

The PLANNER



In This Section...

Gorgeous Garden Wedding Venues

Real Couples Weigh In on Writing Your Own Vows

Welcome-Bag Tips

Ask Martha

Everything You Never Knew You Needed to Know About Roses

Filing Taxes as Newlyweds

Your Perfect Recessional Song

Delegating Tasks

Secrets to Help You Keep Calm

BLOOMING BUSINESS: HOW TO HIRE A FLORAL PRO

Maybe you fantasize about a riot of colorful wildflowers—or perhaps you long for all-white bouquets. No matter your wedding style, a floral expert can bring those dreams to life. For help in hiring one who understands your vision, read on.

TEXT BY CARY MIDLAND

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

When you're hiring for your wedding, the options go beyond your local flower shop. Job titles may vary, but you have two main choices: a floral designer or an event designer. If you already have

a clear vision of the day, you can go with a floral designer, who will focus on the blooms, including bouquets, ceremony markers, table arrangements, and other décor. For more comprehensive help, consider an event designer, who will aid in selecting all the elements

for a cohesive look, design, and theme, says Holly Heider Chapple, owner and lead designer and event planner at Holly Heider Chapple Flowers, in Luckett's, Virginia. That means not only choosing flowers but consulting on anything that *(continued on following page)*



contributes to the feel of your event, including stationery, rentals, linens, sentimental touches—even your gown, if you haven't picked it out! Meet with a few candidates to decide what approach works best for you. Remember, popular vendors book up early, so you'll likely need to start your research soon after settling on a venue. Aim to have a signed contract 8 to 12 months before the big day if you can.

MAKE A PLAN

You'll also need to figure out your budget—a good rule of thumb is for 10 percent of your total to be allotted to flowers. You might lower that if, say, you're going all out on food, or increase it if you want nothing but blossoms everywhere you look. Whatever you plan to spend, it's important to be honest with designers from the beginning, says Diana Venditto,

founder and creative director of Eventi Floral & Events, in Towson, Maryland. And if you find a pro you like but can't afford the quoted price, ask if there are ways to work within your limits. For example, if you envision floral chandeliers, perhaps a trade-off, like more-subtle centerpieces, would make them possible.

DREAM BIG

Next up, the fun part: imagining the overall look you'd like to achieve. Your favorite flowers are a natural starting point, as is your color palette, if you've already chosen it. Keep these in mind as you search for inspiration pictures: Do you like wild, over-the-top centerpieces, or do you prefer simple yet elegant arrangements? Are there blooms that you don't want to use? Flag designers whose aesthetic appeals to you.

SHIRA SAYS

"Boutonnieres are constantly getting smushed during all those hugs with loved ones, so they typically don't last long. Grooms, consider bringing a backup to refresh your lapel décor. Stash it somewhere, chilled and out of the sun—like an air-conditioned room—and you'll be good to go for the rest of the night!" —Shira Savada, real weddings editor



And the more ideas, the merrier—so put that Pinterest board to work!

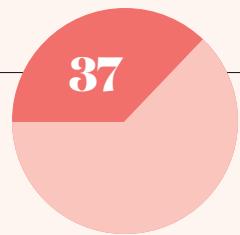
CONSIDER EXPERIENCE

Potential designers should be able to speak about not only flower varieties and design, but also logistics such as the number of events per day they handle, the people on their team, and their experience. "Established studios get the best blooms, no doubt about it," says Chapple. They simply have more resources—farms or relationships with vendors—so they get first pick of the highest-quality flowers, as well as the greatest variety. Plus, "experienced designers should be able to do any look," says Chapple, even if it's not represented in their portfolios. Don't hesitate to ask for examples in the style you want.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

Your final decision shouldn't just focus on flowers. "It's about the overall vibe. Is the designer easy to talk to? Does she seem excited about your vision?" asks Megan Gray, creative director at Honey and Poppies, in Long Beach, California. The ideal, she says, is to be able to "hire someone whose work you love, and then let her do her thing." That way you can do *your* thing: Grab your bouquet, walk the petal-strewn aisle, and enjoy your wedding day.

