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## Ask Martha

Wedding wisdom and practical solutions for all your pressing questions



**Q:** *What's an eco-friendly approach to invitations and other printed materials?* —Victoria, via email

**A:** The list of printed materials for your wedding—save-the-dates, invitations, reply cards, programs, and so on—can be long. And these pieces are often a beautiful part of the look and style of your day. But if your goal is reducing environmental impact, there are ways to have your paper and be Earth-friendly, too. “Consider emailing the save-the-date,” says Juliette Fagerwold, planner and owner of San Diego-based Simply Elegant Weddings. This is typically a more casual piece, and you can establish the theme of the day in a fun, relaxed way. Send a simple email, or use an online service, like Paperless Post, to design your digital message. As for the formal invitation, “emailing a wedding invitation is still not considered proper etiquette,” Fagerwold

says. But there are ways to reduce the amount of printed materials you use. She suggests a modern take with just “one envelope, one invitation, and one insert card that directs guests to your wedding website.” Information typically included on extra inserts, such as a map, lodging, and transportation options, can live on the site. On the day of, some couples omit paper components like programs and menus altogether, but you can include them and make a difference by using environmentally friendly paper and ink. “Beyond recycled materials, cotton papers are a great option, since it’s a natural, renewable resource,” says Rachelle Schwartz, co-owner of California-based luxury stationer Wiley Valentine. And, she says, soy-, rubber-, and water-based inks

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are all green choices. Overall, let your eco-friendly approach inspire you to think creatively. “For example, menus that double as place cards will cut down on the pieces needed,” says Schwartz, “and make the menus extra-special.”

**Q:** *We're trying to decide between having a band and a DJ for our reception. What should we consider?* —Rachel, via email

**A:** Think big picture: The music at your wedding should suit the feel of the day. “A band dressed in tuxes with a large horn section might not be a fit for everyone, but it would be a great complement to a ballroom black-tie wedding,” says California-based planner Alexandra Kolendrianos. A beach wedding or a garden party, on the other hand, might call for a very different sound. Consider which tunes you want to dance the night away to—a DJ can play just about anything (interview those you’re considering to see if they’re open to your song selections), whereas a band might have limitations.

“Look at repertoire lists to see if they play the range of genres that you like,” Kolendrianos says. The venue itself can also affect your choice. “Depending on size and instrumentation, most bands will need about 12 by 24 feet of space on the stage, factoring in speakers and a mixing board off to the side,” says Kolendrianos. A DJ, on the other hand, can fit in a much smaller space. And then there’s the question of price; a DJ is almost always a more affordable option. Either way, make sure you are clear on what’s included in the fee—some bands and DJs may not come fully equipped, necessitating additional tech rentals.

**Q:** *My engagement ring is vintage, but my wedding band is new. Is there a difference in the way I should care for each of them?* —Meredith, via email

**A:** All jewelry should be treated with care. However, “modern jewelry is typically more durable than vintage, because it’s designed to withstand today’s lifestyle,” says Greg Kwiat, CEO of New York City-based jeweler Kwiat. Ask your jeweler about the band style and setting of your engagement ring and any special care they require, as certain vintage pieces demand more attention than others. “For example, Georgian-style rings with closed-back settings should not get wet, and pieces from the art nouveau period are very ornate and easily damaged,” says Kwiat. The gemstones in the jewelry can also affect care. “Diamond jewelry can be cleaned with a soft toothbrush and soapy water, but stones like turquoise, emeralds, and pearls—which shouldn’t even be exposed to

hand creams—should be cleaned professionally,” says Kwiat. If you have any doubts at all, ask a pro.

**Q:** *We've just set our wedding date in January. Will this restrict the types of flowers we can use?* —Lauren, via email

**A:** While the season may limit your selection of locally grown blooms, flowers are increasingly available year-round—they’ll just be shipped in from warmer locales, like New Zealand. Flowers such as roses, lilies, and orchids are practically seasonless and steadily priced throughout the year. “One of the few things that’s strictly season-specific is blooming branches, which are only available in spring,” says our style director, Naomi deMañana. Otherwise, the sky’s the limit, as long as you’re willing to ship from afar. If you’d rather not do so, one alternative is to replace some floral elements with foliage. Draping a garland along family-style tables can dress up the setting just as much as

a traditional centerpiece (see page 52 for a styling idea). “Flowers that naturally bloom in a given season and plants and greenery that grow in the area where you are marrying always look more natural to the environment and time of year,” says deMañana. For ideas making use of the best blooms of winter, visit [marthastewartweddings.com/winter-flowers](http://marthastewartweddings.com/winter-flowers).

**Q:** *Do I have to wear a floor-length gown for my formal ceremony?* —Alex, via email

**A:** It depends on what you mean by “formal,” and how explicit you are in

your dress code on the invitation. For example, if yours says “black tie,” guests might be surprised to see you in a tea-length dress, so you may want to keep the language looser. (To learn about dress codes and what they mean, go to [marthastewartweddings.com/decode-dress-codes](http://marthastewartweddings.com/decode-dress-codes).) But generally, wedding attire has few hard-and-fast rules these days—even for the bride. Many women are opting for dresses in cuts or colors that match their personal style instead of the traditional white floor-length gown. Almost anything can be considered “formal” except a mini, according to our senior fashion editor, Jessica King. “You could wear a satin tuxedo or even a great jumpsuit,” she says. And if you’re worried you might look more casual than your guests, go for dressy fabrics like satin or intricate embellishments to elevate your look. “Then you can amp it up with accessories or a pop of color,” says King. “Great shoes, a red lip, statement earrings, or a fur capelet can go a long way.”

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SENIOR FASHION EDITOR JESSICA KING