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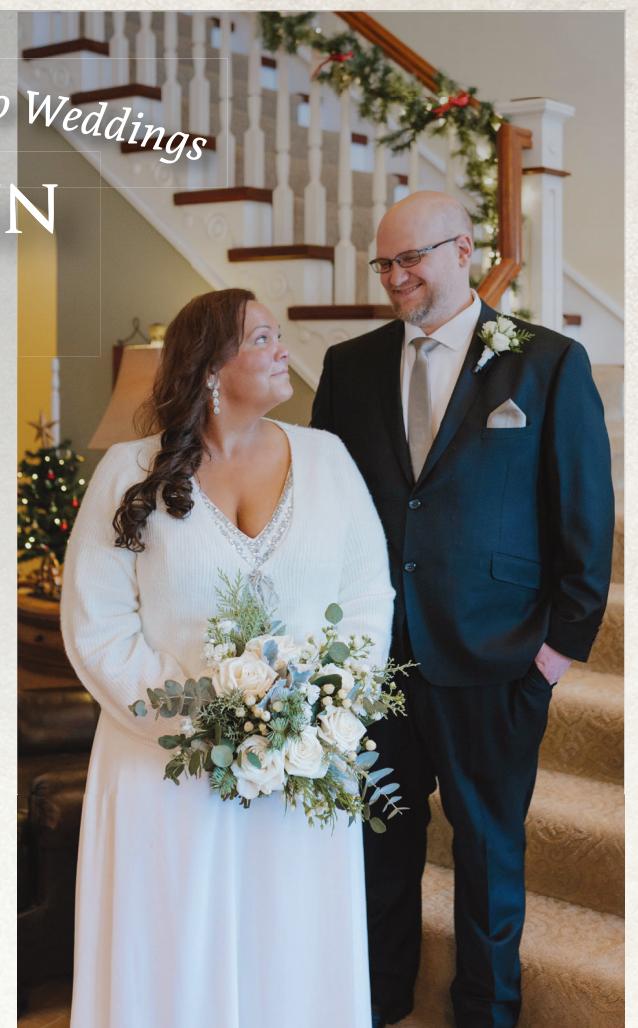
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# A Beginner's Guide to Engagement Ring Shopping

Couples far and wide will tie the knot this year. Weddings join two lives together and often culminate with a lavish party that sees extended family and friends gather around tables enhanced by floral arrangements and delicious food. But long before guests can choose chicken or beef or newlyweds mail the final thank you note, couples must first take the initial step on the road to the wedding. That means getting engaged. Traditionally, engagements involve a sparkling gem that symbolizes love, fidelity and a whirlwind series of months poring over every possible wedding detail. Shopping for an engagement ring is a unique experience. A ring requires a significant financial investment and serves as a lifelong symbol of commitment to another person. To navigate this sparkling world of diamonds and settings, shoppers can focus on key areas, notably budget, gem classification and finding a reputable jeweler.

## Establish an engagement ring budget

Those ready to pop the question need not adhere to the outdated "three months' salary" rule when selecting an engagement ring. Instead, the ring should be chosen based on financial realism and means. The Knot's 2024 Jewelry & Engagement Study indicates the average cost of an engagement ring in the United States comes in at approximately \$5,200. However, many couples spend less, showing that a marriage need not start on shaky financial footing due to the cost of a ring. If cost is a factor, lab-grown diamonds often cost 50 percent or more less than natural diamonds, yet they are chemically and physically identical to mined diamonds. One also can consider another gemstone, particularly if diamonds are beyond a budget or seem too traditional.

## Know the four Cs

Diamond shopping involves mastering the Four Cs, which refers to Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat Weight. A person should prioritize the cut above all else, and try to find a diamond in budget that has a cut that brings out the gem's brilliance and fire. It can be challenging to distinguish a diamond's color with the naked eye. Very often a near-colorless G-J diamond can look identical to a colorless one (Grade D). Color grades increase up to Z, with the diamond being more yellow/brown as the grading goes on. Clarity refers to tiny flaws (inclusions) in the diamond. A diamond that is Very Slightly Included will have inclusions not visible without magnification, making them a safe bet for saving money over those without any inclusions at all. Carat weight refers to the diamond's weight and not its size. Diamonds just shy of the full- or half-carat mark tend to be less expensive but still look impressive.

## Choose a reputable seller

It's best to choose a gem that has been graded by an independent laboratory like the Gemological Institute of America. Customers also should select a jeweler they trust, which may require some research and word-of-mouth recommendations. A knowledgeable jeweler also can make suggestions on setting and gem shape. Upon purchasing the engagement ring, one also might consider having it independently appraised for further purchase protection.

An engagement ring purchase requires careful consideration and a significant investment. But once the stress of purchase wears away, the lasting memories of the engagement and wedding to come will make everything well worth it.

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# From One Dance to

# "I Do"

## How One Dance Changed Everything - A Lake Okoboji Love Story

### A Note of Gratitude from the Couple

As we look back on this incredible day, our hearts are so full. We want to extend a special thanks to our parents for their unwavering support—we wouldn't be who we are without you.

