



SPRING  
BRIDES

# Perfect Engagement Photos

Congratulations, you're engaged. This is such an exciting time as you and your now fiancé join together and make plans to share the rest of your lives together.

After celebrating with friends and loved ones, one of the first things you will want to do is capture the moment in engagement photos.

You've most likely seen engagement photos before — the good, the bad and the outright cringe-worthy. To avoid the latter, consider the following elements.

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Choosing a local photographer is key. Look through portfolios and other engagement sessions each professional has photographed.

Keep in mind that many photographers include an engagement photo shoot in their wedding photo package, so you will save in the long run if you book the same photographer for your wedding as your engagement session.

## SCHEDULE EARLY

There are many benefits to snapping your engagement photos as early as possible. Not only will you want to capture the moment while your emotions of excitement are at their peak, but if you have them in hand early, you can incorporate them into your save-the-date cards and your wedding website or pub-

lish it with an engagement announcement in the local paper.

Even if you choose to do none of these things, it will be one task complete. This will give you the free time to focus your attention elsewhere later — when you will need to make many decisions very quickly.

## CHOOSE A STYLE

Your engagement photos should reflect who you and your fiancé are as a couple. You, your fiancé and your photographer should discuss overall style and location, as well as any outfit changes you might have planned.

Keep in mind how you plan to use the photos, as well as who will want them. Think of what you wouldn't want hanging on your grandmother's wall.

## PLAN YOUR OUTFITS

Stick with styles that complement one another and stay within the same color palette. You also want to avoid looking like a "matching set."

Many brides-to-be incorporate white attire into their engagement sessions, which is a classic choice and allows the groom to choose colors he is comfortable in, as everything matches white.



# An Intimate Affair

A small, intimate wedding has loads of romance to it — as well as many other advantages. While the large wedding has become a staple of contemporary American culture, the small wedding is making a comeback, and for good reason.

Before you set your final budget and guest list, consider the following motivations for staying small.

## GET MARRIED WHERE YOU WANT

Think of all the gorgeous venues you could either price yourself out of, or not be able to fit into due to the size of your party. Keeping your guest list small gives you more options.

It also opens up venues that don't traditionally host weddings — or charge “wedding prices.” Think of places such as an art museum, a zoo or a greenhouse.

## SPEND MORE QUALITY TIME WITH GUESTS

An intimate wedding typically has less than 75 guests, which means you will have a lot more time to spend with each person.

Walk around to each table and personally thank people for coming. Depending on the size of your party, consider seating everyone at one long table — creating an intimate dinner party atmosphere.

## DO MORE WITH YOUR MONEY

Small weddings can cost less, saving you thousands. Alternatively, you could spend the same amount as you would have set aside for a larger affair



and splurge on the luxurious extras you want most.

A smaller wedding can be a way for you to ensure your guests have a night they will always remember, and that you

have the wedding you always dreamed about.

## PUT YOUR MONEY TOWARD YOUR FUTURE

Your wedding day is a magi-

cal day and will most likely always hold a distinct place in your heart. But remember, it is just one day.

Hosting a smaller wedding means you are free to put addi-

tional money toward future goals, such as putting a down payment on a house or saving to start a family. Remember, your lives together are just beginning.

# Choosing Bridesmaids Dresses

Nothing can cause more drama than choosing bridesmaids dresses — especially if you have a large bridal party or opinionated attendants.

The smart bride understands that this aspect of her wedding is less about her and more about her maids.

## HAVE KEY INFO IN HAND

You should know your wedding colors and have your venue booked and your own gown ordered. All of these items will impact the style and hue of the gowns you choose.

Will you be choosing the gown or have you decided to allow your maids to choose their own (with your final approval, of course)? Do you want your maids in the same style?

Will they be wearing various colors or hues of the same color? Know the answers to each of these questions before stepping foot inside a bridal salon.