37



The percentage of American guests who choose wedding gifts from the registry. Others gave cash or did their own thing.

\$99

The average amount Americans spend on wedding gifts for friends—compared with \$127 for relatives.

53

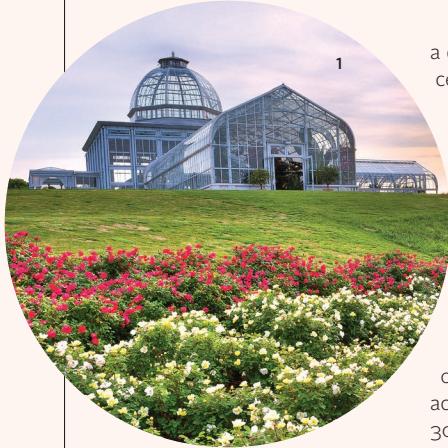
The percentage of American couples who pay for their own weddings.

SOURCE: AMERICAN EXPRESS SPENDING & SAVING TRACKER 2016
(FLOWER ARRANGING); STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON (SHIRA)

GARDEN GATHERINGS

Natural beauty abounds at these botanical venues, where butterflies, blossoms, and dreamy vistas are sure to wow your guests—and free up some of your floral budget.

TEXT BY SARAH L. STEWART



1. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

Richmond, Virginia

Old-world charm pervades this 82-acre public estate, from cobble paths and quaint gazebos to a striking glass-domed classical conservatory. Exchange vows in a restored Victorian-style garden planted with peonies, tulips, and daffodils, or on a hillside terrace perfumed by more than a thousand rosebushes during peak bloom in late May and early October. Up to 250 guests can revel on the tented lawn of the property's stately Craftsman-era manse, one of several reception options. Not ready for the night to end? You can relive the romance with a yearlong garden membership, included for newlyweds in the cost of booking. **Top Tip:** Serve regional sips from Richmond's own Legend Brewing Co. or nearby Barboursville Vineyards, both available from venue caterer Meriwether Godsey.

THE DETAILS: Venue rental for ceremony and reception from \$1,800, lewisginter.org.

2. Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden

Dallas

Choose from lakeside lawns, shaded grottoes, and more than

a dozen other picturesque ceremony sites at this 66-acre urban oasis. For an awe-inspiring aisle, it's hard to top the Crape Myrtle Allee, an otherworldly tunnel of intricate branches covered in bright-pink blooms each summer. An equally impressive reception awaits at the DeGolyer House, one of two historic on-site properties that can accommodate parties of up to 300. Guests can dine beneath stately oaks and magnolias, then dance the night away on the Spanish-style loggia. **Top Tip:**

Snag a sunset photo op in the arboretum's new edible garden—featuring vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers—with downtown skyline views across White Rock Lake.

THE DETAILS: Venue rental for ceremony and reception from \$3,600, dallasarboretum.org.

3. Butterfly Rainforest

Gainesville, Florida

A thousand winged witnesses join up to 80 human guests for ceremonies inside this lush screened enclosure at the Florida Museum of Natural History. At the center of the rainforest, a wooden bridge over a calming cascade doubles as the altar, surrounded by tropical blooms and butterflies floating by. Afterward, head indoors for a lively reception in the main museum gallery, presided over by a 14-foot-tall fossilized mammoth skeleton, which can even be spotlighted in the color of your choice.

Top Tip: Organize a pre-wedding stroll for your guests along nearby Lake Alice for waterfowl-watching and all-but-guaranteed alligator sightings.

THE DETAILS:

Venue rental for ceremony and reception from \$3,000, floridamuseum.ufl.edu.