To our amazing vendors: Rylan and April Howe for capturing our family so perfectly; April at Hometown Floral for the beautiful blooms; Courtney at Elegance for helping find the perfect dress and tuxes to make it all complete, Okoboji Skin Care, and The Strand for making us all look and feel our best; and John Shea at Shea's Firehouse Kitchen (inside Krafty's Meat Market) for the wonderful meal. Thank you to Lisa's Bake Shop. The dessert was a highlight of its own. They created the perfect wedding cake to sweeten the celebration. Each of you played a part in making our celebration a day we will never forget.



by Jenna Snyder

They say love finds you exactly when you least expect it and, for Amanda Chindlund and Jon Collins, that timing couldn't have been more perfect. While their individual stories began in the nearby towns of Hartley and Le Mars, it was the magic of a Lake Okoboji summer that finally brought them together. For years they had moved in the same circles—connected by mutual friends and the music of the Josh Quirin Band—yet they remained strangers until one fateful Friday night at The Gardens. When Jon first asked Amanda to dance, she initially declined, but Jon's persistent wit and a bit of playful ribbing eventually won her over. They shared that one dance and, after Jon reached out over social media a week later, a true Okoboji love story began. Within just a month of dating, Amanda felt it in her gut and told her best friend with total certainty, "I'm going to marry him."

The road to the altar was paved with secrets and sentiment. Jon had been quietly hiding an engagement ring from Spirit Lake Silver and Gold for months—the very one Amanda and Mackenzie had picked out at the Clay County Fair. He even held off on a Thanksgiving proposal so as not to steal the spotlight from a friend. On Christmas Eve 2023, the perfect moment arrived. Before heading to Ankeny, Jon, Amanda, and her ten-year-old daughter Mackenzie, gathered to open one gift early—a tradition the girls had invited Jon to join. After the first round, Jon asked the girls to close their eyes while he grabbed a final surprise. When they opened them, Jon was on one knee. Mackenzie's mouth hung open in shock, and Amanda's eyes filled with tears as she smiled through the surprise. With a joyful "yes," the three of them shared a giant hug, beginning their journey as a family.

Choosing a wedding date became a way to honor the family who came before them. With Jon's parents celebrating their anniversary on July 29th and both of his brothers, Ben and Nate, having July weddings in 2016 and 2010 respectively, July 25, 2025, was the perfect fit. To capture every moment, they chose Rylan Howe Photography. Rylan had already become a fixture in their lives after capturing their first family-of-five portrait with Santa at the Holiday Market. Amanda visited Hometown Floral in Lake Park with her mother and future mother-in-law, where April Junge guided them through the bouquets and table flowers.

The search for the dress at Elegance was a true family affair, complete with Mackenzie channeling her inner "Say Yes to the Dress" assistant. Amanda originally thought she needed a "big poof," but she found herself tearing up over the dress Courtney had picked for her. Once the morning of the



wedding arrived, the bridal party had their makeup done by Dallas at Okoboji Skin Care and hair styled by Sarah Carpenter at The Strand. When Amanda finally saw herself put together, wearing her gown and her mother's original veil from 1987, it felt unreal. She felt amazing and confident—a feeling matched only by Jon's reaction during their private "blind" first look at the beach. Tapping him on the shoulder and seeing him turn around was perfect; Jon found the sight of his bride breathtaking, and the two of them simply couldn't stop smiling at each other.

The big day arrived at The Bend south of Milford, the very spot where Jon first met Amanda's daughter Mackenzie attending a friend's wedding years prior. The weather was on their side, allowing for a beautiful ceremony outside and a reception to follow inside, complete with yard games for the guests. The ceremony was filled with pure, unscripted joy—most notably when their eight-month-old twin boys, Blake and Parker, made their way down the aisle in an electric remote-control Jeep driven by Mackenzie. Because the twins were so small and strapped in, Parker eventually tipped over behind Blake just as they reached the guests. While it didn't allow for the "perfectly posed" picture for Rylan, it gave everyone a wonderful laugh.

The most touching moment followed: the unity candle ceremony, which officially united Amanda, Jon, and Mackenzie as a family of five. The celebration moved inside for a reception catered by Shea's Firehouse Kitchen (located inside Krafty's Meat Market on Highway 86). The bridal party made a high-energy entrance to Montell Jordan's "This is How We Do It," before the night turned into a whirlwind of scavenger hunts—featuring Amanda's brother carrying a bartender and Jon's brother carrying a bilingual toddler—and a surprise late-night roller dog machine for Jon.

Looking back, the couple was touched by the presence of Jon's 93-year-old grandma, Mary Lou, and those quiet moments at sunset captured by the Howes. They walked away from the weekend with a stay at The Inn in Arnolds Park and a lifetime of adventures ahead. As Amanda says, "If you forget something, no one will know how it was 'supposed' to be anyway." They are now ready for the "forever adventure," grateful to have a partner to share the journey and a family that is finally, officially, complete.

