

STAYING WITHIN YOUR BUDGET

There is no getting around it, weddings are expensive. The primary way to cut costs is to cut the guest list and have a smaller affair. It is possible, however, to keep costs to a minimum and still invite all your intended guests and have an elegant event. The following ideas are meant to spark your thinking and creativity. You will certainly think of other ways to save as you work through your plans. By thinking creatively and being willing to compromise, you can create a wedding that is long on memories, yet short on costs.

Facilities: By holding both the wedding and the reception at the same location, you will save rental fees and transportation costs. If you or your parents are members of a church, consider having the wedding and reception there.

Most larger churches and event centers have well-equipped kitchens and may have numerous serving pieces available. They may also have candelabra, tablecloths, and table decorations.

The women of the church may be willing to help in the kitchen, including washing dishes and making punch and coffee. This can be a great help and often the only payment required is a donation to the women's organization of the church. Do be generous with the donation, however.

Some churches will allow you to hold the rehearsal dinner there also. You may have to cook the food yourself or have it catered, but it can be less expensive and more relaxed than taking the wedding party to a restaurant and you will already be there for the rehearsal.

Bridal Gown and Attendants' Dresses: You don't need to purchase your wedding gown in a bridal shop for a premium price. Attractive gowns are available in a number of places and at reasonable prices. Consider renting the bride's gown and/or the attendants' dresses. Gowns and attendants' dresses are also available in resale shops, in catalogs, and on the Internet, including on e-bay. If you order from a catalog or on-line, be prepared to pay shipping charges and to hire someone to do alterations if they are needed.

Gowns that are suitable for bridesmaids are often available near Christmas, New Years, and prom time and can often be purchased on sale. The bride might also consider wearing a gown meant for holiday wear rather than purchasing a traditional wedding gown, particularly if she is having a casual wedding.

You might choose to borrow a gown from a family member or a friend. If you or someone you know sews, consider having them make either the bridal gown or the attendants' dresses or the veil.

If you are planning a spring or summer wedding, you can often find Easter dresses in stores as early as February that are perfect for the flower girl. Easter is also a good time to purchase white shoes as well.

Flowers: Using flowers that are in season will reduce costs. If, however, your heart is set on having roses in December, be willing to pay a premium. Silk flowers do not always save money, since they are labor-

intensive to arrange, but do compare costs.

If you plan on using flowers on the guest tables at the reception, consider using brandy snifters and float one large blossom or a floating candle in them. Tie a matching ribbon around the stem and perhaps add a balloon or two. If a centerpiece is used on the altar during the ceremony, it can be moved to the reception area and used on a serving table.

Christmas weddings: If you are planning a December wedding, you may be able to incorporate some of the church or event center's holiday decorations into your decorating plan. If there is a Christmas tree in the reception area, place your gifts under it. If there are poinsettias or greenery available, work them into your decorating plan. Be careful, however, about having a December wedding and choosing colors for your wedding that do not match the church or center's decorations. If the church decorates in red and green, for instance, purple would not be a good choice for one of your wedding colors.

Food: Etiquette dictates that food should be served at a reception, but what kind and how much is up to you. The simplest and least expensive food to serve is cake, punch, and coffee. If more food is desired, trays of vegetables, fruits, cheeses, or hors d'oeuvres can be served. The most expensive reception to prepare and serve is a sit-down dinner. To reduce the amount of food needed, schedule your ceremony for mid-afternoon or in the evening after the dinner hour when your guests won't expect as much food. An evening dessert reception with a variety of desserts plus wedding cake is a popular alternative.

If you plan to serve a buffet-style meal, you can prevent the large eaters from taking more than their share the first time through the line by using 6" or 8" plates rather than larger dinner plates. That way, everyone will be able to get through the line at least once before the big eaters come back for seconds.

If there will be a large number of guests at the wedding, you can save on the cost of the wedding cake by ordering a smaller cake and additional sheet cakes. The sheet cakes can even be different flavors than the cake, if desired.

Alcohol: Serving alcohol will dramatically increase the cost of your reception. To reduce costs, consider hosting only a champagne toast or serving no alcohol at all. If your family and friends would usually expect alcohol to be served, you can avoid the problem by scheduling your wedding for morning or early afternoon, since alcohol isn't normally served early in the day.

Pictures: When money is tight, the first thing many brides eliminate is the photographer, but most regret it later. If you can't afford the services of a commercial photographer, contact local high schools or colleges and see if the photography teacher will photograph your wedding. Some photography teachers moonlight on the side, and are happy to have your business. Ask to see samples of his or her work, or have the person take your engagement pictures and see how you like the results.

Videos: Today's video cameras have become so easy to use that most anyone can take reasonably good pictures. If you can't afford to hire a professional videographer, ask two or three friends to take pictures from different locations in the room and at the reception. Be certain that the person knows how to operate the camera and that the camera is placed on a tripod for stability. Newer cameras will adjust for low lighting, but some older cameras do not, so plan accordingly. If one of your friends is good at editing, they can combine the videos, add music, a picture of the invitation or program, and other special effects.

Programs: Generally, if there will be 100 guests or more, or if you are including unique activities in the ceremony, it is important to have a wedding program. Programs can be printed inexpensively at copy centers such as Kinkos. You can design the program yourself on a computer, then simply have it printed on colored paper. The center can add a design, or you can use clip art. Some copy centers are open 24

hours a day and will even print the programs overnight just before the wedding. A program does not need to be elaborate or to provide exact details of the ceremony; a general outline will be sufficient. Guests will be most interested in reading about the members of the wedding party, especially those that they do not know, so be sure to mention who they are, such as "college roommate of the bride," or "groom's younger brother."

Decorations: Consider using potted bedding plants at an outdoor wedding or outside the entrance to the church or reception center. They will add a touch of color, then you can take them home and plant them in your yard or use them on a deck or balcony. Pots of herbs make attractive centerpieces, especially for outdoor receptions. They can then be given as gifts.

Balloons are inexpensive and can be used to decorate tables or the dance floor. You can rent a helium tank and blow up your own balloons less expensively than purchasing them already blown up.

Tulle comes in many colors and can often be purchased on sale at fabric stores. It can be used to decorate banisters, arches, down the aisle, and in many other ways.

With a little creativity, you can have an elegant wedding without breaking your budget.

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