4. Desert Botanical Garden

Phoenix

Stately cacti, spiky succulents, and a red-rock backdrop lend a distinctly southwestern sensibility to soirees at this desert outpost, which can accommodate parties of up to 250. Larger shindigs may use the saguaro-studded terrace or airy event hall. Weddings of 100 or fewer can choose between an earthy amphitheater overlooking the garden's impressive cactus collection and a circular pavilion situated along a wild-flower trail, which erupts in a kaleidoscope of color each spring. Once the sun drops behind the Papago Buttes to the west, watch for stars winking through the pavilion's center skylight—and if you're there during the holidays, you'll also be able to bask in the glow of hand-lit luminarias flickering on the surrounding paths. **Top Tip:**

Stay and play poolside at the new Mountain Shadows, a hip,

retro-style resort at the foot of nearby Camelback Mountain.

THE DETAILS: Venue rental for ceremony and reception from \$1,000, dbg.org.

5. The Oregon Garden

Silverton, Oregon

Rustic meets refined at this 80-acre jewel in Willamette Valley wine country. You'll find ambience and amenities in equal measure: Adjacent to the garden's tidy green spaces and looming forests, a 103-room lodge offers cozy cottages equipped with fireplaces and patios, a hair and makeup studio for day-of pampering, and a full-service spa (couples' massage, anyone?). Get hitched at the base of a vine-clad grape-and-hop arbor, in an intimate forest meadow, or on an elegant emerald lawn. Then celebrate beneath a ceiling of twinkling white lights in the Grand Hall (a refurbished barn with a capacity of up to 450 guests), or outside on a 200-person plaza featuring fiery-orange maples.

Top Tip: Head to the comfortable Fireside Lounge, located adjacent to the garden, for a dressed-down after-party with live music and drink specials nightly.

THE DETAILS: Weddings from \$3,500, oregongarden.org.





Should We or Shouldn't We? WRITE OUR OWN VOWS

Your vows are some of the most meaningful words that will ever cross your lips. We talked to couples about the statements that seal the deal.

We Did

"We wanted our vows to be unique and reflect our personalities. After we got engaged, we each kept a running list of ideas of what to say, then put it all together a couple of weeks before the wedding. We love to laugh, so the biggest challenge was figuring out how to balance a joke with the significance of committing to our life together. On the big day, we were so confident in our decision. The stories and promises were so personal, and we were happy to share them in front of friends and family."

—Becca Wolf, married to Zac Wolf

We Used a Mix of Both

"The idea of baring my soul filled me with dread. Then I thought, *This is my chance to dig deep*—so we each wrote a 'personal statement' to read on the big day. At the same time, I love the gravitas that traditional vows bring, so I would have felt like something was missing if we hadn't done those as well. The mix felt true to us, and it was a growth moment for me to share my deepest feelings and hopes in front of so many people." —Cameron Hardesty, married to Michael Babyak

We Didn't

"We had a lot on our plate already, since we were planning a destination wedding, so the thought of writing personal vows was just too much for us. Instead, we worked closely with our officiant to agree on the ceremony wording, which included traditional vows. I'm happy with our decision. We entered into a long-established tradition, the institution of marriage, and it felt right to have time-honored words usher us in."

—Brette Allen, married to Patrick Mowrer

A Planner Says...

"If you're writing your own, you'll be speaking to your partner—but remember, there will likely be a crowd! Agree on length and any connecting factors, like a promise to each other. Couples who fear public speaking may be more comfortable repeating traditional vows: You won't have to memorize, pull out written words, or worry if the crowd can hear you. Traditional vows also work for those who want to repeat the words their parents and grandparents used." —Jessica Rourke of Jessica Rourke Weddings, in Columbia, South Carolina

A WARM WELCOME

We've got fun ideas for creating custom welcome bags, boxes, and more on page 124—but if you're pressed for time (or creative energy), there's a case for letting a pro handle them for you.