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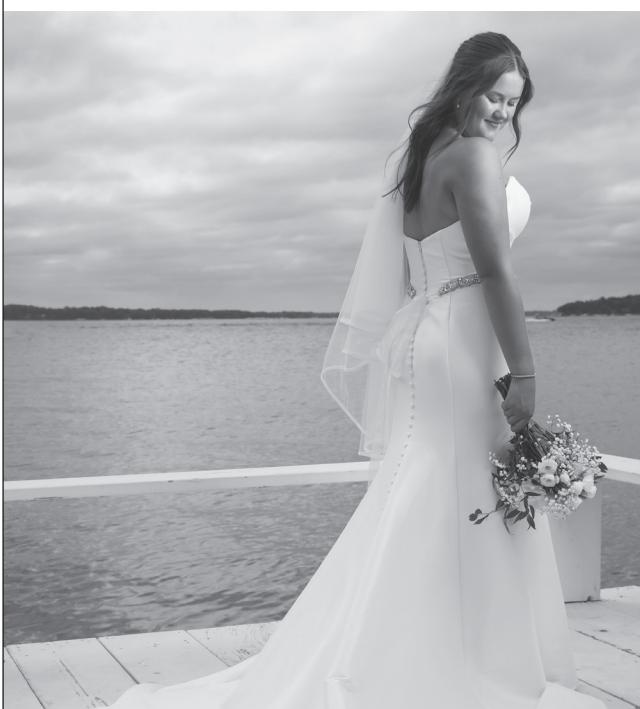
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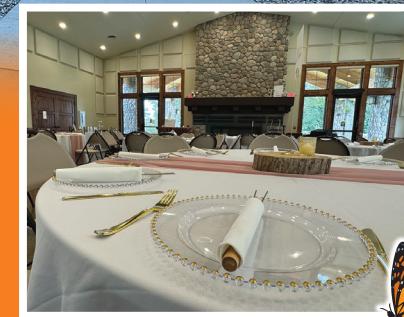
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A wedding reception is a joyous occasion that affords newlyweds and their guests an opportunity to celebrate into the evening. Various components combine to ensure a memorable reception, but food is a major highlight of the festivities for guests. That places a significant responsibility on couples to find a reception center or third-party caterer who can dish up food that will have guests saying "I do" to a great meal. These considerations and questions can help couples find the right caterer for their weddings.

#### Does my venue mandate use of a particular catering service?

The wedding planning website Zola advises that many wedding venues require couples to use a specific catering service. They may have an arrangement with a particular caterer who they trust, or the venue has in-house chefs and servers. In the earliest planning stages after the wedding date has been set, a couple should be sure to pick a venue that will serve the best food possible. Couples who have a specific caterer in mind may need to shop around for a venue that will allow outside vendors.

#### Identify your preferred meal

First and foremost, a couple should know how they want to have their food served and inquire with potential caterers about their standard options. Service types often include a formal sit-down dinner reception, a buffet dinner service, a family-style dinner, or a more minimal cocktail offering without a full dinner. The couple can cross out prospects that don't offer the type of service they desire most.

#### Ask what's included

A couple should determine if a catering service offers food prepared by professionals, the amount of flexibility related to menus, if table settings are included, and if cleanup is part of the fee. Full-service catering typically includes all of this, while more limited service may be food brought in that requires the venue's own staff to serve and clean.

#### Compile the right questions

It's important to ask caterers some key questions to narrow down prospects. Some of these include:

- Are you a participant in any local business associations?
- What events with a similar concept have you catered?
- How many weddings do you book each year?
- Will my wedding be the only event you cater on that day?
- How many guests can you accommodate?
- Do you handle special food requests, such as gluten-free or kosher meals?
- How many chefs and cooks prepare the meal, or are meals exclusively prepared by the business owner?
- Do you allow substitutions or customization to a set menu?
- Do you have references for other events you have catered?
- Do you have any preferred vendors?
- What do we need to know and do regarding delivery?

#### Keep location in mind

The distance a caterer has to travel to cater the wedding will affect the price. It's helpful to find a caterer who knows the venue or has had experience with a similar place.

#### What are the contingency plans?

When interviewing caterers, Cvent, an event management software company, suggests asking about any last-minute changes they've dealt with to gauge how the caterer handles problem-solving. Inquire about how they adapt if a certain menu item is no longer readily available or what they do if a piece of equipment breaks down the day of an event? Answers to these types of questions can separate seasoned professionals from those caterers who may not be as experienced.

Food is a vital component of a wedding reception, which underscores the significance of finding a talented and experienced caterer.

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## Questions to Ask When Interviewing Caterers



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## Simple Touches That Add An Elegant Feel To A Wedding

The term "the perfect wedding" can be somewhat misleading. Couples have their own ideas regarding the perfect wedding, and no single vision is more worthy of that characterization than another.

Tradition plays a big role at many weddings, as couples have long embraced customs like the first dance, cutting the cake together and even tossing the bridal bouquet at the reception. Traditional weddings often are associated with elegance, and there are many ways to create an elegant aesthetic at a wedding.

### • Consider candlelight.

Candlelight can make any space feel cozy and warm. Lit candles also create a calming and elegant vibe at a wedding. A handful of thoughtfully placed candles around a ceremony space can add a sense of elegance to a wedding. That vibe can be maintained into the reception when candles are placed on dining tables.

