



Rev. Ann Fuller

Tips for Home Weddings

Getting married in a private home is a popular option for couples on a budget and couples with unlimited resources. You may want to be married in the home in which one of you grew up, the first house you bought together, the cousin's house where you met on a blind date, or the friend's house with the gorgeous backyard on the river. Some people opt for home weddings because they want to minimize the stress of wedding planning only to find they have taken on more work than they anticipated.

While it can be a cost effective way to have a gorgeous wedding, you are pretty much on your own unless you hire a professional to handle all of the details for you. I do recommend professional wedding vendors because they can be worth their cost in stress-relief alone, but recognizing the reality of budget concerns, many of the tips below assume a "do-it-yourself" approach.

Consider the following:

Home Weddings Start Late

If you want your wedding ceremony to begin at 2:00 p.m. tell your guests "the festivities" begin at 1:30, or better 1:00. Even if you send out formal invitations, guests are much more casual about arriving on time for a home wedding. I can guarantee the one guest you absolutely want to attend who is habitually late to everything will not make an exception for your wedding. He or she will still be late.

Consider the Children

If children will be present, take their needs into account. Their nap and feeding schedules may suit some ceremony times better than others. Cakes are children magnets. If you have your wedding cake where small hands can reach it, small hands will reach it. Make sure someone is designated to supervise the children. They are often overlooked in the hustle and bustle of a home wedding unless someone is specifically charged with the task of their supervision.

Music

If you are using recorded music through a sound system, whether it is an iPod or a DJ's sound board, make sure the speakers are put into place and the music queued up and tested prior to guests arriving. Designate someone as your "DJ" and make sure they know which tracks are played at what point in the ceremony. Pick someone who is familiar with the audio technology you will be using and have him or her practice pushing the right buttons well in advance of the ceremony.





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This is a common source of last minute scrambling that delays home wedding ceremonies. I highly recommend live music for home weddings if you can afford it or have a talented friend or family member.

Beg, Borrow, but Don't Steal

If you are trying to keep your wedding expenses down, don't be afraid to ask friends and relatives for assistance. They will likely feel honored to be needed and delighted to help. You can rent arches, tables, chairs, etc. from party supply rental companies, but you can probably also collect everything you need from the people nearest and dearest to you if necessary. If you have a handyman in the family, he or she can build a beautiful arch at a lower cost than purchasing or renting one. The green thumb in the family may be able to provide flower arrangements. The shutterbug can take pictures. The budding chef can help with the food. Make a list of everyone you know and what skills, talents and resources they have that you might need. Also think in terms of multiple use. If you plan to seat people for the ceremony, reuse the chairs for seating at the reception. If you have flower arrangements as a focal point in the wedding ceremony, reuse them on a buffet or gift table as centerpieces. Now is the time to be creative!

The Isolated Bride

The bride is often hidden in a bedroom so the groom will not see her before the wedding. The result is a bride who feels isolated from the party atmosphere building in the rest of the house. She may have a few friends with her and will certainly have a somewhat steady stream of visitors coming in and out, but after awhile that can get tiresome or even annoying—especially if something substantially delays the start of the ceremony. Remember the superstition prohibits the groom from seeing the bride *in the dress* before the ceremony. Consider getting your hair and makeup ready early and then mingle among your arriving guests until almost the last minute. Change into your wedding dress shortly before the ceremony is scheduled to begin. *(Thank you for suggesting this Renee!)*

A Clean House is a Better Wedding Venue



But who wants to clean house on the day of their wedding? Come to think of it, who wants to clean house period. Considering hiring a cleaning service to prepare the house or refer to the suggestion above and ask friends and relatives for their help. You really do not want to be concerned with the state of your home or be scrubbing toilets thirty minutes before your guests are due to arrive. Put together a schedule for the day before and the day of your wedding that allows ample time for all the tasks you want to accomplish.



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Plan to have everything done at least two hours before your first guest is due. A bride, groom or host rushing around to pick up stray items, stock toilet paper, fill the ice chest, set out the cake, etc. is a stressed bride, groom or host.

