

Weddings on a Shoestring Budget



Chapter 1 Don't Spend a Fortune on the Flowers

Flowers at your ceremony and your reception are an integral part of a beautiful wedding, but they can cost thousands of dollars. You can have fabulous flowers and remain on a budget.

Chapter 2 Live Flowers for Your Wedding

Every little girl dreams of a fairy tale wedding with arches of roses, armloads of orchids and baskets of gardenias. Then we grow up and find out just how much one orchid costs much less an armload. You can have fairy tale flowers at your wedding without nightmare prices, but you need to go to the garden nursery not the florist.

Chapter 3 Wedding Bouquets – You Don't Have to Spend Hundreds of Dollars

It's your wedding day and you've always pictured yourself with a stunning bouquet. Then you go shopping and the sticker shock is the only thing that's stunning.

Chapter 4 Your Wedding Dress: Beautiful and Affordable

Wedding dresses can cost thousands of dollars, just look at the latest celebrity bride. But yours doesn't have to. You can be beautiful and stay on a budget. There are alternatives to spending a small fortune on your wedding attire.

Chapter 5 Glorious Gifts for the Bridesmaids and Maid of Honor

Traditionally the bride gives a token of her appreciation to each female member of her wedding party, but those tokens can add up to a chunk of change. You can give a memorable gift without emptying your piggy bank.

Chapter 6 Keepsakes for Your Guests That Won't Max Out Your Credit Card.

Every bride would like her guests to take away something more than just beautiful memories from her wedding. But those mementos can add up to a hefty total in no time.

Chapter 7 Cutting the Costs on Your Wedding Cake

A multi-tiered wedding cake beautifully decorated is an important part of any bride's dream wedding, but the price tag can give you nightmares. Use these tips to take a bite out of the bill.

Chapter 8 Conserve Your Cash While Your Guests Eat, Drink, and Be Merry

Catering can drain your checking account faster than a leaky bucket. But you can plug the holes and still provide your guests a fabulous feast.

Chapter 9 Just for Fun

Chapter 1 Don't Spend a Fortune on the Flowers

Flowers at your ceremony and your reception are an integral part of a beautiful wedding, but they can cost thousands of dollars. You can have fabulous flowers and remain on a budget.

If you're buying the flowers through a florist order flowers that will be in season. Daffodils are beautiful and not very expensive in the spring but horrendously priced at other times of year. Roses, carnations and mums are year round flowers usually reasonably priced.

Be flexible on your color choice. Yellow and white are the most common flower colors, followed by red. Blue is rare, as is purple. True black in nature doesn't exist. If you have got to have black, use silk flowers. You can mix silk flowers with real ones as long as the silks are small flowered.

Florist prices depend on the variety of the flower, how many flowers and how long it takes to make the arrangement. The simpler the arrangement, the less time they have to spend on it, the less expensive the arrangements. If you have got to have exotic flowers like orchids, place one stem in a tall slender vase. You'll get the glamour at a lesser cost. You can use oriental lilies the same way. Usually there are three flowers on each stem. Place one stem in each narrow tall vase.

To keep your flower costs to a minimum don't use a florist. Grocery stores these days have a fabulous assortment of blossoms and bouquets. And they come in a variety of colors. If you want an arrangement for each table at your reception, buy an inexpensive glass vase and a bunch of flowers from the grocer. Place flowers in vase and you're done. If the colors are of paramount importance you can talk to the flower manager to see what she/he has ordered for the week of your wedding. You can then have the correct color bouquets saved just for you.

Roses are only expensive at two times a year, Valentine's and Mother Day. Other times of the year they can be had for as little as \$10 a dozen. Buy five dozen and you have enough for ten tables when you fill in with greenery. You can also buy flowers wholesale online. Just make sure that you don't need a retailer's license and that the minimum quantity is something realistic. 12 dozen roses sounds like a lot, but if you have 8 tables at your reception, the cake table, and a drinks table, you've just used 12 dozen roses. Keep in mind flowers from wholesalers are shipped in the tightly closed bud state. You will need some place to store the flowers and keep them in water. And leave enough time, two or three days after delivery for the buds to open up a bit.

