

\$ETTING A REALI\$TIC WEDDING BUDGET

BY AMI PRESLEY

Planning their wedding budget is the most important decision brides and grooms must make. The budget controls every aspect of your special day. No matter who is footing the bill, it is the first thing that should be determined when it's time to plan your event. According to CostofWedding.com, the average wedding in the United States costs more than \$28,000. If you are now suffering from a bit of sticker shock, take a deep breath and relax. There are many ways you can stick to, or even stay below, your wedding budget. Here are 10 easy tips that even the most frazzled couple can follow.

1. Tap into free resources:

Before you run to the bookstore to buy up every bridal magazine and planning book on the shelf, take a trip to your local library and see what they have to offer. You will be amazed at the amount of information and free wedding planning assistance you will find on the Internet as well, including



budget calculators, organizers and links to local resources. Some of these sites even allow you to set up your own personal wedding Web page, so your friends and family can stay informed as you go through the planning process.

2. What's Really Important:

Sit down and figure out what is most important to you about your special day. Is it the dress? The photography? The honeymoon?



Prioritize the different aspects of your ceremony and reception, and plan your budget accordingly. You'd be surprised how much money gets spent on things that don't mean anything to the happy couple.

3. Who's Really Important:

Probably the easiest way to keep wedding costs down is to keep your event on the smaller side, as most reception costs are figured per person. Don't let a sense of obligation cause you to invite

lots of distant relatives, business associates or acquaintances. Figure out who you'd really like to share in this very special day with you, and invite only them. You can always offer to share your photos or wedding videos with people who don't make the cut, so they feel included.

4. Simple can be elegant:

Sometimes, less is more. Keep your invitations to one classy sheet. Think about putting candles and mirrors on your tables instead of large, lavish centerpieces. If you are looking for a simpler dress design, check out bridesmaid gowns and order one in white or ivory to wear as your wedding dress. This area is one of the easiest places where you can cut costs.

5. Explore other options:

Consider non-traditional elements for your ceremony. Scheduling your wedding during the off-season (November through April) or having a Friday evening or Sunday

