

Planning your ceremony step by step

By Tara Marion

Setting a wedding date, choosing the location and arranging for someone to perform the service are the most important factors for a successful wedding day, according to Cynthia Krueger, author of "Dream Weddings Do Come True," (Brighton Publications Inc., 1993) and Teddy Lenderman, author of the "Complete Idiot's Guide to the Perfect Wedding (Alpha Books, 1995).

Before choosing a wedding date, you should take into consideration family commitments, religious holidays, special events, tourist activities, the travel situations of your guests and potential weather conditions.

When selecting a facility, choose one that corresponds to the type of ceremony you desire, according to Krueger.

If you want a church wedding, be aware that many churches charge increased amounts for non-members or make them wait until six months before their desired wedding date to register.

Because many religious organizations require premarital counseling, schedule an appointment with the officiant six to 12 months before the ceremony to discuss restrictions, regulations and costs.

In addition to these three significant items, the two experts have compiled a checklist to keep you organized. From one year down to a month before your wedding, following this simple checklist can make planning your wedding as easy as saying "I do."

Contact a bridal consultant. "A professional bridal consultant has a network of wedding suppliers with whom she works to help you plan, coordinate and arrange you wedding," Krueger said.

12 to 6 months

- Select a florist. The date is important here, avoiding holidays when florists are already busy.
- Choose the musicians or organist for the ceremony and reserve them for your wedding date. Select your wedding party attendants.
- Begin the guest list. Compile guests' names on alphabetical index cards, which enables the bride to eliminate duplicates from parents' and fiancé's lists and will help in mailing thank-yous for shower and wedding gifts, according to Lenderman's book.

5 months

- Order the invitations and prepare necessary maps to be enclosed for your guests.
- Select and order your gown.
- Reserve hotel rooms for out-of-town guests.
- Make an appointment with your bridal consultant to 'touch base' and get your questions answered, Lenderman suggested.

3 months

- Finalize your guest lists, checking the spelling of names and addresses.
- Apply for your marriage license. Each state has different requirements and policies regarding waiting periods, ages of both parties, blood tests, physical examinations, identification and costs.

- Review musical selections for the ceremony with the musicians.

2 months

- Rent tuxedos for the father of the bride, groom and male attendants.

1 month

- Relax and handle the fun finishing touches: mailing the invitations and recording acceptances and regrets.
- Make an appointment for your final gown fitting, as wedding gowns are intended to be altered and custom-fitted.