Whether you order the flowers online or pick them up from your grocers the flowers need to be prepared. Strip off all the leaves from the stem that will be below the water line in the vase. Recut each stem at a 45 degree angle and immediately put in a bucket of ice water. If the buds are tightly closed and you want them to open place the buckets in a warm brightly lit room. If you want to slow down the flower's from opening place the buckets in a dark cool room.

The easiest way to transport the flowers from home to the wedding site is to keep them in the buckets and place them in the vases at the site.

After the wedding consider giving the flowers to a Senior Citizens' Home or to a children's hospital.

Chapter 2 Live Flowers for Your Wedding

Every little girl dreams of a fairy tale wedding with arches of roses, armloads of orchids and baskets of gardenias. Then we grow up and find out just how much one orchid costs much less an armload. You can have fairy tale flowers at your wedding without nightmare prices, but you need to go to the nursery not the florist.

Blooming plants in pots are perfect for weddings. Here are some ideas that could take your breath away and the sting out of your wallet.

Geraniums come in pinks, purples, reds and whites. You have your choice of the one quart size which is about a 4 inches high container or one gallon which is about 8 inches high.

Miniature roses, which refers to the size of the blossom rather than the size of the plant, come in a variety of colors. Most of the time they're in 4 inch pots.

Standards are flowers which have been trained to have a trunk-like sturdy stem and then a burst of flowers at the top. The trunks can range from a foot high to four or five feet high. Roses, hibiscus, bougainvillea are just a few of the flowers you can find in the standard form.

Azaleas are available in late winter, spring and early summer and come in white and pinks. The bushes have glossy dark green leaves and are loaded with blossoms. Azaleas also come as a standard, but these can be a bit pricy.

Chrysanthemums are available at nurseries only in the fall, but you can find them in grocery stores nearly year round.

Now that you've got all these pots what do you do with them?

The first thing is to cover the ugly containers or to repot. You can buy cheap baskets. You can repot in decorative pots. You can buy cheap terracotta pots and spray paint them in gold or white and then stick the nursery pots inside. You can buy gift bags (the kind without the handles) and place the nursery pots inside and then tie a ribbon around the stems of the plant.

For smaller pots you can buy cloth napkins, place the pot in the middle of the napkin, and bring up the four corners, then tie. You can also do this with larger pots with fabric.

Take your decorated pots and line the aisle or the entry way to where your wedding ceremony is being held with gallon containers. Place pots on stairs. Put several pots on each table at the reception, at your cake table, or on food tables.

You can vary the height of your arrangement by placing one of the pots on an overturned empty pot and then surrounding it with contrasting flowers.

Rather than placing a flower arrangement on the alter, use a standard on either side of the alter table.

You can group several pots in a basket and then cover the pot brims with moss, available at a crafts store.

If you don't want to take the pots home, let guests take them, or donate them to a retirement home or your church.

Chapter 3 Your Wedding Bouquet – You Don't Have to Spend Hundreds of Dollars.

It's your wedding day and you've always pictured yourself with a stunning bouquet. Then you go shopping and the sticker shock is the only thing that's stunning. You can have beautiful flowers for you as the bride and for your wedding party without spending a fortune. And you don't have to be a professional florist to do it.

Keep in mind the season of your wedding. If it's fall, you can order tulips, but you'll pay a fortune. If you go with mums, which are in season in the autumn, you'll pay a lot less.

Stay away from the exotics like tuberose, gardenias, orchids, or calla lilies incorporated into your bouquet. Stick with more common flowers like carnations, roses, and baby's breath.

You can carry a single spray of orchids or a single calla lily. One flower of an exotic species makes a dramatic statement and doesn't cost a fortune.

You can carry a single white rose tied with a satin ribbon and each of bridesmaids can carry a rose to match or contrast with their dress.

If you have to have the traditional flowing bridal bouquet you can cut costs elsewhere by being creative with your table setting flowers.

Do it yourself, or have a friend do your flowers.

You can make a beautiful hand held rose bouquet.

