

The Wedding Girl's SOS
12 month
Wedding Planning Guide

12 months

Budget – First things first you need to sit down with your fiancé and anyone else who will be contributing money to your wedding and talk figures.

Once you have your budget agreed you need to decide what are the most important things to you as a couple and then how much you want to allocate to each of these things.

See the Budget page of the spreadsheet for a guide to average costs and update your figures accordingly. It is very important to keep track of your spending and stick to your budget. Don't forget to add every little thing you buy to the spreadsheet, all those little purchases soon add up and you will be wondering where your money has gone.

Inspiration – Now is the time to start looking for inspiration. Look through lots of blogs and magazines for ideas and themes that you like. Do you want girly and romantic, or modern and sleek. Figuring out what you do and don't like will help you have a more coherent theme throughout the planning. Using sites like Pinterest can be a fantastic way of visually bringing all your ideas together.

Type of wedding – One of the first things you will need to discuss is what kind of wedding you want. Do you want a small intimate wedding in a tiny chapel with only your closest family and friends or a huge extravaganza with everyone you know in a giant tipi? Do you want the wedding to be at home or abroad? All of these things will impact your budget and guest list. Think about the weddings you have been to in the past, what kind of weddings have you enjoyed the most and felt most comfortable at? It is important that you stay true to what you and your fiancé want and not feel pressured by other people, remember this is YOUR day and you will only be doing it once.

This is also the time to discuss what kind of ceremony you want. Do you want a traditional religious ceremony, civil ceremony, a humanist ceremony or perhaps a blessing? The type of ceremony you want will probably impact the venue you choose. The venue may need a license to marry you on the grounds.

Guest List – Time to start thinking about who you want to invite. You need to decide on how many people you want to invite as well as can afford to invite to the entire day and evening. Split your list in to two categories day and evening (use the guest list page of the spreadsheet).

As you will be sending out your day invites first you can always move some people from the evening list to the day list if you have some guests RSVP that they are unable to attend.

You also need to think about whether you want to invite children, co-workers and partners. Inviting co-workers and partners to the evening only is perfectly acceptable. As is choosing not to have children.

Also take into consideration that you will need to find a venue that can accommodate your final number whether it be large or small. If you already have your heart set on a venue then you will need to contact them to discuss their capacity before putting together your guest list.

Set the date – Think about how much time you want to save & plan for your big day. Most couple choose to get married within 2 years of their engagement but there is no reason you can't give yourself more time or bring the date forward. Decide what time of year you would like to get married, are you dreaming of a winter wonderland or a Summer fete, figuring this out will obviously help you set the date.

Also think about things like school holidays, if you are having your wedding in a key school break then their may be some people that can't make it due to pre-planned holidays.

You could also consider having your wedding on a week day if you are looking to save money but you then need to consider that you are asking all of your guests to take a day off work.

Take time to discuss all of these things and you will soon come to figure out the best date for you.

Venue – Now is the time to start looking at venues. Firstly think about whether you will want the ceremony and reception all in one venue. If you want a church wedding for example you will need a separate venue for the reception. You would then need to think about how you will transport your guests to the second venue. If you want your wedding all in one location then this might impact the type of ceremony you can have. Are the venue registered to hold civil ceremonies? If not there are always other

options such as a blessing, you can do the legal bit at a registry office with just you and your fiancé. There are lots of possibilities but it's a good idea to think about the logistics before setting your heart on a venue. Once you have decided what kind of venue you want you can start making appointments to go and look around. When you have found a venue that you love don't forget to ask them lots of questions. Some venues are very strict on things like no fireworks, no outside caterers, times that live music needs to stop. So be sure to discuss all of these things with them so you don't have any nasty surprises after you have handed over your deposit.

Once you are completely happy with everything and are ready to go ahead and book the venue you will need to make contact with whoever is holding your ceremony (vicar, registrar, celebrant) before you sign a contract or pay a deposit. It is important that you deal with this straight away to make sure they are available on your chosen date and that they are happy to marry you, they will often need to meet with you at least once. Once this has been confirmed then you should go ahead and book your venue straight away so you don't lose your chosen date.

Save The Dates – Once you have set the date and booked your venue then this is the time to send out your Save The Dates to ensure all the people you want at your wedding have as much notice as possible. You only need to send these to people who are invited to the daytime (not evening guests).

Wedding Insurance – Once you have booked your venue I would recommend booking wedding insurance. I have heard too many horror stories over the years and insurance really doesn't cost very much in the grand scheme of your budget but can end up saving you thousands if something goes wrong.