## START WITH PICTURES

Look through many photos before you begin shopping. Also keep in mind, as much as you love them, your friends are not models (unless they are) — so what you see in photos will look different in person and on each individual person.

## CONSIDER THE COST

Not everyone is going to have the same budget, and a compassionate



bride-to-be will be mindful of this. Unless you are picking up the tab, don't choose a pricey gown. Not everyone views your wedding as the investment you see it as.

## BE FLEXIBLE

This applies both to your expectations of the dress and your maids. Keep in mind that the color

you see in a magazine might be slightly different in person.

Be flexible in terms of what is will look good on different skin tones. Remember, as much as you might love a color, above all, you want everyone to look their best.

## ORDER AT THE RIGHT TIME

Many dresses require one to

three months to ship, so be sure to allow for this. After the dresses arrive, you also will need time for your maids to pick them up (unless they are being shipped directly) and for the gowns to be altered.

So don't wait too long before checking this item off the bridal to-do list.

# Plan an Elegant Bridal Tea

Spring is the perfect time to host an elegant bridal tea. Whether you are a bridesmaid or the mother of the bride or groom looking to honor the bride-to-be — or are a bride yourself — consider hosting a fancy get-together.

It is inexpensive, chic and fairly easy to pull off without additional stress.

## SAVE ON RENTAL FEES

You can save a significant amount of money by hosting the tea at someone's home rather than at an event center or restaurant. Sunny spring weather means everyone should be comfortable in a backyard or patio setup.

You will just need to be sure to have enough seating for everyone, which might require renting a few tables and extra chairs.

## CAPITALIZE ON SPRING FLOWERS

An outdoor affair also provides plenty of natural decor. Afraid of rain? Flowers such as peonies are bountiful in spring, and their large blooms mean you only need one or two at each table to create a stunning effect.

Roses also are a classic choice, with many varieties blooming in early spring. Any flower you choose, however, will add feminine flare and complement the tea service.

## USE FAMILY CHINA

While the betrothed couple might not be registering for china, you can bet that their grandmothers — and the grandmothers of close friends — did so, still have it and hardly ever use it.

Many women will most likely be happy to contribute to the occasion and let you borrow their settings. Be sure to keep track of which patterns belong to who, and return them promptly and hand washed. (Most china is too delicate for a dishwasher.)



## DON'T FORGET THE TEA ALTERNATIVES

Not everyone is fond of tea, so be sure to have alternatives to offer to

guests.

For hot beverages that also can be sipped out of china, offer coffee or hot chocolate (a delicacy consumed year-

round in many other countries), as well as cold beverages such as lemonade, or water garnished with cucumber or mint.

# All About the Hair

Your hair is a central component of the overall bridal look. What you choose to do with it — and adorn it with — can dramatically change your finished appearance. How you look will be an obvious focus of wedding planning since everyone else's eyes will be on you.

But don't fret just yet. Follow these tips and tricks, and you are sure to be happy with the results.

## UPDO — OR DOWN?

Before you choose a hairstyle, you must take into consideration the style of your gown, as well as the overall tone you are hoping to set for your wedding. Your hairstyle should complement these aspects — not compete with them.

Your face shape also will play a role in your overall decision. Just remember, the goal is to look like the best version of yourself — not someone completely different. So consider styles that don't stray far from your everyday look.

If you regularly wear your naturally wavy hair loose, a simple side-swept bun with a long veil will look more appropriate than tight ringlets and a tiara.

## VEILS: THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

The veil has become a classic wedding accoutrement and is available in many lengths, styles and fabrics. Consider the style of your dress when choosing a veil; ideally, these items will be purchased at the same time.

Will you want to show off the back of the dress? Stick with a veil of sheer silk netting.



Is your dress an ankle-length, vintage chic stunner? A birdcage veil is the likely choice. When choosing a hairstyle, be sure it allows for the veil of your choice to be easily

secured.