Buy a dozen roses. Cut the stems leaving about 8 inches of stem from the flower heads. Hold the stems in your hand tightly bunched. Wrap the stems with a rubber band and then cover the rubber band with a satin ribbon. This technique works with carnations, gerbera daisies or any sturdy stemmed large headed flowers. Tie a simple bow over the satin wrapping and leave the ends trailing. Place the bouquets in buckets of water with their stems resting in about three inches of water but the ribbon wrapping dry. Store in a cool, but not freezing, dark place.

You can make a nosegay.

Take a vase that's about 10 inches deep and has an opening no more than 4 inches across. Weight the vase by placing glass marbles in the bottom so it won't tip. If you don't have marbles you can use pennies. You will need about 18 to 24 flowers for each bouquet. Cut the stems of all the flowers to the same length, about 8 inches from the flower head. Start with three roses in the center of the

vase. Around the roses, place a circle of carnations; you'll need five to seven. Around the carnations place a circle of roses, you'll need from seven to ten roses. If you want you can insert springs of babies breath, and stems of leather leaf fern, in between the carnations and the roses. The bouquet should be circular. Remove it from the vase with your left hand and secure the flowers with a rubber band. Cover the rubber band with a satin ribbon, a length of lace or tulle netting. Store in a cool, but not freezing, dark place.

Carry a basket of flowers.

Line a basket with plastic and place a water soaked piece of oasis (available at craft stores) inside the basket. The oasis should be slightly larger than the basket so when you push it in it is held in place by the pressure of the basket.

Begin sticking stems of greenery into the oasis so it is covered from sight. The greenery should be visible about four to six inches above the top of the basket. Place about four to six large headed blossoms – roses, carnations, lilies, gerbera daisies in the basket about an inch apart. Fill in the gaps with small flowers – baby breath, mini carns, snap dragons, and mums. Tie a bow on the basket handle.

Chapter 4 Your Wedding Dress: Beautiful and Affordable

Wedding dresses can cost thousands of dollars, just look at the latest celebrity bride. But yours doesn't have to. You can be beautiful and stay on a budget. There are alternatives to spending a small fortune on your wedding attire.

Don't shop in the wedding department. It seems there is a surcharge on any dress once it's labeled as a bride's dress. Shop in the formal evening wear department or even prom dress.

If you have enough notice, and most brides do since they plan their weddings six months in advance, shop the sales at wedding salons. Wedding gowns go on sale after June. You can also buy samples or floor models. Most of them are in good shape. There are discontinued wedding gown models that are priced at a substantial discount. And there are gowns that were ordered and delivered but never picked up.

Wedding veils are much less expensive than wedding dresses. Splurge on the veil and stay modest with your gown.

Look on ebay or even your hometown newspaper for a dress that's been barely worn. Or perhaps not even worn at all. It's sad but true, weddings do get canceled. And while you're looking at ebay, also use the Internet to find wedding gown bargains. Just punch in wedding gown + bargain, +cheap, or +discount.

There are wedding outlet stores you can find online. If you know the manufacturer and style of the gown of your dreams you may be able to find it at a huge discount. Just take your measurements and ask if the gown that they have will fit you. Do NOT rely on the sizes. Wedding gowns for some bizarre reason are often sized 2 sizes smaller than regular dress sizes. So if you normally take a 10 in street wear, you may have to wear a size 14 wedding gown. The gown will arrive scrunched in a box but a quick trip to the dry cleaners for steaming and pressing and it should look fresh.

Rent your wedding dress. Men rent tuxedos, so why not? You can expect to pay about 1/10 the cost of the gown to rent it. So you can wear a \$1500.00 dress for \$150.

Shop consignment shops or high fashion/couture wear second hand shops. Every major city has at least a few. A relatively new trend is wedding consignment shops which deal only with wedding attire and accessories.

Borrow the dress from a friend or relative. Your sister may be thrilled that you think of her dress enough to want to wear it at your own wedding.

Consider having the dress made, especially if you want a sleek, elegant look. The silk you buy at a fabric shop is the same silk used in the designer dresses. You can achieve the same look at a lesser cost.