Wedding Party – Now is a good time to think about the key members of your wedding party. Who would you like as your bridesmaids and best man. It is important to pick people that you can truly rely on as the lead up to a wedding can become very stressful and you will want to know that you have people around you who will help support you and help things to run smoothly.

Once you have assigned the key roles (maid of honour, best man, bridesmaids and groomsmen) if there are still a few people who you would like to be involved then why not ask them to do something like a reading, there are lots of ways to make people feel involved and it can also make your day feel more personal. Perhaps one of your oldest school friends plays the violin, could she play a piece at the ceremony while you are signing the registry, or is your favorite cousin an amazing baker, perhaps you could ask her to make your cake.

9-11 Months

The Dress – Now is the really fun part. It is important to think about who you want to take with you when you first go and look at dresses. You want someone who is honest but not critical, someone whose opinion you completely trust and respect. I would not recommend taking more than two people on the first trip. I always recommend trying on lots of different styles of dresses. It can often be the dress that you never thought you would ever pick up that ends up being the one you fall in love with. So keep an open mind and have fun trying on an array of styles.

Remember to wear suitable underwear, spanx and a multi-way bra in nude are usually best. You will also need to take a pair of heels.

Some dress shops require you to make an appointment and others let you walk in without an appointment so it's best to phone up and check first.

Also consider looking at sample sales. You can often find incredible bargains that can save you hundreds and even thousands of pounds. The dresses are often brand new they just need to be sold to make way for new stock.

Try to order your dress at least 6 months before your wedding date. You will need to have a number of fittings in the lead up to the big day.

Never feel pressured into making a decision about a dress there and then, always go away and think about it, this is probably one of the biggest most important purchases you are ever going to make!

Wedding Website and Invites – Now that your venue is booked you can start thinking about what kind of invites you want, do you want simple & elegant, fun and funky, hard copy or e-invites. Your invites are the first thing your guests will see in relation to your wedding so you can use them to give your guests a little glimpse of what your day might be like.

Having a wedding website can be a great way to easily share information with your guests. You can include everything from key information about the big day, to your gift list and recommendations of local accommodation. Some websites even let people RSVP and make menu choices.

You can either send the link to your wedding guests before you send out your wedding invitations (if you feel it is ready for people to see) or you can wait and include the link on your invitation.

Suppliers – The earlier you book suppliers the less disappointment you will have. Start talking and meeting with the most important suppliers such as Photographers, Videographers, DJ, Band and Caterers as soon as possible. It is very important to ask them lots of questions and remember it's ok to try and negotiate on price, especially if you are not getting married in the Summer or on a weekday, you can save thousands of pounds by saving a little bit here and there. If suppliers are not willing to lower their prices then ask them what extras they might be able to throw in to cinch the deal.

I always recommend getting at least 3 quotes to compare for each job, this ensures you are getting the best price and can often be used to negotiate.

If you live near your venue then I recommend asking suppliers such as photographers and florists to meet you at the venue, this makes it easier to discuss ideas and logistics.

Make sure you read contracts properly before signing them and handing over any money. If there is anything you are unsure about make sure you get them to clarify don't just skim over it.

6-9 Months

Book secondary suppliers – This is the time to think Florists, Hair & Make-up, Stationary, Transport, Cake maker etc. The same rules apply, don't be afraid to negotiate prices and to read contracts thoroughly before paying a deposit.

Suits – This is the time for your fiancé to decide on his suit. First he must decide if he wants to hire or buy and then he can make some appointments to go and try some on. If he is having something made to measure he may need to go for a number of appointments.

You can also make an appointment now for the male members of your wedding party to go and be measured for their suits.

Bridesmaid dresses – Now is the time to pick your bridesmaids dresses. Firstly decide if you are going to pay for them or ask your bridesmaids to contribute to them, then set a budget.

Organize a date to go out with your girls and try on dresses. Try and find dresses that your bridesmaids feel happy and confident in, this will always look best on the day. If your bridesmaids can not agree on one style then consider a multi-way dress that can be worn in multiple styles or perhaps pick a colour and then let each girl pick a dress in that colour which she feels happy in.

Make sure you leave enough time to have any alterations done, and be clear about whose paying for these. Also decide on shoes and accessories and if they will be having their hair & make-up done or will be doing it themselves. These costs can soon add up so don't feel embarrassed about asking your bridesmaids to contribute to some of the cost.

