

FROM WEDDING FAVORS to BRIDAL GOWNS

The Secret Guide to Having a BEAUTIFUL Wedding on a Small Budget

Planning a wedding puts stress on our emotions as well as our pocketbooks. During the planning of our wedding, my fiance lost his job which caused an even greater financial struggle. After experiencing my own mistakes and misjudgments during that time, I quickly learned “what not to do” and gained much wisdom, which I am fortunate enough to share with brides-to-be everywhere. I have been very successful in using these tips and tricks to help couples with their **financial burdens** in hopes of making their wedding experience a very blessed memory. Hopefully this list will also help many of you have a beautiful wedding on a budget you can afford. No one will ever know you didn't spend a lot of money on your wedding. Its our little **Secret!**

Look for our ***GOLDEN TIPS*** throughout this e-report for extra special savings!



RECEPTION, DATE, and LOCATION

1. Inquire about renting a local arboretum or museum grounds for the day. Arboretums are beautiful as they are blanketed with fresh, seasonal flowers and greenery.
2. Call the parks department in your area. Many parks will allow you to rent an area for your reception for free or a nominal fee. It cannot hurt to inquire.
3. Call your public beaches or a friend with a beautiful backyard. A beach is a beautiful place for a summer wedding. If you are really strapped for cash, why not ask a friend to help you by requesting their backyard? This would be a beautiful wedding present to you from them.
4. Research the grounds of your local college – A lot of colleges offer discounts to alumni for receptions. If your college has a beautiful gazebo or a special lake with grassy areas, it would be a beautiful backdrop for your reception. Even if you are not part of the alumni, inquire about the college's pricing. You may be surprised at the cost savings.
5. Restaurant – Some restaurants have private large rooms or outdoor areas which are perfect for a wedding celebration, and they are usually much less expensive than a reception hall.
6. Invite less people – Compose 3 lists: a definite, a definite maybe, and a maybe. Be honest with who you “need” to have and who you “want” to have. Remember, this is **your** day.

7. Advertising weddings – If you have a large guest list that you just cannot cut, inquire about referrals. A lot of halls offer low rates for advertiser weddings. This is how they get more business. Assure them that you have a “large” guest list and it will be great advertising for them. If you send some future business their way, they may be open to negotiate a low price. This applies to all vendors.
8. Consider other meal options for your reception. Instead of a sit-down dinner, try these cost-effective options: buffet, high tea with finger sandwiches, brunch, or hors d' oeuvres.
9. Reception prices are least inexpensive on national holidays. Consider Labor Day, President's Day, July 4th, or Columbus Day. Most likely your guests will be off from work and you can snag some great deals on halls. We had our wedding on Columbus Day and received 68% off our dinner price!
10. Consider a wedding on an “off” month or an “off” day. About 68% of US weddings occur between May – October which are the most expensive months. December weddings are beautiful and cozy. Halls are usually pre-decorated for you due to the holidays. Also, most wedding receptions occur on Saturdays. Choose a Friday night or Sunday during the day for some extra added savings.

GOLDEN TIPS

If you are not utilizing a reception hall, and need a caterer or food service, contact your local culinary schools or career services departments to find students who can cater your cocktail hour as practice or for credits. You can rent napkins and tablecloths at websites such as www.clothconnection.com. You can also rent a tent and drape holiday lights for a beautiful effect. Don't forget to make sure you have a place for your guests to use a restroom!



WEDDING GOWNS AND BRIDAL ATTIRE

1. Borrow a dress - Have any of your close friends or family members had a recent wedding? This may seem a little strange, but it would also be a beautiful bond between two close friends or family to share a dress on your special days.
2. Rent a dress – This is slowly becoming a national phenomenon. You would be surprised how many brides are renting dresses to save a few dollars.
3. You can find many bridal outlets in your specific location. The most popular is David's Bridal. www.davidsbridal.com. Check your local listings for outlets in your area.