Consider lingerie. No, I don't mean a teddy with lace thigh highs. An ivory satin halter style night gown could very easily be a wedding dress with the right underpinnings and accessories. Some of these night gowns come embroidered with lace, have beading and appliqués.

You can use these same tricks and tips to help your bridesmaids stay within their budget as well.

Chapter 5 Glorious Gifts for the Bridesmaids and Maid of Honor

Traditionally the bride gives a token of her appreciation to each female member of her wedding party, but those tokens can add up to a chunk of change. You can give a memorable gift without emptying your piggy bank.

Create a wedding memory scrap book for each bridesmaid. If you start the project as soon as you start planning your wedding it will be a snap to complete. Include snippets of the bridesmaid gown fabric, photos from the wedding shower, a bit of lace from your wedding dress, a copy of the invitation, and of course photos from the bachelorette party, wedding rehearsal, dinner and event itself. The scrapbook can be just 5 or 6 pages long.

Buy a dozen roses in the same color as your wedding bouquet, unless the roses are red. Red roses don't dry well or press well, they turn an ugly black. Press the roses between the pages of a telephone book, three roses to a page, covered with blank white sheets of pages underneath the roses and over them. There should be about 50 pages of the telephone book between each set of roses. Place several more telephone books, or any heavy books, on top. In about a week to 10 days the roses should be flat and dried. Place one to three pressed roses on a background of lace in a picture frame. Personalize the frame with an engraving that thanks each bridesmaid for her participation.

Make a gift basket with a theme. You can use spa bath products with a hand written note that says "now that the wedding is over you deserve a bit of pampering." Or a split of champagne, an engraved glass with the bride's and groom's initials, a package of gourmet chocolates and a note that says "you deserve the best."

Give a gift certificate for a manicure or pedicure, even a massage, for use the day after the wedding. You can probably arrange for the gift certificates for locations that are close to the wedding site, or even in the bridesmaid city of residence.

Give a copy of your favorite romantic movie, a split of champagne, a package of microwave popcorn, a pretty lace embroidered handkerchief, a few scented candles, and even a candy bar or two. Include a gift certificate for a pair of movie tickets.

Instead of the trite photo of the bride and groom in a silver picture frame, tell the photographer at your wedding that you want at least three candid, but pretty, photos of each bridesmaid. Frame those three photos with the photo of the bride and groom.

Or you can pick the best photo of each of your bridesmaids and make a framed collage. Use pressed flowers, bits of lace and ribbons, the wedding invitation, a few wedding mementos.

Order a keepsake bracelet that has the birthstone of each bridesmaid and the bride. If the links on the bracelet are sterling silver, rather than gold, the price can be kept reasonable. Unless, of course each of your bridesmaids was born in April. The birthstone for April is a diamond.

Chapter 6 Keepsakes for Your Guests That Won't Max Out Your Credit Card

Every bride would like her guests to take away something more than just beautiful memories from her wedding. But those mementos can add up to a hefty total in no time.

Hire a friend who has a high quality digital camera. Arrange for a color printer to be available during your wedding. The friend snaps photos of your guests, prints them and posts to a bulletin board. Each guest has a photo to take home.

If you want something a little more formal, set up a chair next to a floral arrangement. Each guest sits in the chair to have their photo taken. For a couple, one sits in the chair and the other stands behind it. Each photo is printed with the caption "Josh and Sue's wedding 2007".

Buy a few dozen roses in pastel colors and remove the petals from each rose and dry them a few weeks before the wedding. Don't use yellow roses they have a tendency to turn brown, or red roses they dry black. You can easily dry the rose petals by placing them in a basket in a warm place and stirring them every few days. You can jump start the process by turning the oven on to the lowest setting for 15 minutes, turning it off and then placing the rose petals in a basket in the oven. Remove after a couple of hours. The oven can not be set at higher than 200 degrees and it must be off before you start. You can also buy dried rose petals in bulk.

Scent the rose petals with a few drops of scented oil. Place a tablespoon or so of the dried petals in the center of a circle of fabric netting – sold in crafts stores. Tie the circle with a ribbon that matches your wedding color scheme. Place baskets of these sachets on each table at the reception, or have a few friends hand a sachet to each guest as they leave the ceremony. The sachets will not only be a lovely color accent but the scent will perfume the air on your wedding day.