Hen & Stag Plans – You will want to check in with your maid of honour and the best man to make sure the hen and stag plans are underway. If you have specific ideas of what you want to do then you should discuss this with them as early as possible.

Hair & make-up Trial – Time to book a trial with your hair stylist and make-up artist. I would recommend trying at least two different hair-styles at your trial, to see what you feel happiest with. It's a good idea to take along a selection of images of styles that you like. If you are unsure of what you want then a good hair stylist should be able to help create something that looks great based on your hair type, your wedding dress and your own personal style. If you are not happy with how the trial goes then I would suggest finding someone else as the last thing you want is to be stressed out about your hair & make-up, it should be a really fun and relaxing part of your wedding day.

Discuss menu ideas with venue or caterers – Food & Drink is usually very important to most couples and often accounts for the largest portion of your budget so it is important to be happy with what you are paying for. Make sure you get to sit down with the venue's head chef or catering team to discuss ideas. Remember by using seasonal local produce it will not only taste better but will be most cost effective. If your venue has a set menu with things you don't like on it, discuss making some changes, most chefs are happy to do this and understand how important the food is for the couple.

Most guests don't end up eating the wedding cake as they are so full from a 3 course meal, which is such a shame when you have paid so much money for a beautiful delicious cake. So why not consider serving your wedding cake for desert, this can save a huge amount of money and ensures everyone gets to enjoy your lovely cake.

If your venue allow you to bring in your own alcohol and charge a flat fee or a corkage fee then sit down and do the math, even if it sounds high at first when you work it out it can actually save you a substantial amount of money and even mean your guests are provided with a lot more drinks for your budget. Be sure to ask if there is an additional service charge added to the food and drink as this unforeseen cost can add a huge amount to your bill, which you may not have accounted for.

Decorations & Details - Think about decorations and details - centerpieces, flower arrangements, table plan, guest book etc. Will you be making some of these details yourself. If so then you want to get started on them as early as possible as DIY projects can take much longer than you think.

3-6 Months

Start looking at readings and music – You will usually have two readings during the ceremony. Try and find reading that you either really like or are personal to you. If you can't agree on any readings then why not use a poem.

You will need to pick at least 3 songs for the ceremony; 1 for walking down the aisle, 1 for the signing of the registry and 1 for walking back down the aisle. This will vary slightly depending on what kind of ceremony you are having so discuss this with whoever is conducting your ceremony.

Dress Fitting – Your first dress fitting will usually take place about 6 months before your wedding date, this is when they will go through anything that needs altering. You will probably return for either one or two more fittings depending on how much altering needs doing. Your final fitting will usually be around 2 weeks before your wedding so that the dress fits perfectly.

Remember to take your underwear and heels with you.

Book smaller suppliers – This is the time to think about anything else you might want at your wedding like photo booth, food stalls such as icecream or hot dog cart, caricaturist or other entertainment. Although these kind of entertainments can be fun don't feel pressured to spend lots of money trying to fill every minute of the day, most people will just enjoy watching you get married and catching up with friends over some nice food and drink. And it's often the personal touches that people remember the most. The same rules apply, don't be afraid to negotiate prices and to read contracts thoroughly before paying a deposit.

Menu tasting with caterers or venue – You will have already discussed menu ideas with your venue or caterers and now is the time to taste the food and drink. Don't be embarrassed to give honest feedback, if there is anything you are not happy with you should discuss that with them and discuss how to improve it or alternative options. You need to be 100% happy with your menu and a good chef or catering team will understand this. The same goes for the drinks if you're not happy with the wines on offer then ask about alternatives, venues can usually order in different wines from their suppliers.

Accessories – Time to choose your accessories, everything from shoes, to veil, hairpiece, Jewellery, underwear etc. I would recommend taking your accessories to your second dress fitting and try them on with your dress so you can see the finished look and make sure you are not missing anything.

Make sure your stationary is finalised – Whether you are making your own stationary or having someone design it for you make sure everything is coming together and that your invitations are finalised.

Stationary to consider – invites, order of ceremony, menu cards, name places for tables or seating plan, thank you cards (you may want to use a photograph from the wedding day).

Not all stationary is necessary, you can decide what you feel you need for your particular wedding.

Look around for cheap alternatives to traditional stationary. If you are having a beach theme wedding for example, why not collect large pebbles from the beach and write each guests name on one and use them as place settings for the tables, or take a cool black & white photograph of you and your fiancé with the date and wedding website link written on the back for your wedding invitation, 5p each.

