- Drink water
- Get a good night's sleep
- Put any boxes, suitcases, bags, and survival kits to bring to the ceremony or reception in the car. (You'll thank us tomorrow!)

DAY OF THE WEDDING

The morning of:

- Stay off your feet as much as possible
- Eat breakfast
- Drink even more water
- Take your dress and veil out of the bag early on and have someone steam them if needed
- Lay out all the items (rings, invitations, etc.) that you want your photographer to capture
- Exchange notes with your partner
- Say thank you to everyone around you!

For Brides With Less Time to Plan

Though 12 to 14 months is the ideal length for an engagement, every couple's engagement time is different.

If you're getting married in six months, try to complete all the wedding-planning checklist tasks designated for month 12 to 6 in that very first month, and then you'll be right on schedule with everything else.