## HEADPIECES AND HAIR JEWELRY

Another option is to forgo the veil altogether. Baubles

designed specifically with your locks in mind are getting more and more popular.

Think golden floral combs, delicate headbands and whimsical bun wreaths. You

can leave behind jewels and metals of all kind, and go floral; a wreath of delicate rosebuds or one elegant magnolia bloom can add a breath-taking touch of romance.

# Marriage in the Movies

The wedding-themed romantic comedy is a beloved genre — and brings with it a range of emotion.

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We enjoy every crazy bridesmaid, every heartfelt moment between a bride and her mother, and the general fuss that goes into and surrounds the wedding planning process.

The following three movies, released 10 years apart from each other, focus their respective narratives on the wedding planning process. They also demonstrate how much has changed — and hasn't — when it comes to planning the

perfect wedding.

## **FATHER OF THE BRIDE (1991)**

Is there any bride-to-be more perfect than Annie Banks McKenzie? Yes, the original 1950 version is a classic, but there is something about the aura that Kimberly Williams brings to the role that has every modern girl wanting to be just like her.

Plus, her storybook house was made for a backyard

wedding. This movie oozes wedding inspiration, and borrowing ideas from it is basically required.

## **THE WEDDING PLANNER (2001)**

What's a girl got to do to stay married? Wedding planner Mary nails marital issues to wedding choices. While she plans lavish affairs for her clients, her would-be courthouse wedding and classic boat neck dress have a sim-

ple-elegance to them that you can't not appreciate.

Even though this is not the wedding she ultimately follows through on, her style is effortless — and brides-to-be will covet her style along with her love affair with love.

## **BRIDESMAIDS (2011)**

This movie gets real with the drama that comes with the typical wedding. Meet yet another Annie, only this one is a bridesmaid who just hap-

pens to be down on her luck.

She is the made of honor in her best friend's wedding, where she must plan festivities with the other maids, including Helen, who is seemingly perfect in every way.

Brides, take note. Bride Lillie definitely could have been more sensitive to both friends. Also, don't eat questionable fare before a fitting. Lessons abound in this romantic comedy.

# Thank You Card Etiquette

Receiving wedding gifts is an added joy of getting married. Writing thank-you notes for each of these gifts, however, can be a challenge.

This is especially true if you receive a large number of gifts. Not to worry, with this simple guide, your thank-yous will be thoughtfully written and in the mail in no time.

## WHO TO THANK

Everyone who has given you a gift should receive your thanks. Be sure to add anyone who helped in planning, organizing, and decorating or ran errands on your behalf. Your wedding would not have been what it was without help.

Start by making a list. This will ensure you don't forget anyone and makes it easy to cross off each name as cards are written.

## WHEN TO SEND

For every gift you receive before your big day, you have a couple of weeks to post a thank you note. For every gift received at or after your wedding, you generally have a few months.

This is not to say you should wait until the end of this etiquette deadline. Try to send your thank-you notes out as quickly as possible —



ideally within the first few weeks after you return from your honeymoon.

## WHAT TO SAY

As a culture, we have always struggled with the best way to say, “thank you.” The best way to pen a mass quantity of thank-you notes is to stick with a simple formula, with a touch of personalization.

Start with a simple greeting:  
Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Then express your gratitude: Thank you so much for \_\_\_\_\_.

Next, mention the gift by name and add a personal detail. This could be how you plan on using or displaying the gift. If the person has given money, describe how you plan to spend it.

Follow up this sentence by stating when you hope to see the person again, what the person means to you, or just that you're thinking of her.

Finally, end with your regards.

## MAKING IT FUN

You can relieve much of your anxiety about the task by making the experience an enjoyable one. Start off by

stocking up on some beautiful stationery.

Thank-you cards are items you will need again and again, so you can take advantage of bulk deals without worrying about waste.

Make it an “event.” Put on some fun music, pour a glass of wine and pick up your favorite pen. Don't forget to split the task with your beloved.