Welcome bags are your arriving guests' first impression, so you want to wow them. But you may not be up for an 11th-hour task—especially if you don't have a lot of helpers. "The last thing you should be doing the night before your wedding is tying welcome-gift ribbons," says Lindsay Marko of A Signature Welcome (asignaturewelcome.com). Luckily, companies like this will take care of everything from design to delivery. Still on the fence? We asked some experts to share the highlights of their time-saving services—plus some of their best tips.

Easy budgeting

Welcome bags can be done at any price, but amenities can cost more than you'd think. An expert can score the best deals and help you figure out what's essential and what's not.

No-brainer branding

Use elements from your stationery and décor—such as colors or a monogram—for a unified look. "Stickers are great for showing

off your logo without breaking the bank," says Wesley Brown of Bundles Gift Co. (bundlesgiftco.com).

Practical packaging

When packing welcome bags, it's smart to keep the use and reuse of containers in mind: Think boxes and baskets that stack easily at a front desk, or totes that can be repurposed for carrying to the pool or spa during a destination weekend. Many companies offer collapsible boxes, which lie flat for the journey home.

Items with meaning

Think personal and local when filling bags—whether you're DIYing or hiring out: "Locally made chocolate is always a hit," says Torrance Hart of Teak & Twine (teakandtwine.com).

Location-specific items can be practical, too: When Brown works on mountain weddings, for instance, he often suggests altitude kits. And finally?

"A letter from the couple takes the bags to another level," adds Jamie Kutchman Wynne of Marigold & Grey (marigoldgrey.com). —Shira Savada



ASK MARTHA

Wedding wisdom and practical solutions for all your pressing questions



Q:

We're registering at multiple stores, and I'm worried some of the items may not match once they're under one roof. How can I plan ahead?

—Alex, via email

A: Begin by narrowing down your aesthetic. "Many registry sites, like Zola, Amazon, and MyRegistry.com, offer curated galleries to help you put things together," says our style director, Naomi deMañana. And before you shop, crystallize what you need. "Going without a list may result in a blend of odds and ends, like mismatched linens," says Lee Mayer, cofounder and CEO of online interior-design service Havenly. "Instead, break down the rooms you'd like to design, and list what you need." When shopping, look for common accents. For example, white china with varying gold details would work together. The same general idea applies to glassware, linen, and even cookware.

THE
INSIDE
SCOOP

Q: We found our dream venue. What should we do before signing a contract?
—Leah, via email

A: Great news! First, firm up exactly what you're paying for. Real weddings editor Shira Savada suggests you ask about:

1. What's included in the price

How many hours? Is there an on-site coordinator; are there lighting services?

2. Restrictions

Are there specific requirements for caterers or other vendors? Are there décor rules (no open flames, no wall installations), noise restrictions, or end-time ordinances?

3. Capacity

Will your guests (plus the band or DJ) fit comfortably?

4. Catering

Does the venue cater? Ask for price per head and minimums.

5. Other events

Multiple weddings could limit vendor access or divide resources.

6. Bad weather

What are backup options in case of rain or storms?

Q: I'm close with both my dad and stepfather. How do I handle the father-daughter dance?

—Sarah, via email

A: Every situation is different. If your father and stepfather are on good terms, sharing a shorter dance with each of them to two different songs played consecutively is a nice way to give equal attention. "If back-to-back is not ideal, then split up the dances with the mother-son dance, or even have one before the first dinner course, one after," suggests Lauren Fremont, owner of New York- and Paris-based Loli Events.

BRYAN GARDNER (BAKING SUPPLIES); RYAN RAY PHOTOGRAPHY (DANCE)



Have a planning question for Martha or our team of editors?

We've got answers. Send us a note via email at ask.martha@meredith.com, and we'll get back to you via email, or in a future column!



Everything You Never Knew You Needed to Know About ROSES

If you're considering using this elegant bloom for your big day, here's how to ensure that everything comes up, well . . . you know. **TEXT BY CHRISANNE GRISÉ**

Rose Colored

In the Victorian era, flowers conveyed ideas. Our quick color guide will help you do the same.



