

20 Ideas for a Frugal (Not Cheap) Wedding on a Budget

What advice do you have for a frugal wedding on a budget? We're getting married this fall and want to explore as many cheap wedding ideas as we can. Since we're both in our early twenties and don't have a lot to spend, we were hoping to keep our wedding as small as possible. We were thinking no more than six to eight people including ourselves.

Glad you asked. My wife and I were married in the summer of 2003. Although our wedding was actually quite frugal, we recognized afterwards that there was plenty more we could have done to make it even less expensive.

Hindsight is always 20/20, so here are 20 tactics you could try to cut down the cost of your wedding without diminishing your experience or that of your guests.

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20 Tips to Plan Your Wedding on a Budget

1. Avoid guest list bloat.

Although you might be tempted to throw everyone you know on your guest list, that isn't always a great idea. With each addition you make, you're adding additional costs while also making your wedding less intimate.

To a degree, this was a trap we fell into with our own wedding – our guest list grew and grew to the point where we invited people that we didn't know well simply because we felt obligated.

To save as much as you can, try inviting fewer people and making the event more intimate. Start by whittling your list down by 20%, then another 20%. Then see if you're happy with it.

2. Ask for wedding help instead of wedding gifts.

We were lucky that several of our friends and family had musical talent, so they were able to provide musical accompaniment for our ceremony. We also have a close friend who's an extremely skilled amateur photographer, and he was willing to photograph our ceremony as our wedding gift. Then, after the ceremony, he provided high-quality digital images of everything.

Asking family and friends to offer help or services that align with their talents in lieu of a gift is a great way to keep your wedding on a budget.

3. Hold the ceremony at home, or outdoors.

Renting a building or function hall for your ceremony and reception can be very expensive. Instead, consider using your own home (or the home of a parent) for your ceremony, or perhaps a public park with a beautiful view.

In each case, you can also have your reception outdoors, creating a picturesque, memorable ceremony while eliminating the cost of renting a venue.

If you go the outdoor route, however, it's best to have a back-up plan in case of bad weather; you don't want to get married in a downpour that leaves all your friends and family soaked. That might mean renting a sturdy tent if rain is forecast, or a few industrial fans if it's an extremely hot day — or simply stuffing everyone inside the house to wait out a storm.

4. Do the catering yourself, or hire a family-owned restaurant.

For our wedding, we handled our own food preparation and catering with a lot of help from my wife's family. This drastically reduced the food costs for the ceremony.

If this isn't your forte, look around your community for a family-owned restaurant and ask the owners directly to cater your wedding. Family-owned restaurants are always the first place to check — they will almost always go the extra mile to make your wedding special and are generally more understanding of your particular budget needs.

5. Go minimal with the flowers.

Instead of spending boatloads of money on flowers that will die shortly after the reception, keep it simple but elegant — for instance, a single rose for each bridesmaid and a very small bouquet for the bride. If you know someone with a rose bush, you can actually make your own bouquets the day before the ceremony by cutting the roses yourself and trimming away the thorns.

Another cheap wedding idea — go with fake flowers instead. It's likely that no one will even notice, and you could save a bundle by making the arrangements yourself well ahead of time.

6. Skip the groomsmen and bridesmaid gifts.

While it's considered customary to give gifts to your groomsmen and bridesmaids in some circles, it isn't always necessary. Instead of buying gifts they may not even want or enjoy, consider writing them a special note to say "thanks" instead. If your friends know that you're trying to have a frugal wedding, they will understand.

7. Make your own invitations.

With a quality home printer and some time, you can make very classy invitations on your own. My wife and I picked up a simple blank invitation kit on sale at Staples and made our own invitations to our wedding. No pictures or anything – just a very classic font and simple text. It looked stylish and didn't cost us much at all.

Sites like [VistaPrint](#) also offer cheap wedding invitations you can order from the comfort of your home. Their options aren't too fancy, but they'll certainly do the trick. You can even hire a freelance graphic designer to whip up a custom invitation for you on [Fiverr](#) for pretty short money.

8. Borrow stereo equipment or use yours from home.

Rather than hiring a DJ, just use your own home stereo equipment, or equipment you borrow from a friend. Put speakers around the dance floor area – there's no need to spread them around the entire reception room. Create a playlist on your iPod that features a few hours' worth of your favourite songs – or see if you have a friend who might want to make a playlist for you. Choosing your own songs is a great way to personalize your entire experience.

9. Stock the bar yourself.

Alcohol is a big expense when it comes to a lot of weddings, and it's also a big variable you can play around with to cut costs. Instead of opting for a full open bar, for instance, you can save money offering just beer and wine, or a free cocktail hour followed by a cash bar.

If you do rent a function hall, ask if they'll let you supply your own alcohol instead of using the venue's, which can be a big money-saver. Look for a discount liquor store in your area, and stock up on the basics: red and white wine and a few types of beer at the very least. If you want to offer a full bar, pick up the standard liquors like vodka, gin, rum, and whiskey, plus a few mixers and soft drinks like sodas and juice.

Keep in mind that while it's more cost-efficient to buy a keg of beer instead of cases, any leftover beer will go to waste, whereas you can store excess bottles for months. And that's helpful, since it's a good idea to overestimate — you don't want to run out of drinks halfway through the reception.