### • Include some vintage items.

Vintage items can add elegance because they call to mind traditional weddings of past eras. Unique vintage vases on seating tables or even as reception table centerpieces are simple to arrange and effective at adding an elegant touch.

### • Choose a signature cocktail.

The drinks guests enjoy at the reception also can add some elegance to the festi-

ties. Ask the reception hall bartender to collaborate on a classic cocktail, ideally one that might have been popular years ago or even a modernized version of a drink that calls to mind ceremonies of yesteryear.

### • Go traditional with wedding attire.

More and more brides are choosing wedding gowns that go beyond the classic white dress. But brides who want something elegant may want to stick to traditional attire. The same goes for grooms, who can choose a traditional black tuxedo to add some simple elegance to the big day.

### • Set your sights on seating.

There's no area of a wedding that can't be augmented with a little elegance, and that even goes for seating. Chair sashes complement an elegant theme, and such simple decor is easy to pull off. It also provides instant appeal and a touch of class as guests enter the venue and take a seat.

An elegant wedding aesthetic makes for great photographs and adds a memorable vibe to a ceremony and reception.

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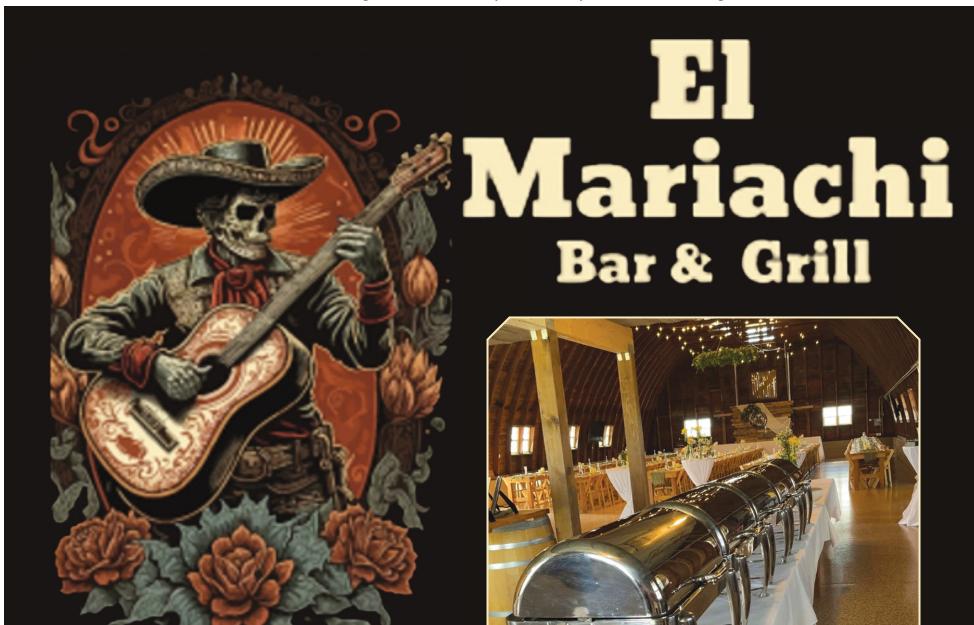
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## Wedding Timeline Guide 2026

Wedding planning involves many movable pieces that ultimately need to come together on the big day. Planning is typically a months-long process, and adhering to certain monthly benchmarks can help couples stay the course. Brides magazine offers that the perfect engagement period is 12 to 14 months, which affords ample time to get organized and work with vendors. With that in mind, here's a 12-month timeline for couples getting ready to say "I do."

### 12 MONTHS OUT

At the start of the planning process, establish your budget, hire a wedding planner (optional), choose the wedding party, pick a date, and start to assemble a cursory guest list. This also is a great time to begin touring venues to get a feel for potential ceremony and reception locales.

it might take some trial and error to find the perfect dress. You also can start shopping for wedding party attire at this time. Check with formalwear vendors to see how long it will take for the gowns to arrive in the shop for alterations. If you haven't already done so, be sure to book the wedding venue.

### 8 MONTHS OUT

Reception halls may have their own schedules, but you should think about setting your menu at this time, including deciding if you will host a seated dinner, a buffet or something else. Eight months out also is a good time to finalize the guest list and send save-the-date cards. This also is a good time to visit stores to create registry gift lists.

### 6 MONTHS OUT

Meet with potential florists and

other vendors, like transportation companies and hotels, to secure these arrangements. Your place of worship also may require certain classes or preparatory meetings, so be sure to inquire about these. Meet with a makeup and hair stylist and book a trial. Choose attire for groomsmen and give them a deadline for fittings and orders. If you will not be getting married in a place of worship, hire an officiant at this time.

### 4 MONTHS OUT

Grooms traditionally arrange the honeymoon, so this is a fine time to get those travel plans in order. If you need passports, you should secure them as early as possible, and no later than four months prior to the wedding to ensure processing times. Book cake tastings and order the cake if it is not part of the venue food and beverage package. If you haven't already done so, the bride should have an initial gown fitting,

and wedding invitations should be ordered at this time.