4. You can find discount custom wedding dresses by typing in “discount wedding dresses” or “inexpensive wedding dresses” in any internet browser. You will find prices as low as \$150 for a dress. The only drawback is that you cannot try on the dress before purchasing, and once you receive the dress, you cannot get a refund. Make sure you are certain of the style you like and your exact measurements.
5. Be sure to check return policies for each online wedding gown store. Most of them do not accept returns. This is a very risky practice, as the dress may look great on the computer screen, but not great on you. It is only wise if you have a knowledgeable seamstress you can rely on to make proper changes to fit your shape and style. We recommend you try some dresses on similar to the style you want to purchase online before you make the actual purchase.
6. You can find beautiful vintage gowns at vintage stores and thrift shops nationwide. They are often inexpensive and only require cleaning and minor alterations.
7. JCrew just launched a new wedding dress collection in quality fabrics at prices from \$300 - \$3000. Check it out at www.jcrew.com.
8. If you go to a wedding dress specialty store, occasionally the sample dresses will be for sale at a discount. The dresses are most often in sizes 6, 8, or 10. You can also alter these dresses to fit.

GOLDEN TIPS

All of these tips can be used for bridesmaid's dresses as well! Also, try searching bulletin boards at local fashion design schools or contact career services departments to find students who can replicate a gown that you like for much less or even nothing. They can use it for class credits or personal advertising!



FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS

1. Try balloons instead of flowers. You can create a beautiful look with themed colors and different sizes.
2. Have your friends and family make them. You can find books and ideas in various craft stores in your area or on the internet. Have a couple of “girls only” parties and serve nice drinks for your friends with music. Take pictures and make it a fun and memorable experience. Include your pictures as a precious gift to each one of them.

3. If arranging fresh flowers yourself is an option for you, go to the online store www.proflowers.com which may have bulk discounts on fresh flowers. They offer ready-made arrangements as well. If you are near local farms, order from there.
4. Alternatives: If you are religious, why not hold a Bible with a single rose or flower? You could also hold a memento from someone you want to remember tied around one rose.
5. Sometimes less is better. One classic rose or calla lily with a little baby's breath can make just as much of a statement as an elaborate and expensive bouquet. This applies to the bridesmaids as well.
6. Another option is to have the church ceremony directly after Easter or during the Christmas season...this way the church will already be decorated beautifully. This will help you to save money on ceremony decorations.

GOLDEN TIPS

Ceremony Flowers – Try using big potted plants instead of expensive, elaborate flower arrangements. They cost less money and take up a fair amount of room. They also add a “home” feel to the ceremony. You can even make them yourself. Don’t count out your local dollar store or thrift shop. Get creative and think outside the box!



RECEPTION MUSIC

1. Consider a DJ. They are always less expensive than a band and can still be very entertaining.
2. If you must have a band, you can call the local schools to see if the music department has any bands that would be willing to play for practice or for a nominal fee. Just be sure to hear what they can play before booking them.
3. If you really want to save money, you can do it the old-fashioned way. You can use a friend’s CD player. They can handle the music for you all day as a wedding present to you.



PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY

1. You can find listings of photographers and videographers looking for work on www.craigslist.org. Be sure to meet them and sample their work before you give them any money. Make sure they are reputable and professional and always ask for a contract.
2. There will always be budding photographers and videographers looking to expand their portfolio. You can use this as leverage when choosing a novice photographer for an inexpensive price.
3. Again, calling local colleges or universities may be a good step. They may offer discounted and even free services just to get some exposure. If you want to make sure your pictures are professional, another tip is to hire an experienced photographer for the formal shots and the inexperienced ones for all other candid photos.
4. Ask your friends to take pictures. Put a disposable camera at every table so your guests can capture memories also.

GOLDEN TIPS

If you are trying to save money on every other aspect of your wedding, let the pictures be last on your list. Pictures are the memories you will have for years, long after the dress is put in storage and the band has finished playing. My advice is to spend most of your money on the pictures and videography and consider saving money on other things first.



WEDDING CAKE AND CENTERPIECES

1. Have a friend bake the cake as a wedding gift to you. Another fun idea is to go to a cake decorating class with your bridal party gals and decorate the cake yourself.
2. Have one small cake on each table which can also serve as the centerpiece. These little cakes can be baked by friends, if need be. Decorate with a few fresh flowers or color-themed candles. As a result, your main cake can also be smaller as it does not have to feed all of the guests.
3. Contact local culinary schools for students interested in a wedding cake project for credits or experience.