47

The number of rose species that are native to North America.

1986

The year President Ronald Reagan declared the rose the official flower of the United States.

THE BIGGEST BOUQ

In 2005, a mall in Germany set a Guinness World Record by displaying a bouquet of 156,940 roses.

RED ALERT

Most roses are significantly more expensive around Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. If you're planning a wedding right before either, it'll likely be more cost-effective to choose a different in-season flower. For a June wedding, on the other hand, field-grown garden roses can be a great and affordable choice. "Be open to your florist's suggestions," Teasley recommends.



GARDEN VARIETY

News flash: Not all roses look alike. We asked Nancy Teasley, owner of Ella Rose Farm, in Fallbrook, California, to take us through the different options.



HOTHOUSE STANDARD ROSE

Tall and stiff-stemmed, these are what most probably imagine when they think of roses. Opt for these classics for a relatively budget-friendly pick.



FIELD-GROWN GARDEN ROSE

These are roses like Grandma used to grow. They have a subtle fragrance and a loose, lush, dramatic look.



HOTHOUSE ENGLISH GARDEN ROSE

Slightly longer outer petals create a cupped look in these flowers. They're longer-lasting than field roses and have sturdy stems—perfect for wedding arrangements.

LOVE AND TAXES

If filing taxes as a single person is confusing, then filing as newlyweds can be downright baffling. Don't panic—this expert advice from Tina Hay, CEO of personal-finance company Napkin Finance, will get you through it.

TEXT BY CHRISANNE GRISÉ



UPDATE YOUR W-4. Remember that W-4 withholding form you filled out when you started your job? Until now, you were likely claiming only one allowance—but when you're married, you're allowed more, meaning less taxes are deducted. Figuring out the right number of allowances can be complicated, because many factors—including your dependents, how many jobs you have, and whether your spouse works—can all affect how many allowances you should claim. If you're not sure, the IRS website (irs.gov) offers tools and forms to help you figure it out. And whatever you decide, update your W-4 every tax year to ensure it's still accurate.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FILING METHOD. Most newlyweds are better off filing jointly, thanks to the tax benefits available to married couples (think more deductions). But in some circumstances, it may be smarter to stay separate. "When you file together, both partners take responsibility for the income reported and the taxes owed," explains Hay. If, for example, one spouse has a significant itemized deduction, old tax debts, or defaulted student loans, it might not be advantageous for the other person to be included. And some couples with higher incomes might face a "marriage penalty," meaning they have to pay more in taxes if filing together than if they were filing separately. But regardless of your situation, Hay

suggests consulting with a professional and considering preparing your taxes both ways to see which method gets the best results. "Otherwise, you might miss out on key deductions and benefits," she says. (Plus, with new tax-code changes coming into effect, an expert opinion is especially worthwhile.)

CHANGING YOUR LAST NAME? MAKE IT LEGAL.

The IRS uses your social security number to file returns, so it's fine to use your maiden name if you haven't switched to your married one yet. "But if you are planning to file under a new name, be sure to notify the Social Security Administration (SSA) of the change before filing tax returns," says Hay. Since the IRS checks your information against the SSA's database, you'll want to ensure enough time for it to be registered.

HAVE AN HONEST CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY. Filing taxes together is a significant step in merging your finances. What was once a simple form for each of you may now be a more complex process, and over time, if you have kids and buy a home, it will become more so. That's why Hay recommends using this time to discuss your short- and long-term goals, as well as any issues—say, credit-card debt—that affect your finances. "This is an opportunity for a couple to start building a financial road map," she says.

THE PLAYLIST: PARTY STARTERS

Your recessional song signals that it's time to kick off the celebration. Whether you're going with an acoustic ensemble or a DJ, you can grab guests' attention by choosing a less-traditional track. These upbeat suggestions from Gretchen Clements—who manages the classical/ceremony division at Élan Artists, a cooperative of musicians all over the world—will help your guests move into party mode.