### 2 MONTHS OUT

Secure your wedding license and buy wedding party gifts. Address and mail the wedding invitations. Undergo a second gown fitting and work with the seamstress for the final fitting date just before the wedding. Finalize any song selections with the DJ or band.

The final details will occur in the last weeks before the wedding. Buy all the small accessories and items, undergo final fittings and check in with all vendors for final payments and to ensure they are on schedule. Notify the reception hall of the final guest count.

Once the wedding day arrives, couples who have done their best to stay on schedule can relax and have a great time with family and friends.

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### 11 MONTHS OUT

Now is the time to get a firm handle on the theme and scope of the wedding. Start picking wedding colors and overall design. Also, interview and hire vendors, such as photographers, bands and videographers. These vendors tend to book up quickly as wedding season draws near, so it's never too early to book them.

### 10 MONTHS OUT

This is a good time to start shopping for a wedding gown because

# Wild Hearts and Winter White: The Abrahamson Adventure



by Jantina Carney

From the rugged trails of Northern Iowa to the shimmering docks of Okoboji, Ashley and Hunter's love story is a testament to the beauty of being exactly who you are. It wasn't a story born of pretense or grand gestures, but of shared laughter, a love for the outdoors, and the natural ease of two people who simply "clicked."

#### Where the Trail Began

Growing up in Algona and Okoboji, Ashley and Hunter were both shaped by the open air. Fate eventually brought them together at a Polaris dealership—a fitting start for a couple whose hearts beat for UTVs and adventure. In the midst of engines and gear, they found a different kind of spark. It was a connection built on joking around, being themselves, and realizing that life was just better when the other person was in it.

The journey led them to a warm July night in 2024. During Ashley's birthday weekend, on the dock at Bracco's, the summer air became the backdrop for a new chapter when Hunter asked her to spend the rest of her life with him.

#### A Day Dusted in White

When their wedding day arrived at Swiss Acres, nature had one more surprise in store. Though a November snowstorm wasn't in the original plan, the falling flakes transformed the ceremony barn into a serene winter wonderland. For Ashley—stunning in an all-white, long-sleeved lace gown from Bridal Connections—the snow was a gift. It was the perfect contrast to the warmth waiting inside.

The day was anchored by deep family roots. As guests entered, they were greeted by a table honoring those present in spirit: their grandparents and Ashley's brother. Before the walk down the aisle, a tearful, private moment between Ashley and her sister, the Maid of Honor, served as a poignant reminder of the bonds that brought them to this moment.

#### Laughter, BBQ, and Living in the Moment

The reception was a true celebration of their community. With Hucky's BBQ providing comfort food and Mojo (Cody Nielsen) keeping the energy high, the barn was filled with the sounds of a life well-lived.

**The Speeches:** Ashley's dad, Brent, moved the room to tears and laughter, followed by heartfelt words from her "Okoboji Dad," Tony, and the bridal party.

**The Surprise:** A highlight of the night was the performance of a custom "spin-off" song—an inside joke from the bachelorette party that Ashley and her friend sang for the whole room.

**The Perspective:** Despite the weather keeping some guests away, Ashley and Hunter remained unshaken. Their focus was exactly where it belonged: on each other and their daughter, Oakley.

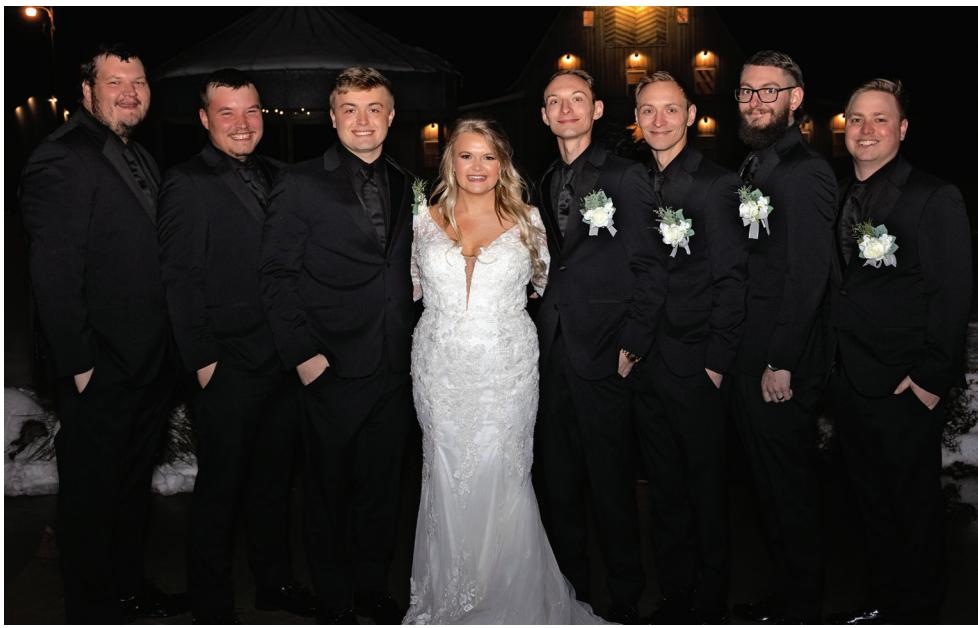
#### The Quiet After the Storm

The most magical moment of the day happened away from the crowd. After the ceremony, Ashley and Hunter stepped out into the quiet, falling snow for their private vows. It was a scene captured perfectly by Tayler Schmidt Photography—just two best friends, a flurry of white, and a set of promises that didn't need a crowd to be powerful.

