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The Essential E-Book for Brides

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Chapter One

So you've just gotten engaged – Congratulations!

Whether your beau stuck to tradition by getting down on bended knee or you grabbed the bull by the horns by popping the question yourself, engagement is one of the most exciting times in a young couple's life together.

Cohabitation is well and good, but nothing screams commitment quite like saying 'I Do' in front of your nearest and dearest.

But now that he's finally put a ring on it, what next?

For the first few weeks – heck, make that months – you may be so busy flashing that sparkler in the face of anyone who'll look that you forget one tiny detail: the wedding.

For those who've been dreaming about their Big Day since they were a little girl, celebrating your engagement (and showing off that bling) is naturally a gal's prerogative.

"We're still celebrating our engagement," admits model Lisa Murphy (37), who's set to wed solicitor-to-the-stars Gerald Kean next Spring. "To be honest, at the moment we're just focused on getting our house finished before the wedding. I definitely haven't turned into Bridezilla!"

Before your life slowly transmogrifies into one long episode of reality TV show *Four Weddings*, take time out to enjoy simply being engaged advises Weddingstyle.ie relationship expert Trish Murphy.



“Engagement is a lovely time for a couple,” says psychotherapist Trish.

“It’s romantic and exciting; it’s the first chapter of your life together as husband and wife.”

“After my husband and I got engaged, I just felt all loved-up again like I had when we first met,” agrees newlywed Rosemarie (28) from Dublin.

“Although nothing really changes in terms of your day-to-day relationship, all of sudden I just felt more secure. All the small tiffs seem to disappear; it’s a bit like an early honeymoon period!”

When the sheen of the engagement wears off and the stress of planning a wedding sets in however, it can be a different story.

So for all you blushing brides-to-be, Weddingstyle.ie has compiled the ultimate engagement survival guide.

From interfering in-laws to pre-wedding jitters, read on to find out how to make it down the aisle with your sanity intact!

Chapter Two

Unless your name is Liza Minnelli, chances are your engagement wasn't a total bombshell.

Most couples will have chewed the fat over their future together at some point during their courtship – and those who are in it for the long haul are nearly certain to have discussed the big M before the all-important question was popped.

“My boyfriend and I were together for almost five years when he proposed,” says affianced Meath woman Michelle (30).

“The conversation about marriage came up within our first eight months together, but I felt I was too young at the time. When we finally did get engaged, I felt ready; now I can't wait for the wedding!”

Nonetheless, whether you're straight or gay, religious or not even remotely, agreeing to be bound to someone for life in love and law is a quantum leap.

It scarcely needs stating that your heart should be in it before you start mentally shopping for a meringue says Trish Murphy.

“You've got to ask yourself ‘Can I imagine myself still enjoying this person's company in twenty years' time?’

It's not about the passion, which will inevitably burn off, but whether or not you'll still be compatible when you're pensioners.”

So how can a seemingly smitten couple go from contemplating marriage to calling it all a day in one fell swoop? Ask Charlotte Church and Gavin Henson, who announced their engagement just weeks before splitting for good earlier on this year.

“People do strange things when they're about to split up,” explains Trish. “Sometimes couples use getting engaged as a Band-Aid for other problems, thinking marriage will solve the issue; but all it does it put it in a different context.

I'm a great advocate of facing up to what's really happening in a relationship before taking it further.”

It was Marlene Dietrich who once famously quipped: ‘Most women set out to try and change a man, and when they have changed him they don't like him’.

If your fella routinely deposits his smelly socks on the bedroom floor, don't expect a marriage certificate to change that warns Trish.

Chapter Three

Having committed to committing, it may suddenly feel like life, as you know it has become nothing more than a prelude to your Big Day. Saying ‘Yes’ was the easy part - now you’ve got an actual wedding to plan!

But you don’t have to allow your looming nuptials transform you from a sassy, smart singleton into a crazy, card-carrying Bridezilla who gives your groom second thoughts.

“I was delighted when the excitement of the engagement died down and I could get down to planning the wedding,” tells just-married Rosemarie.

“I nearly had repetitive strain injury from constantly lifting up my hand to show people my engagement ring!”

So when should you start planning your Big Fat Irish Wedding in earnest?

“It really depends on the couple and their financial situation,” acknowledges Trish Murphy.

“Some couples might get engaged and married within eight months, for others it’s eight years.”

“We started planning our wedding about two months after we got engaged,” adds Rosemarie, “and got married 18 months later. We paid for our own wedding, so it took us about a year to save.”