Think of the Neighbors

Now might be a good time to cultivate good relations with the neighbors. Let everyone around you know when you are getting married and how many cars to expect. A considerate neighbor will refrain from mowing the lawn during your ceremony or kennel particularly noisy dogs. You may even obtain use of their driveway for guest parking so as not to clog neighborhood streets. It cannot hurt to ask! If you do have neighbors offer their driveway, tell specific guests where to park. For example, "Cousin Sarah, our neighbors have graciously offered their driveway for parking. When you come to our wedding, please park in the driveway at 125 Main Street." and "Uncle Bob, our neighbors have graciously offered their driveway for parking. When you come to our wedding, please park in the driveway at 128 Main Street."

Wedding Party Equals Wedding Coordinator

If you are planning to have several bridesmaids and groomsmen and a "walk down the aisle," designate someone in advance as your "wedding coordinator" on the day of the wedding. His or her job is to line everyone up in the order in which they will enter the ceremony and to appropriately space their entrances. I highly recommend rehearsals for home weddings even when there are only one or two attendants. You should already have easy access to the venue, it will enable you to spot logistical problems well in advance and will alleviate the stress of participants on the day of the wedding. Just because it is a home wedding doesn't mean it is automatically an easy wedding. Home weddings can be trickier because the property is just not intuitively an event venue.

Safety

Take the time to walk through the property a few times and look at it with several perspectives in mind. Are there hazards for small children who may be present? Is it accessible to guests with mobility issues? Will there be any electrical or plumbing issues for the number of guests expected to attend? Will parking in some areas restrict easy access to the home? Is there a pool that would pose a problem for children and non-swimmers? Are there scrubby areas or yard debris that may attract unwanted indigenous creatures? Should the yard be sprayed for mosquitoes and other biting insects before the wedding?





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The Biggest Mistake

Whether you are hiring musicians, caterers, maids, and professional photographers or are doing everything yourself, the biggest mistake you can make is not to delegate. Make sure other people know your basic expectations and your grand plan. Do not think of yourselves as the hosts, even if you are paying for everything yourselves. Have someone else fill that "role" to free you up to be the bride and groom. You do not want to be micromanaging details the day of the wedding. Plan in advance, delegate to trusted individuals and relax. Your wedding will be what it will be and it will be wonderful.

Key Personnel

If you are not hiring professional staff for your wedding you should designate the following responsibilities to trusted friends and family members.

- Host/Hostess: Greets guests, thoroughly familiar with both the layout of the home and the planned flow of the festivities. This person understands both the grand vision and the details necessary to pull everything off. If something gets lost, this is the person who knows where it is. If a guest is lost, this is the person who can give them directions over the phone.
- Wedding Coordinator: This person should not be a shy individual and should know the logistics of the ceremony portion of your wedding festivities. He or she will need to instruct and assemble the guests when it is time to begin, line up the bridal party and space their entrance in the processional.
- DJ: This person should be thoroughly familiar with your audio technology, know exactly when and how to play which piece of music.
- Photography: If you do not have a professional photographer, I highly recommend designating at least three of the better photographers within your circle of acquaintances, preferably ones who have decent quality cameras. I can give them tips on how to best capture your ceremony. I even know a few ideas for great portrait photographs afterwards. If keepsake photographs are important to you, this may be an area where you want to invest in professionals. They are expensive, but the quality difference can be tremendous.
- Childcare: This person should have an easy rapport with children, but the authority to keep their exuberance within appropriate boundaries.
- Reception Coordinator: This is your kitchen person. This individual should know the logistics of the reception portion of your wedding festivities and have a thorough knowledge of your menu and how and when you intend it to be served.

The 6-10 people above should be able to work together and all should understand your expectations and how their roles contribute to the bigger picture. I recommend a meeting with all of them together approximately two weeks before the wedding. Make your expectations clear, but not unreasonable or bossy.