#### Hopes and Dreams

As they look toward a future filled with family, travel, and perhaps a deep-sea fishing trip or a snow-filled sledding honeymoon, the Abrahamsen family are embracing the "go with the flow" spirit that has defined them. For Hunter, the day was about the excitement of the future; for Ashley, it was the peace of knowing she had married her best friend.

With Oakley by their side and a lifetime of trails to explore, their adventure is only just beginning.



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## Responsibilities Typically Delegated to Notable Bridal Party Members



Engaged couples tend to ask their closest family members and friends to be in their bridal parties. Such requests are an honor and bridal party members tend to be excited to play such a significant role on a couple's wedding day. But bridal party members also do much to help engaged couples before the big day. Couples can choose to delegate as many tasks as they desire to bridal party members. Before delegating, couples can look to tradition to guide them in regard to asking their bridal parties to lend a hand.

- **Best man:** The best man toast at a wedding reception tends to be a jovial part of the festivities that couples and guests look forward to, so asking a best man to give such a speech is customary. Best man responsibilities also may include organizing a bachelor party or a similar type of get-together with fellow groomsmen and other guests prior to the wedding. A best man also may coordinate a gift for the groom if the groomsmen want to give the groom an item that requires pooling resources.

- **Maid/matron of honor:** A maid/matron of honor typically delivers a toast at the reception prior to the best man's speech. A maid/matron of honor also may coordinate a bachelorette party and bridal shower in the weeks or months before the wedding. A maid/matron of honor tends to play a significant role on the wedding day as well. A maid/matron of honor may handle any problems that arise in the hours before the ceremony so the bride can relax. For example, a maid/matron of honor may work to ensure the bride is shielded from issues affecting hair and makeup, the venue, last-minute gown concerns, and other unforeseen problems that can arise. A maid/matron of honor may need to do some delegating of her own prior to the ceremony, asking fellow bridesmaids to help coordinate party plans.

- **Bridesmaids:** Bridesmaids can help a bride when she's choosing her gown as well as the dresses bridesmaids themselves will wear. Bridesmaids also help the maid/matron of honor coordinate the bachelorette party and pitch in to help address any issues that arise on the day of the ceremony.

- **Groomsmen:** Groomsmen can be tasked with helping the best man coordinate a bachelor party. Groomsmen also can be asked to schedule their tuxedo fittings to afford enough time for alterations and orders to be completed in time for the big day.

- **Parents:** Parents' roles have changed considerably in recent years. While the parents of the bride traditionally paid for the wedding and grooms' parents were tasked with bankrolling the rehearsal dinner, many modern couples now foot some, if not all, of those bills themselves. Parents can still be asked to lend some financial assistance. In addition, couples can seek input from parents regarding reception traditions like father/daughter and mother/son dances. Many bridal party members are willing to do whatever it takes to make a couple's wedding day as special as possible. Couples are still urged to discuss responsibilities with bridal party members prior to delegating tasks.

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## Here Comes the Bride

It's customary for a bride-to-be to make a grand entrance on her wedding day, and for many that involves the processional song "Bridal Chorus," commonly referred to as "Here Comes the Bride." The song is from the 1850 opera "Lohengrin," which was composed by Richard Wagner. In the opera, the women in the wedding party sing the song as they escort the bride, Elsa, to her bridal chamber. The original lyrics included, "Faithfully, led, you go..." and referred to the joy of the couple's new life together. After Princess Victoria, the daughter of Queen Victoria of England, used the song for her 1858 wedding procession, the music became a wedding staple across Europe and America. While the instrumental version is widely used for a bride's walk down the aisle, some religious institutions prefer couples choose another song because of the music's secular origins.



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6. I Do
7. Holy Hymns



## The Many Ways to Incorporate Floral Arrangements

Flowers showcase the beauty and pageantry of the natural world. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The earth laughs in flowers," and Lady Bird Johnson is quoted as saying, "Where flowers bloom, so does hope." Flowers are inextricably tied to some of the most important events in a person's life. Flowers wish people well, console those who are mourning, and symbolize love and affection.

Flowers are an essential component of wedding day celebrations. Flowers symbolize love, fertility and new beginnings. According to The Knot 2025 Real Weddings Study, the average cost of wedding flowers in 2025 was \$2,723, which serves as a testament to how important flowers can be on these special days. Flowers are incorporated into many facets of a wedding. Couples planning their weddings can give thought to the many ways flowers can enhance this special day.

#### Bouquets

Wedding bouquets are some of the first arrangements people think of when planning a wedding. Historically, wedding bouquets contained herbs that were designed to ward off evil spirits. Today, one is much more likely to find a gathering of many beautiful flowers tied at the stems with ribbon. Bridesmaids carry bouquets as well, and flower girls toss flower petals along the aisle during the processional. Bouquets typically coordinate to the theme of the wedding and the color scheme. A bride's bouquet tends to be similar in design to her bridesmaids' but may feature more muted colored blooms to complement her gown.