4. For a reduced price, a baker can bake a plain cake without decorating. For decorations, you can add a few simple roses and the attendants can hold the same color roses to bring the whole look together. Instead of flowers on the cake, you could also add fresh berries in many different colors.

GOLDEN TIPS

For centerpieces, you can purchase inexpensive glass jars or bowls online or at dollar stores or even at garage and estate sales. They can be filled with a few fresh flowers in glass beads or floating roses in water.



INVITATIONS

1. Many party supply stores sell 'do it yourself' invitation kits which can be assembled and printed out at home for a fraction of the price.
2. Another idea is to save money on postage. Have your guests reply through email or by phone call.
3. Hey it's the digital age, right? Why not Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, or text your invitations? Receive replies through either site or through email. You can always send out paper invitations to those who don't have a computer. Except your old-fashioned grandmother, everyone has a computer these days!



BRIDAL JEWELRY

1. A great idea for bridesmaid's and bridal jewelry is to make jewelry for the wedding day out of glass, wood, or colored beads. You can find them in craft stores. Just look for "make your own jewelry" kits. You can even make it a fun project with all of the girls! Get creative...whatever you imagine can become a reality!
2. Ebay is another great site for finding some great bargains on wedding jewelry. Just make sure that the seller is trusted and has a good reputation

3. Vintage and thrift stores can be goldmines if you catch them at the right time. You can find low prices if you are willing to take the time to look. You can find your local thrift store in the yellow pages or through an online search. Just type in "thrift store" with your city name.
4. For those of you who want a designer look at a discount, check out www.bagaceous.com. The designer is offering a 15% discount for brides who order and mention this document! The designs are handcrafted in Milano, Italy and are one of a kind; however, they are not expensive. You can choose from the necklaces on this page www.bagaceous.com/necklaces/ or you can have a necklace specially designed just for you. My personal favorite is the purple flower necklace, which was also a red carpet order! Just go to www.bagaceous.com/terms-and-conditions/ and click on "contact us" to order and Louisa (the designer) will take good care of you!



WEDDING FAVORS AND GIFTS

1. Favors can be made by your friends and family and can consist of everything from bags of sweet candies, jordan almonds, or mints, to little jars of homemade cookies and delights.
2. One issue with homemade favors is they are time-consuming because of the number of guests. If you want to save time, there are [inexpensive favors](#) you can buy for pennies on the dollar.
3. Double Duty – Let your place card holders double as your favors! Place card holders are much more inexpensive than elaborate favors and often come in bulk discounts. Remember: Place card holders can be small picture frames or mini photo albums. They are also beautiful and make great gifts. You can put the place card holder with the guest's name at each individual place setting and wrap it in a bow, raffia string, etc. Check out some popular [place card holders](#).
4. Now, you will need a "real" place card holder for the guests to know where they are seated. One idea is to make a big board with a list of the tables drawn out and a diagram where everyone is seated. You can decorate it nicely. Another idea is to print out the menus on nice vellum paper and type the guest's name and table number on the bottom. You can fan them out in such a way that the name appears in view. The guests can search for their name and have the menu in front of them. You can even alphabetize them so your guests have an easier time finding their name.
5. If you do not want to spend money on attendant's gifts but want to give them something special, why don't you write a special poem or note to each one with a picture of them? It is a nice memento and it will be cherished for a long time.

GOLDEN TIPS

If you really want a beautiful, classy store-bought wedding favor, there are stores online who offer bulk discounts and even offer favors under \$1.00. Don't forget to check out those place card holders so you can "double duty" and save money as explained above. Right now www.designstoremember.com is offering a 10% discount for a limited time on all orders (\$99 or more) to help people out in this economy. Just use coupon code **SAVE10** for some great savings!!

HAVE A GREAT WEDDING DAY!

Just remember...get creative! Join together with your future spouse, family, and friends and have a "think tank" meeting to discuss ideas about ingenious ways to save money. Don't allow tradition and past weddings to dictate what you should or shouldn't do for your special day. And most of all, enjoy this time. It will fly by and quickly become a passing memory. Hopefully my tips will help it to be a memory that will live on forever!