"Best Day of My Life,"
by American Authors

"On Top of the World," by Imagine Dragons

"I Really Like You,"
by Carly Rae Jepsen

"Galway Girl,"
by Ed Sheeran

"Brand New,"
by Ben Rector

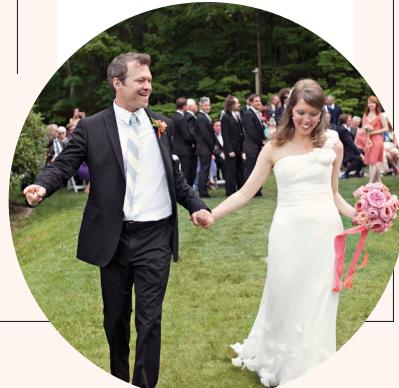
"Shut Up and Dance,"
by Walk the Moon

"Fallin' for You,"
by Colbie Caillat

"Ho Hey,"
by the Lumineers

"All My Loving,"
by the Beatles

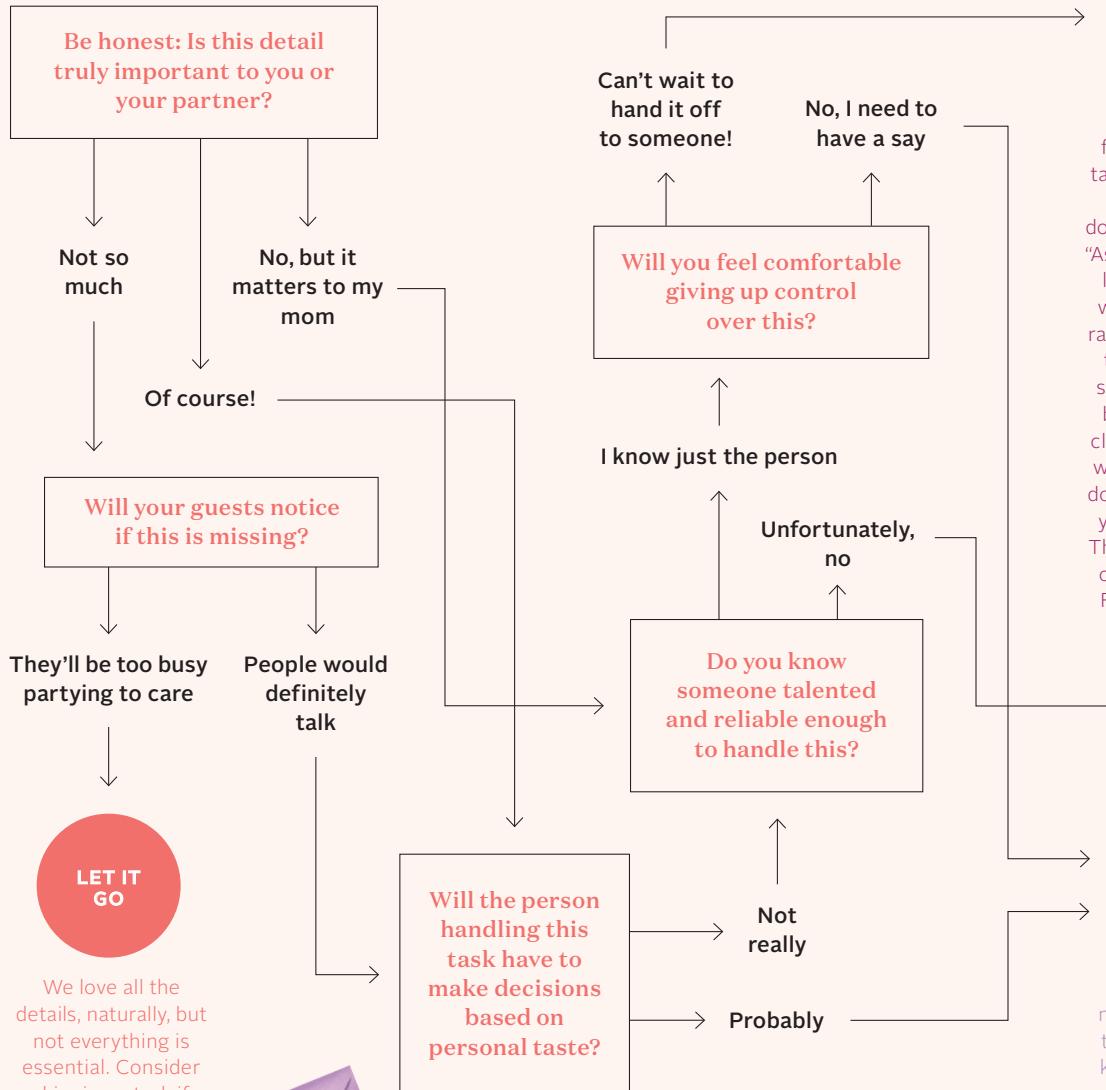
"Beautiful Day,"
by U2



CAN I DELEGATE THIS?

You've got a long to-do list and loved ones eager to help. But while your sis might be capable of some tasks, others are best handled by you. We asked Francie Dorman and Britt Cole, cofounders of 42 North, a wedding-planning firm in Ipswich, Massachusetts, to break it down. **TEXT BY CHRISANNE GRISÉ**

START HERE



Congrats, you've found the perfect task to assign—one that needs to be done, but not by you. "Asking a responsible loved one to help with important errands can really take the pressure off," says Dorman. Just be sure to offer a clear explanation of what you need, and don't forget to show your appreciation! Then cross that task off your to-do list. Feels good, right?

If a project is a matter of personal taste, or you don't know anyone with the right skill set, it's likely best for you to deal with it. "Some decisions will reflect the two of you as a couple, so embrace the opportunity to highlight your unique style," says Cole. Feeling super-stressed? Look for more straightforward tasks to pass off. (See left for suggestions.) You've got this!

5 GREAT TASKS TO DELEGATE

1 Collecting guest addresses for save-the-dates and invitations



2 Stuffing and stamping envelopes

3 Assembling welcome bags and/or dropping them off at the hotel