Don’t panic if you start dreaming about place settings and centre pieces instead of George Clooney; It’s normal to feel swamped by the process of planning a wedding, says Weddingstyle.ie relationship guru David Kavanagh.

“Between dresses, venues, guest lists and so on, it’s normal to feel like the wedding is taking up your every waking hour,” he says.

“Remember that you’re meant to be planning the happiest day of your life, so if the planning process is making you unhappy it’s time to hit the reset button.”

“My biggest frustration was negotiating with suppliers,” says Rosemarie.

“At first, I made countless phone calls trying to get a reasonable price which nearly drove me mad. Eventually, I just started saying to suppliers: ‘I’ve got €350 to spend on flowers - what can you give me for that?’ which cut out a lot of the nonsense.”

Make like Santa by compiling lists and checking them twice, recommends David Kavanagh.

“Sit down with your groom and make a list of everything that has to be done before the wedding; then delegate tasks to your family and friends where possible.”

“And if things still really start to get on top of you, simply step back from the preparations and take a deep breath,” he adds.

“Why not take a romantic break away with your husband-to-be? It’s important not to lose sight of what it’s all about.”

Chapter Four

Interfering in-laws (and frenemies), you heard it here first: butt out!

It's one of the biggest bones of contention for any couple elbow deep in wedding preparations, but there is a way to keep interfering family, pushy pals and nosey neighbors out of the frame.

“Couples can feel under enormous pressure to make everyone else happy,” says Trish Murphy, “when really their job is to invite others to witness them being happy.”

“Brides, especially, can get caught up in competitiveness and stress themselves out trying to make everything perfect.”

“I think a lot of couples get stressed out over other people's opinions,” agrees soon-to-be-wed Michelle. “It may sound harsh, but we suited ourselves!

“Couples might start out with their own ideas, but, sure enough, everyone else throws in their tuppence worth – stupid things like ‘You have to have a red carpet in the Church’.

“When someone says: ‘But you have to invite Auntie Peggy's sister's husband's brother’, you have to push back. Lots of our friends ended up in debt because they conformed to having all the bells and whistles.

“We want our wedding to be personal to us,” she adds, “and if any of the guests say something nasty afterwards, then we'll know they shouldn't have been invited in the first place.”

Resist the urge to tell your future mother-in-law to eff off, though, when she tries to railroad you into wearing her moth-gnawed wedding gown.

Losing the plot with your in-laws will only come back to haunt you, so try a spot of the old reverse psychology suggests David Kavanagh.

“When dealing with your future in-laws, remember this golden rule: they will never forget how you made them feel in the months and weeks leading up to your wedding. They will also remember whether or not you respected their input - this is where things usually get tricky.

“To manage the issue, I often advise couples to give their future in-laws two different projects to organise – something you and your partner don't feel too strongly about such as the flowers.

“Once they feel they've had some input into your wedding, it should keep them happy. Basically, be nice to everyone and you can't go too far wrong!”

Chapter Five

You've got the man, the dress and date – all that's left to do now is say 'I Do'.

Don't forget to stock up on woolly socks when you're buying your garter belt because cold feet are common, reassures David Kavanagh.

“If a bride doesn't get anxious before her wedding, I get worried,” he says. “It signifies to me that perhaps she doesn't fully comprehend the enormity of the step she's about to take. By the same token, if she's not excited about her Big Day there may be underlying issues at play.”

If money or the minutiae take their toll on your romance in the run up to the wedding, bring on the honeymoon before exchanging vows.

“Planning a wedding is very stressful,” concedes Trish Murphy. “You're spending a lot of money and probably one person – usually the bride – is far more invested in the process than the other. Feeling unsupported or clashing on certain details can cause cracks in the relationship.

“Couples really need to focus on what they are doing – write it on the mirror if necessary. Remember that you're vowing to love each other for the rest of your lives and that should keep you on the right track throughout the planning.

“You've committed to each other already by getting engaged,” she adds, “so you'll get through it together. If nothing else, the slings and arrows of planning are good practice for married life!”

Learn from the mistakes of other brides to ensure your Big Day is stress-free and fabulous. “I really regret spending so much time and energy on my Invites and RSVP cards,” admits bride-to-be Michelle.

“Most people barely looked at them and some of our guests didn't even bother RSVPing. If I were to do it again, I'd send out email invites.”

“My husband's father passed away a couple of weeks before our wedding,” says Rosemarie. “It gave us a massive reality check.

At the end of the day, as long as your family and friends are together with plenty of food, drink and dancing, what more could you ask for?

“Many a happy Irish marriage started out with a party in a pokey flat in 1960's London – I know my parents' did anyway!”