Have a friend buy several dozen roses in the colors the compliments your wedding. Hand each guest a rose as they enter the wedding site. The rose can be tied with a narrow satin ribbon bow for a more formal touch.

M&M candies can be special ordered. Order colors that match your wedding scheme. You can also have them imprinted with the first names of the bride and groom. Package a ¼ cup of M&Ms in a clear cellophane bag tied with a ribbon. Hand each guest a package or place the packages in baskets at the exits.

Buy tapered cream colored candles, one for each guest. Tie each with a narrow satin ribbon tied in a bow. Have business sized cards printed that say “Josh and Sue share their love” or something similar, with the date of the wedding. Punch a hole in each card and thread onto the end of a ribbon then make a small knot to keep it from sliding out.

A month or so before the wedding start looking for inexpensive champagne glasses at discount stores, big box stores even second hand stores like Goodwill. Buy a glass for each guest. Fill with foil wrapped Hershey kisses cover with plastic wrap over the kisses and tie the wrap around the stem of the glass with a ribbon. Use the same type of cards as above, with something like “Josh and Sue share their love with you on their wedding day, and the date.”

Chapter 7 Cutting the Costs on Your Wedding Cake

A multi-tiered wedding cake beautifully decorated is an important part of any bride's dream wedding, but the price tag can give you nightmares. Use these tips to take a bite out of the bill.

If your heart is set on a three tiered cake that feeds 100, order it with plain white frosting, no decorations, and then decorate at the reception with fresh flowers. Or you can wrap a length of lace around each layer, like you would a ribbon. Of course remove the lace before cutting.

Stick with basic flavors and fillings, exotic flavorings add to the cost of the cake.

Rather than one huge multi-tiered cake, use a modest tiered cake and then several (as many as you need for your guests) sheet cakes. Serving will go faster this way as well.

Order from a grocery store rather than a bakery. Many grocers have onsite bakeries, just like they have onsite florist departments.

Don't order a wedding cake at all. Order a sheet cake with white frosting to serve guests and a smaller two tiered cake to cut for photos.

Depending on how many servings you need, order a full sheet cake (100 servings), a half sheet cake (50 servings) and a quarter sheet cake (25 servings), all iced in white. Place the half sheet on the full sheet cake and then the quarter sheet on top. Use ready-to-use frosting that comes in a can with a nozzle to touch up any mistakes and fill in the gap between the layers. You don't have to remove the cardboard between the layers, it will help steady the cake when it's time to cut. Don't go any higher than three layers, if you do you run the risk of the bottom layer being squashed by the weight of the upper layers.

Use cupcakes. Order as many as you need in white paper wrapping, and white frosting. Use a tiered serving dish to arrange the cupcakes. Or you can buy two or three inexpensive white plastic serving platters. Line the platters with white paper lace doilies. Place the first platter on the table. Place three inverted wine glasses at noon, 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock on the platter. Fill in around the glasses with cupcakes. Place the second platter on the overturned wine glasses. In the center of the second platter, place three more inverted wine glasses. Fill the second platter with cupcakes. Place the final platter on the overturned wine glasses and fill with cupcakes.

Use a two tiered cake for the bride and groom to cut at the reception. Order a sheet cake for however many guests will be attending. On a separate table offer guests various toppings for their slice of cake. You can offer fresh strawberries, chocolate syrup, raspberries, sprinkles and whipped cream. Consider offering several flavors of ice cream. It's fun and festive.

Have a friend, or several friends bake the cake using various sizes of heart shaped pans. Each can be iced in shades of pale pink, pale lilac, cream, and white. The cakes are placed on a table covered with a lace cloth. Rose petals in pinks, cream, and lilac – or whatever colors suit your color scheme are scattered between the cakes.

Chapter 8 Conserve Your Cash While Your Guests Eat, Drink, and Be Merry

Catering can drain your checking account faster than a leaky bucket. But you can plug the holes and still provide your guests a fabulous feast.