10. Display 'vendor cards' in exchange for reduced rates.

If you're hiring people to provide services for your reception (musicians, a DJ, florists, caterers, photographers, etc.), offer to advertise for them in exchange for reduced rates.

At the reception, put a small card by each person's place setting that lists the businesses responsible for each service at the wedding, along with their contact information. Since this tends to be very effective advertising, many businesses will happily provide services at reduced rates in exchange for this opportunity.

11. Contact the local university.

If you'd like live musical accompaniment for the ceremony (and perhaps for the reception), one place to look for lower-cost musicians is your local university's music department.

Contact them and ask if there are any students who are studying a particular instrument or vocal work and see if they're available to provide music for a wedding. It can help them develop their resume *and* save you on this typically pricey part of your wedding.

This goes for photographers as well — if there's an art school or photography program at your local college, see if there are any talented students or recent grads who would be willing to photograph your wedding at a discount for the portfolio-building experience and exposure they'd receive.

12. Price shop for decorations – and consider buying used.

If you know what you're looking for ahead of time, you can simply wait until it goes on sale and “pounce” when the time is right.

Meanwhile, you can also consider buying used centre pieces and decorations. Recent brides often sell their decorations on sites like craigslist.org, and you can save a bundle of money — and effort — going that route.

13. If you're getting married in your own church, ask the ladies' auxiliary for help.

Most churches have a women's organization that is very happy to help with wedding preparation in exchange for a small donation. Get them involved – they can take a lot of worry off your shoulders for a relatively low price.

At our wedding, the “church ladies” were a great help with church decoration and other helpful things on the day of the ceremony.

14. Buy dresses off the rack – and on sale.

If you want to save on bridesmaid dresses, try to avoid ordering custom dresses altogether. Instead, head to a few stores with dresses on sale and see if you can all find something “off the rack.”

This works best if your colours are chosen ahead of time and if the store you're shopping at carries plenty of sizes. To minimize spats within your wedding party, you can also shop ahead of time and only have them try on dresses you already approve of.

Another cheap wedding idea: Instead of buying new dresses, have every bridesmaid wear a particular colour dress they already own.

15. Rent tuxedos as a group, or simply wear matching suits.

Unless you have a specific reason for owning a tuxedo (and few people do), you should rent one. It's often useful to rent the tuxedos as a group through the same business, as you'll often get a group rate.

If you don't want to go the tuxedo route, you can also have all of your groomsmen wear a black suit from home or other matching formalwear.

16. Choose affordable wedding rings.

Wedding bands are traditionally an important part of the marriage ceremony, symbolic of your commitment to each other. That doesn't mean they have to cost you a fortune.

A typical 14-karat wedding band can cost [upwards of \\$1,000](#), and wedding website TheKnot says Australian couples tend to spend about 3% of their overall wedding cost on the rings (plus thousands more on an engagement ring). If you're trying to pull off your wedding on a budget, this is an area where you can trim costs pretty easily.

Unlike the wedding itself, which is over all too quickly, you'll (hopefully) be wearing this ring every day for the rest of your life – so it's important you like the way it looks and feels. But again, that doesn't mean it has to cost \$1,000 or more. Titanium, sterling silver, and other materials are less expensive, durable, and can be personalized for even deeper meaning.

17. Plan a simple honeymoon, not an ostentatious one.

A huge, over-the-top honeymoon might sound fun, but it's far, *far* cheaper (and often more enjoyable) to stay closer to home.

Instead of planning a big, expensive trip, focus on what matters: Unwinding after those hectic weeks leading up to your wedding, and savouring some time alone with your new spouse. An 18-hour flight across the world with multiple connections isn't going to help in that regard.

You could even just hop in the car and spend a week or two seeing all of the local sights you've never had time to see until now. Whatever you do, just enjoy this time together.

Bonus idea: If you're set on a more distant honeymoon, try paying for most of your wedding expenses with a credit card that offers great [travel rewards](#) or a [sign-up bonus](#), which could help cover the cost of your flight (but pay off the balance before it accrues any interest).

18. Involve your closest friends and family in the preparations.

As you're brainstorming cheap wedding ideas, you should get your closest friends and family involved with the details. Quite often, they'll have surprisingly good ideas that can save you money and effort.

For example, they might know a vendor that would offer you a deal, or have something you could borrow for your special day. Good friends and family are always there to help, and they'll be especially happy to contribute to such a joyful occasion — so you might as well take advantage of their generosity.

19. Plan, plan, plan.

When you're trying to have a wedding on a budget, it's important to plan ahead. List everything you can think of and walk through these items step by step.

The earlier you get started — and the more things you think about early on — the less “last-minute stress” you'll have, and the more time you'll have to find sales and discounts and research other good ideas.

20. Don't stress.

Something will probably go wrong at the last minute — a little detail of some sort won't work out. For example, our pastor almost missed our rehearsal dinner, so we barely rehearsed.

Don't worry about it. Just assume something little is going to go wrong and avoid the urge to throw money at the problem. Most likely, no one will even notice the little issue, and quite often someone in your wedding party (or someone helping out) will come up with a pretty good solution to fix things.

Good luck (and congratulations)!