#### Boutonnieres and corsages

Boutonnieres and corsages are customarily bestowed upon wedding party members and the parents of the happy couple. They also may be gifted to additional special people attending the wedding, such as grandparents or other guests of honor.

#### Altar arrangements

Floral decorations also may be placed around or near the altar for the wedding ceremony. Jewish celebrants may place flowers on a chuppah to add beauty and elegance. Flowers also are commonly used in Muslim wedding ceremonies, appearing in floral arches or even as a stunning floral wall during the Nikah to separate the bride and groom. During religious ceremonies, couples should heed the requirements of the house of worship and ensure that flowers are modest and within the parameters set for the faith.

#### Aisle decorations

Flowers may be used on the seatbacks or on the sides of pews. Small flowers, ribbons and greenery are hung to enhance the ambiance of the space.

#### Centerpieces

Flowers are a focal point during wedding receptions, taking up prime real estate in the center of tables. Knowledgeable florists can create pieces that are beautiful and will not obstruct the view or comfort of guests when seated. Additional floral arrangements may be included to enhance additional areas of the reception space, such as floral arches for photographs, vases placed near the seating chart and even flowers in the restrooms to make these spaces even more inviting.

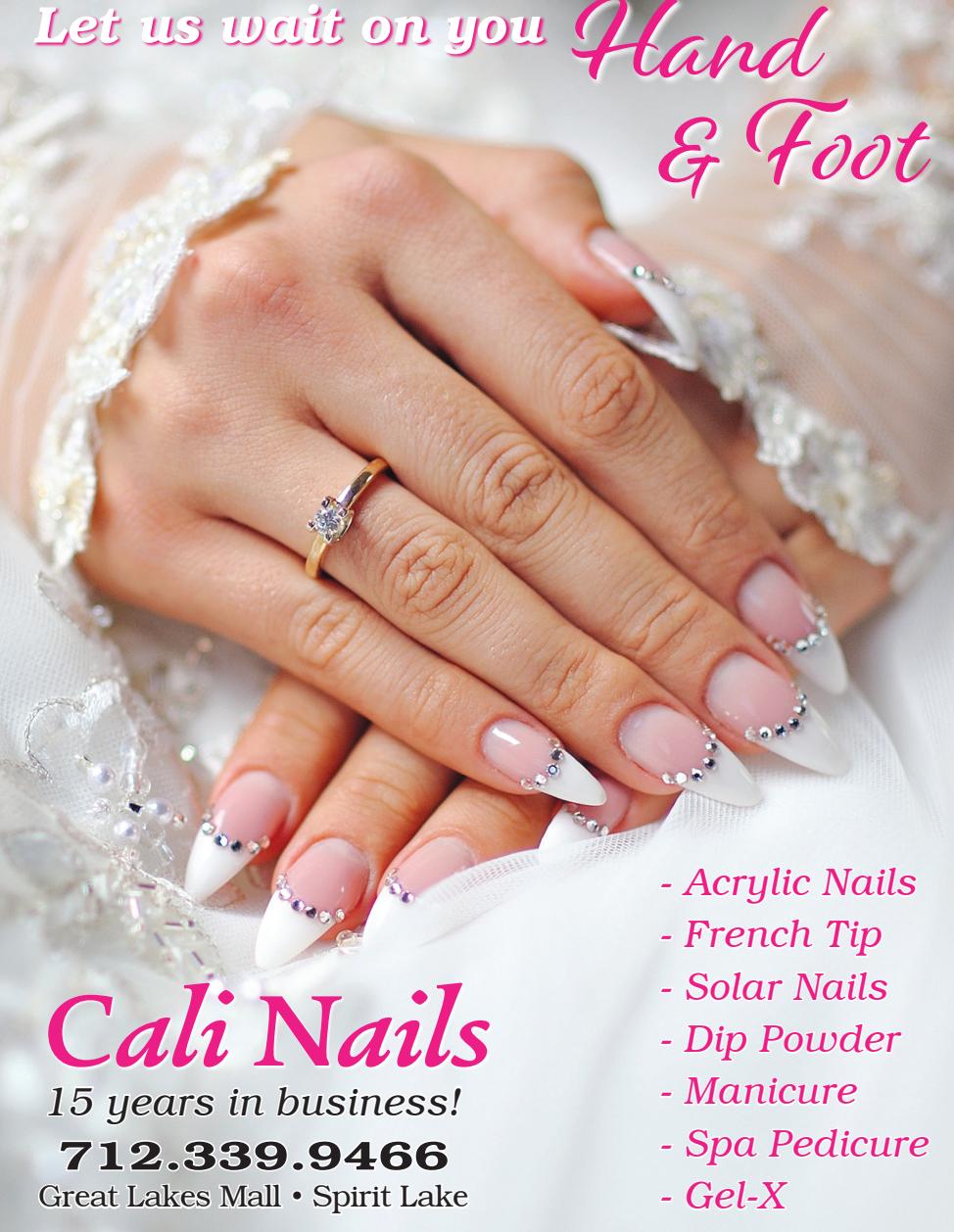
#### Toss bouquet

If a couple decides to adhere to traditional wedding customs, the bride will toss a smaller bouquet to eager single women ready to catch it. A tossed bouquet may feature fresh flowers or artificial silk flowers. This decoy bouquet enables the bride to return home with her actual bouquet to preserve it, but still participate in this classic tradition. Flowers enhance a wedding with their beauty, symbolism and aroma.