Gift List – This is one of the really fun tasks. Think about what you want, do you need things for the home? Would you rather have money? If you are not comfortable asking for money then why not ask your guests to contribute to one large thing like your honeymoon or a special piece of art. There are plenty of companies out there that let you set up a gift list where guests can contribute an experiences rather than just a cash donation, so for example they could purchase a sunset boat trip, or a beachside couples massage for your honeymoon. Usually the money all gets deposited into one account for you to use on your honeymoon but it makes guests feel more like they are contributing something special rather than just giving you cash.

Finish Wedding Website - Before sending out your invites make sure your wedding website is completely updated (if you haven't already sent people the link).

Send Invites – I recommend sending invites out as early as possible so you can bump people from your evening list to your day list if you get some people RSVP NO.

Make sure you put a clear RSVP deadline of at least 6 weeks before the wedding.

Buy Rings – Time to pick your wedding rings. Be sure to leave enough time for any sizing alterations that need to be made, often they need to be sent away for alterations.

Groom to start working on his speech – This can often take a lot longer than you think so it is a good idea to get started as early as possible.

The best delivery for a speech comes from practice, so practicing it in your car on your way to work or when you're home alone is highly recommended.

1-3 month

Bridesmaids Alterations – If any of your bridesmaids dresses need altering I suggest having these done at least 2-3 months in advance so they are not left to the last minute.

Wedding Dress Fitting – You may or may not have to return again for another fitting a few months before the wedding, otherwise your next fitting will be a few weeks before the wedding. Your wedding dress supplier will have advised you of how many fittings you need. Remember to take your underwear, heels and accessories with you to see the finished look and make sure everything is perfect.

Finalise all reading and music for ceremony – These may need to be approved by whoever is conducting your ceremony. You definitely don't want to leave this to the last minute.

Finish Details – Make sure you have finished making or buying any details for your day - Bunting, confetti, guest book etc. It can be very stressful trying to sew 20 meters of bunting the week before your wedding.

Draft your Table Plan – This can often be one of the things people find the most stressful. Leave yourself plenty of time and try to put people on tables with people they know and will have a good time with.

If you are having children then put all the children together on one table so that they are not sat on tables with people who may not want to be sitting at PG rated table.

Keep in mind you may need to make last minute changes if you do not have all your RSVPs back.

Collect Rings – Make sure your rings have been collected and fit at least 1-2 months before your wedding incase there are any problems with the size.

Make a play list for evening – You need to discuss with your band or DJ and venue if you need to provide a playlist for between their sets or after they finish. Your band might finish at midnight but you may be able to continue playing music until 1am, if so then you would need to provide this for your venue to play. Putting together a good play list can take a really long time, so don't leave this to the last minute. Try to include a variety of music that everyone can enjoy.

Hen & Stag Do's – I would recommend not having the hen and stag do's take place in the final 2 weeks before the wedding (unless they involve pampering and relaxing). Anything more than 3 weeks away should be fine.

Chase outstanding RSVPs – Once the deadline for your RSVP has passed then don't be shy to start chasing people. Often people have simply just forgotten they haven't done it and just need a little nudge.

Evening Invites - Send out evening invites at least 6 weeks before the wedding. Try to chase up all your day time RSVP's before then if you are planning to bump some evening guests to the day time.

Groom's Accessories – Make sure the groom has all his accessories sorted (cufflinks, shoes etc).

1 Month

Accommodation – If some of your wedding party and family are staying at your venue you may want to organise which rooms people will be staying in, especially bridesmaids and the best man. Where will you and your fiancé be getting ready? Who will be in the room with you when getting ready?

Final Wedding Dress Fitting – This will be your final fitting where you will usually be collecting the dress to take home with you. Remember to take your underwear, heels and accessories with you to see the finished look and make sure everything is perfect.

Final Numbers – This is usually when you will need to give your venue your final guest numbers. They will probably have already given you a date of when you need to do this so make sure you put it on your spreadsheet.

Confirm with Suppliers – Send an email out to all your suppliers confirming all the details, including their arrival time.

Send a shot list to your photographer – This is a list of all the important shots you want them to take, this could be everything from key members of your family to specific details you have worked really hard on. A good photographer should get shots of everything but I think it's always best to make your expectations as clear as possible.

Thank You gifts – Make sure you have bought all your thank you gifts (parents, bridesmaids, best man, ushers and anyone else who may have gone above and beyond to help you).

Finalise your table plan – Once you have all your RSVP's back then you can make any final changes to your table plan.