Check with your reception site about their rules on whether food can be brought in, or whether you have to use their food catering provider. Many hotels will not allow outside vendors to be brought onsite for a variety of reasons. Hotels charge a hefty price for their food service, sometimes as much as \$15.00 per guest for a simple beverage service (no alcohol) just coffee, tea and soft drinks. A continental breakfast self service buffet can be over \$20.00 a person.

A buffet is usually less expensive to provide than a sit down meal. You can also stretch a buffet to feed 10% more if extra guests show up. You can't do that with a meal. Buffet service requires labor to set up, replenish the buffet and clean up. A meal service requires servers to bring the courses, remove them, refill drinks, fill special requests and clean up. That extra labor is an extra expense.

Breakfast and lunch are less expensive than dinner. Breakfast foods require less expensive ingredients while lunch means smaller portions than dinner.

A meal doesn't have to be served at all. You could provide a fruit tray, a veggie tray and perhaps a few appetizers. Consider ordering the trays from your local grocers, which will cost considerably less than catering. Stick with food that tastes good at room temperature and doesn't need to be kept cold for safety reasons. Deviled eggs are always a favorite and for the cost of two dozen eggs you get almost 50 appetizers. Crackers and spinach dip is another good selection at a reasonable price. Mini ham and cheese sandwiches served on a dinner roll is economical. If you use parmesan cheese and add a basil leaf you have a gourmet sandwich.

If you have an open bar hire a bartender. He or she will save you money by making sure that the drinks are proportioned properly. Guests may be too generous if they mix their own drinks.

The least expensive option is not to serve alcohol at all, and many sites prohibit the consumption of alcohol.

Champagne punch is an alternative to straight champagne. Sangria, a fruit and wine cocktail, allows the usage of a lesser vintage of wine, since the taste is camouflaged by the addition of the fruit. You can also add ginger ale or lemon-lime soda to stretch the wine even further. A white sangria can be made with a white wine, lemon, orange, tangerines and lemon lime soda. Pink sangria uses the

same recipe but adds raspberries or strawberries to the mixture. Just about any juicy fruit can be used.

1 and half liter bottles of wine means a savings of about 20% over the standard 750 liter size bottle. Many stores offer additional case purchase discounts of 10%. A standard tactic is to serve a 'good' wine as the first glass and then switch to serving a lesser vintage as the festivities wear on.

You might see if there is a cooking school in the area that would agree to provide the catering as an exercise for their students. These students are not beginners and all the food preparation is supervised by the staff so the quality of food should be high. You may have to provide containers for the food and transportation from the school to the wedding site.

Chapter 9 Just for Fun

Every bride looks for a way to make her special day, well extra special. Here are some ideas that cost just a few pennies.

Give each guest a mini bottle of bubbles. As the bride and groom leave, the guests shower them with bubbles. There are online sites that sell the mini bottles in several colors, you don't have to use garish primary colored bottles.

Have a friend rent a container of helium and fill a balloon for each guest, couple or family attending. As part of the celebration have each of them write a short wish for the bridal couple and tie the paper to the ribbon of a balloon and then release them all at once.

Each guest writes a fond memory of the bride or groom on an index card. The cards are sealed in an envelope to be opened by the couple on their first wedding anniversary.

Many couples marry now at an age where they've already been living independently. They have most of what they need. In lieu of wedding gifts guests could make a donation to the couple's favorite charity. Each guest then receives a thank you certificate from the charity at the wedding (amounts of the donation don't have to be stated on the certificate).

Each guest brings a photo of the bride or groom. The photos can be recent, or from when they were children. If possible the guest should label the photo with the event of the photo and the date it was taken. The photos are displayed at the reception and then assembled in an album for the couple.

A wedding is a new beginning. Buy native-to-the-area wild flower seeds in bulk and repackage in small re-sealable plastic bags, just a teaspoon of seeds to each bag. Label the package with instructions that the guest is to broadcast the seeds in the dirt along the highway on their way home as a symbol of spreading the love witnessed that day.

Set up a table with crayons and paper. Invite each child to draw a picture of the wedding. Label with the child's name and age and save the bridal couple.