4 Handing out tips to vendors on the day of

5 Confirming hotel and transportation reservations



TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Wedding stress is real, but there are ways to keep it at bay, even on the big day. Meditation and mindfulness—bringing your full attention to the present—can boost your sense of calm. Ellie Burrows, cofounder of New York City's MNDFL studios, shares her tips.

TEXT BY BROOKE PORTER KATZ

1

Do one thing at a time.

Avoid multitasking as much as possible. Instead of buying coffee or scouring Pinterest while on the phone with your planner, find a quiet area to sit and talk. When you concentrate on the current moment, you'll feel more focused and have a more productive conversation.

2

Meditate during lunch (or anytime!).

You don't need a studio or special equipment—just a seat in a peaceful place. Mobile apps like Headspace, Insight Timer, and iGiant Mind will guide beginners through simple exercises; MNDFL offers one-to-five-minute Quick Fix online videos, with themes like Emotions and Breath.

3

Practice slow breathing before bed.

Gently hold down your right nostril and breathe in and out of just the left side of your nose for at least three minutes. It may feel odd, but this meditation technique should lead to better sleep.

4

Schedule quality time on the big day.

On your wedding day, Burrows recommends planning moments to steal away together to connect and express your love, even if it's just for five minutes. "It'll ground you in the moment—and people might think you just stepped away for a photo," she says.

Psst!

Get 50 percent off a one-month MNDFUL online subscription with the code MNDFLBRIDE. Regular price: \$20 a month; video.mndflmeditation.com.