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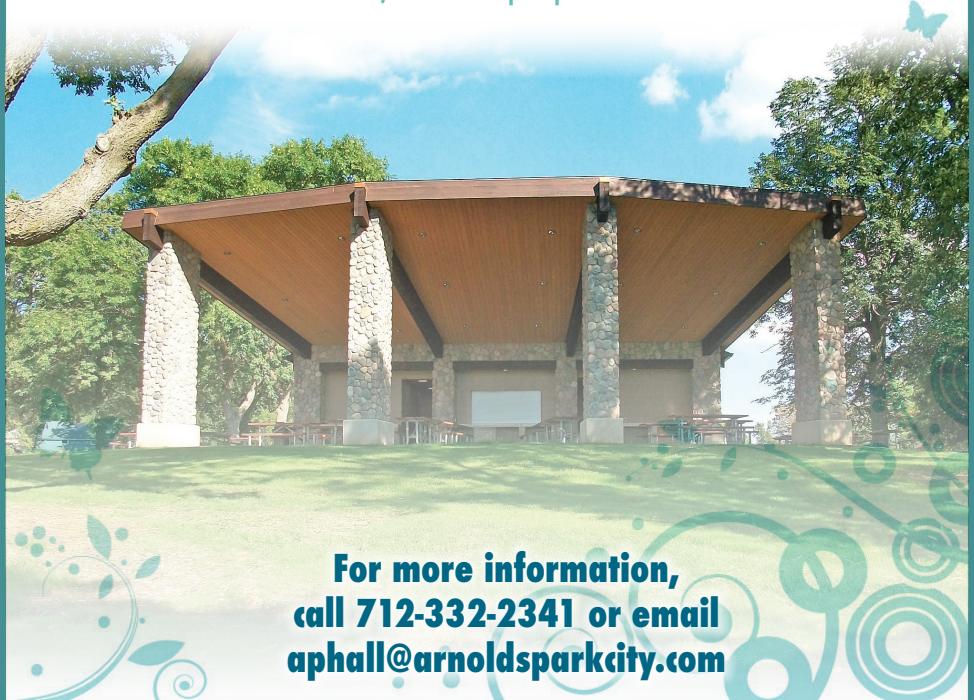
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## 3 Tips to Create a Reasonable Wedding Budget

Weddings are momentous occasions in the lives of couples. Recently engaged couples likely know that weddings can be expensive. The experts at the online wedding resource Zola estimated that couples would spend around \$36,000 on their weddings in 2025. If that figure produces some sticker shock, couples can rest easy in the knowledge that such estimates reflect a host of variables, not all of which are applicable to each wedding. It also can calm couples' nerves to develop a budget as the first step in wedding planning. Once a budget is worked out, couples can then use that to guide their decisions.

The need to budget for a wedding may seem obvious, but couples, particularly those tying the knot for the first time, might not know where to begin. Couples facing such a situation can consider these three budget-building tips for their wedding.

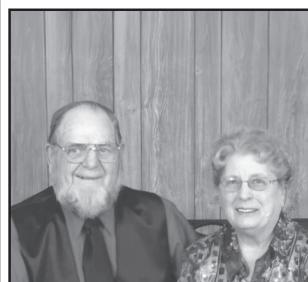
**1. Identify where funds are coming from.** Parents of the bride were once the traditional sources of wedding funds, but that's less common than it used to be. According to The Knot Real Weddings Study, the average age of marriage in 2024 was 32 years. That means many couples are now on relatively firm financial footing by the time they get married, prompting some to pay for the entire affair themselves. Couples looking to establish a wedding budget can first identify who's helping to fund it. If couples are going it alone, then this is a simple step in the process. If parents and other relatives offer to pitch in, couples can count such offers toward the total amount of money they have to fund the big day.

**2. Consider working with a financial planner.** Another strategy to building a budget is to work with a professional to determine how much you can afford. Many couples now live together prior to getting engaged, and Zola notes that more than half (53 percent) even shop for rings together. Advanced wedding planning can be a wise move, particularly for couples footing the bill on their own or with minimal assistance from family members. A financial planner can help couples determine what they can afford and offer tips to grow their existing wealth with an eye on paying for their wedding.

**3. Identify your priorities.** The Knot reports that venue and rentals accounted for slightly more than one-quarter (27 percent) of couples' wedding budgets in 2025. While venues and rentals are typically the biggest expense when planning a wedding, couples building a budget should identify their biggest priority. Some might want a stunning venue, while others might feel a backyard ceremony is perfect for them. Identifying your biggest priorities and then devoting enough funds to those areas can guide the budget-building process.

Weddings can be expensive. Budgeting can help couples get the wedding they want without breaking the bank.

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