2 Weeks

Venue Meeting – At some point in the final few weeks I suggest you and your fiancé arrange a meeting at your venue with the wedding co-ordinator (and perhaps your maid of honour and best man) to go through all the logistics of the day. This is a good opportunity to make sure everyone is on the same page and knows what is happening and when. You can put together a final running order of the day (see example on the Planning spreadsheet) and make sure that the venue staff and your key bridal party all have a copy.

Colour and cut hair – If you need to colour your hair or are having it cut then do this at least 2 weeks before the big day to give it time to settle. I do not recommend dramatically changing the colour of your hair or having a dramatic cut before your wedding. Anything new you want to try should be done at least 6 months before.

1 Week

Nails and Beauty Treatments – Any beauty treatments such as facials should be done about a week before the wedding and nails should be done the day before if possible to avoid chipping.

Put together Emergency kit – You may want to put together an emergency kit for any little mishaps that happen on the day (needle and thread, safety pins, plasters, stain remover, extra hair pins etc). These little essentials can be a life-saver if you happen to spill a glass of red wine down your dress or a button comes loose.

Pack – In the week leading up to the wedding you will need to pack up a number of boxes and bags. Firstly pack up everything that needs to go to the venue, decorations, guestbook, table plan, details, playlist, rings etc.

You will also need to pack your 'wedding bag', so wedding dress, shoes, veil, underwear, jewellery, hair and make-up items, clothes for the next day etc.

If you are going straight off on honeymoon then you will also want to pack your honeymoon suitcase too.

Paying Suppliers – You may need to take cash or a cheque book to pay any suppliers who need to be paid on the day. I recommend preparing these in envelopes with the suppliers name written on it and give them to your wedding co-ordinator or best man to hand over to the suppliers.

Day Before

Suit Collection – Call to confirm the suits are ready on the agreed day and then go and collect them, make sure everything is there before leaving the store and make sure they are hung up and transported carefully so they do not get creased.

Confirm with Suppliers – Send a final email out to all your suppliers with the contact details for your venue's wedding co-ordinator, maid of honor or chief bridesmaid and the best man. This way if they have any problems on the morning of the wedding they won't be trying to contact you while you are getting ready.

Drop off everything at venue – Depending on what you have arranged with your venue you will probably want to have things transported to the venue the day before the wedding. If your venue allow then you may also want to set some stuff up and decorate the venue so everything is ready for the morning. If this is not possible then you will need to arrange for your bridesmaids and best man (or family members) to do this on the morning of the wedding so you can concentrate on getting ready.

Wash your hair – If you are having an up-do it is always better to wash your hair the evening before as it will be easier to manage and won't be too slippery. This also means it will stay in place.

Wedding Day

Wake up and smile – You're getting married today!!!

Tasks - Hopefully you should have nothing to do today except relax and enjoy, but if you do have any tiny things you want to check on that your bridesmaids can't do then do these when you first wake up so you can then concentrate on relaxing and getting ready.

Have breakfast – Some brides feel too nervous or excited to eat on the morning of their wedding but it is really important to have a breakfast, especially if you are going to be having a few glasses of champagne while getting ready. Have a small piece of toast with some smoked salmon and scrambled eggs, this will line your stomach and set you up for the long day ahead.

Having breakfast with your bridesmaids or your mum can be a really lovely start to the day, something that you will always remember.

Relax - Have a relaxing soak in a bubble bath with a small glass of champagne.

Get ready – Make sure your hair and make-up artist is arriving nice and early, you don't want to feel rushed. It's much better to be ready an hour early and have a glass of bubbles with your bridesmaids than to be feeling stressed because you're not ready on time.

Get into the dress – When your hair and make-up are done it's time to get into your dress, make sure someone has told your photographer a few minutes before just in case they are off photographing the guests arriving, this is a shot you will not want them to miss.

Take a deep breath – Once you are in your dress and have your bouquet it's time to take a deep breath, smile and walk down the aisle. You're about to marry the person you love more than anything else in the world!

Good Luck

Love - The Wedding Girl

Post-Wedding

Return any hire items – Make sure you return any hire items on time, they are usually expected to be returned within 24 hours so check with your suppliers. If you are going straight on your honeymoon you will need to arrange for a friend or family member to make the return for you.

Thank you cards – If you are not going on your honeymoon straight away then you should concentrate on getting your thank you cards sent out as soon as possible. This is an opportunity to say a personal thank you to each guest for attending your wedding and to thank them for the gift they may have given you.