



deconstructing a wedding

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Your wedding day has come and gone. The leftover food could fill an industrial-sized freezer, and your floral arrangements are starting to droop. The good news? Your photos don't have to be the only part of your wedding that lingers after the last dance. Elements from your big day can live on in ways you never expected.

reassess your dress

A wedding dress can cost anywhere from a few hundred dollars to upwards of \$10,000. Why just wear it once and then pack it away? "You wouldn't buy a car and drive it once, so why do so with a dress," says Tracy DiNunzio, founder of Recycled Bride. A creative tailor can help you reinvent your garment as a whole new look by shortening it,

dieing it, or changing the style altogether.

If you don't want to wear the gown again, transform it into something else completely. Savor the sentiment of your wedding day by using the material from



ALEXIS STEIN PHOTOGRAPHY

your dress to craft meaningful items like a baby blanket or a teddy bear for your children. If you're looking for something a bit more practical, make something you'll use, like pillowcases, curtains or dinner napkins. By creating something that you see every day, you'll be reminded of your wedding over and over again. "You can even take the scraps from the dress and use them in jewelry and hair pieces," suggests Kathy Peterson, owner of Kathy

Peterson Inspired, design/lifestyle expert and TV host.

If you can't bear the thought of taking a scissors to the gown of your dreams, consider letting another bride give it new life. Make a donation to one of several charities that accept wedding dresses. Some organizations give the goods to brides in need, while others sell them and use the profits towards causes like granting wishes to cancer patients or funding research. Or, to recoup some of your budget, bring your dress to a local consignment shop or post it on an online marketplace. "A lot of people come into my shop and say they have no idea what to do with their dress because daughters rarely wear their mother's wedding dress anymore," explains Nicole Keesler, owner of Creative Elegance Weddings, a bridal consignment shop. "They like the idea of bringing the dress somewhere where they can get some of their money back for it."

regrowth

The centerpieces that made your day picture-perfect can keep on giving. "After our events, we donate flowers to a local convalescent home," says Theresa Dozier, owner of My Sorted Affair, a floral and event design firm in California. Hospitals, community centers and shelters are also great options and will usually be glad to take the arrangements off your hands.

Even if you give most of the flowers away, you can still save some of your

blooms as mementos. Pull out a few select pieces from your bouquet; the flowers can be pressed, preserved, framed and displayed alongside a copy of your invitation and other meaningful keepsakes. You can even incorporate the pressed flowers into the stationery for thank you notes.

If the style of your event allows, forego cut flowers and use potted plants as centerpieces. After the wedding, you can replant them in your yard or keep them on your windowsill as living reminders of your special day. If you don't have a green thumb, don't worry. Plenty of varieties, like flowering cacti, bamboo, succulents and orchids, are beautiful and require little care.

get more from décor

Small details like picture frames and candleholders make your wedding unique, but they can be impractical once the event is over. Whenever possible, use accent items and furniture that your reception site already owns. "When I work with a new venue, the first thing I do is see what they already have available," says Sacha Patires, celebrity event planner and owner of Whimsical Weddings and Events. "I learn what kind of tables, linens and centerpieces they have, but I make them into something new so that the look of the room is not a cookie cutter design." Think outside the box to use an item for more than just its main purpose. If creativity isn't your thing,

enlist your florist. An expert may be able to help fashion something totally unexpected with what is already there, and you won't be left with a box full of items you can't use.

If you do end up purchasing accents, select items that reflect your taste and style. Décor elements such as lanterns, lighting and vases could be used to decorate your home, says event designer Isha Foss.

meal plan

Your wedding is bound to have tons of delicious leftovers, so don't let all those mouth-watering treats go to waste. First and foremost, before you give all of the food away, save some for yourself. It's more than likely that you won't have the chance to eat during your reception, so ask your caterer ahead of time to pack up a few meals for you and your spouse to eat after the party. You handpicked the menu; you should get to enjoy it. And of course, save the top tier of your cake to share with your husband on your first anniversary.

If you're interested in offering the extra food to a homeless shelter, food bank or soup kitchen, know the facts beforehand. Many charitable organizations operate under stringent guidelines regarding food donations. Before you finalize your menu, find out what items the facilities will and will not accept, and plan accordingly. "With prior arrangement, some shelters will coordinate



pickup or have someone available to receive delivery of the food," says Foss.

in tune

Music brings your event to life, and with the right soundtrack, you can relive your wedding for years to come. Ask your DJ or band to make you a playlist of some of the standout songs from your ceremony and reception. Listen to it with your spouse each year on your anniversary to stroll together down memory lane.

To share the love with your guests,

make your favorite requests into a mix that people can take home. "It's a pretty cool wedding favor and a nice sentimental way to remember the wedding," says DiNunzio.

Whether you spent weeks, months or years planning your special day, the celebration doesn't have to stop when the party is over. With the right mix of creativity and foresight, pieces of your wedding can bring smiles to your face and joy to others long after the limo has whisked you away at the end of the night. ■