

# Do your budget a favor and cut out the favors

By Emilie Le Beau | Special to the Tribune  
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When the economy began tumbling, so did wedding spending. Couples are spending significantly less and the average cost of a wedding dropped to \$21,814 in 2008, a 24 percent decrease from 2007, according to The Wedding Report, a research firm in Phoenix.

Many items can be cut from the budget and most guests will not notice. "There are extras you absolutely don't need," said event planner Kara Underwood, owner of Magnificent Milestones in Chicago.

Cut party favors, she suggested, because they are often left behind or ignored by the guests. Even though the wedding industry promotes party favors as a tradition adored by guests, they "also cheapen the table," Underwood said.

Many other items can be crossed off the list. Here are 10 common wedding items, with advice on what to keep and what to cut.

## Cut it

**Ceremony décor:** Flowers and elaborate decorations are not needed. "Most churches or venues are beautiful on their own," Underwood said. Add in the bridal party and bouquets, Underwood said, and decorations will not be noticed.

**Two dresses:** TV brides are wearing one dress to the ceremony and a second to the reception. Underwood said this idea should be cut. "Most brides don't have the budget for that."

Also cut the pricey wedding gown; there are other ways to score a dream dress. Erin Sarris, 25, of [Des Plaines](#) married in November at the Newberry Library wearing a dress she considered at Priscilla's of Boston but rejected when she saw the \$3,600 price tag. Sarris searched online daily until she saw the same dress advertised in a sample sale on Craigslist for 73 percent less.

**Late-night snack:** Serving a 10:30 p.m. snack has become trendy, but Underwood said this pulls guests off the dance floor at the height of the party.

**Personalized napkins:** "It's the same as favors: It's out and not worth your money," Underwood said.

**Elaborate centerpieces:** Couples should not feel obligated to have pricey floral centerpieces at each table. Underwood said she sees many weddings with candles used as centerpieces.

**Pricey paper:** Engraved stationery with the bride's maiden and married names is old-fashioned. Sarris didn't bother with either. She also didn't spend money on a save-the-date card and instead created a free wedding Web site at EWedding.com.

## Keep it

**Nice invitations:** For guests who can't make the event, Underwood said this is their one interaction with the wedding. "Even if you're on a budget, you can still use colors and get your guests excited," she said.

Sarris spent just \$1 per invitation by asking a designer friend to help. She brought in ideas from magazines and the friend designed, printed and assembled the invitations.

**The champagne toast:** Champagne "goes hand and hand with a good toast," Underwood said.

**The bar package:** "Being greeted with a drink is key," Underwood said. Brides on a budget can offer an open bar during the cocktail hour but switch to wine service during dinner.

**The photographer or videographer:** While a photographer or videographer should be kept, ditch the posed family photos that take time away from the party. Underwood said couples now prefer candid photos.