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BUDS ON A BUDGET

*Fresh ways to take your floral fund
(and wedding style!) to the max*

In your pre-engagement life, splurging on flowers probably meant sending your mum a £50 bouquet on her birthday, so the prospect of shelling out hundreds (or even thousands) on big-day blooms can feel pretty terrifying. Still, nothing sets the scene quite like fabulous flora – which is why brides today devote an average of 5-10% of their budget to the cause. To help you navigate the biggest botanical purchase of your life, we've asked the experts to spill their secrets – from genius cost-cutters and DIY how-tos to chic styling tricks that will also save precious cash.

SAVVY WAYS TO SAVE

Top tips from top florists

Getting started...

TALK NUMBERS STRAIGHTAWAY

Why waste your florist's time – and your own – discussing arrangements you can't afford? "Working with a low budget can actually be an inspiration, so it's better to be honest with us from the beginning," says Jens Jakobsen (jensjakobsen.co.uk).

BE STRATEGIC

"Plan to spend approximately 60% of your flower budget on table centres, 25% on bouquets and buttonholes, and 15% on the ceremony," advises Suzie Young, wedding planner at florist Hayford & Rhodes (hayfordandrhodes.co.uk).

PICTURE IT

"When you're looking at your venue, work with your photographer to see where the best shots will be taken and put flowers there," says Simone Pickering, AKA Miss Pickering (misspickering.com).

STAY SEASONAL

For better value, stronger colours, more fragrant scents and flowers that last throughout the day, stick to seasonal blooms. They're usually locally sourced, so the environment will thank you, too.

BUDDY UP TO YOUR FLORIST

"Often, I don't specify exactly which flowers I'll use until a few days before the wedding, when I go to market and buy whatever is the best quality and value on the day," says Miss Pickering. It may sound risky, but flexible clients have ended up with bigger arrangements and pricier varieties than they could have afforded otherwise.

USE FEWER COLOURS

Try to keep your floral palette to one or two hues, says Jens. "It will give you a strong, unified look. The more you spread the colours, the more flowers you have to use to create impact."

WATCH OUT FOR HIDDEN COSTS

Make sure delivery, set-up and prop-hire fees are factored into your quote. "And always ask for VAT to be included so you don't suddenly see an extra 20% blow your budget," says Suzie Young.

The bridal party & ceremony...

WEAR FLOWERS IN YOUR HAIR

If a pricey headpiece is incompatible with your bottom line, weave some beautiful blooms into your hair instead – for under a tenner! "Spray roses can last all day without water and are very English garden," says Marianne Johnson at Sweet Pea Floral Design (sweetpeaflowers.co.uk), who charges just £3 for each wired blossom. But steer clear of delicate options that won't last the day.

GO FOR HAND-TIED!

Labour-intensive wired bouquets (where prep time is factored into the price) can send your bridesmaid costs sky-rocketing. Instead, choose romantic hand-tied posies.

HAVE A BALL

Or, deck them out with cool sphere-shaped pomanders, which can cut costs by a third, says

Javier Salvador at By Appointment Only Design (byappointmentonlydesign.com) – ideal if you've got lots of best girls. Super-strapped for cash? Try a single long-stem rose tied with ribbon for an elegant but affordable maid's walk up the aisle.

ACCESSORISE THE TEAM

A corsage is cheaper than a classic bouquet, will add polish to your leading ladies' look and won't be left on a table when the dancefloor opens up!

BUTTON UP

Like wired bouquets, buttonholes are, by definition, pricey because of the meticulous work involved. "The fewer flowers you use, the more cost effective it will be, so keep it simple with just a single bloom and single leaf," suggests Robbie Honey (robbiehoney.com).

OR PIN THESE ON ...

Quirky buttonholes are having a moment, and we've seen everything from peacock feathers and rosette-style ribbons to flowers crafted from buttons adding a cool twist to ushers' ensembles.

WAVE A MAGIC WAND

You don't need to spend a fortune on flowergirls. A simple wicker basket decorated with bows and filled with fresh petals works well (if you're placing a large order with your florist, ask if they can throw these in for free), or how about a wand with a single bloom and trailing ribbons to add the perfect touch of whimsy to your ceremony?

LIGHT UP THE AISLE

A dozen roses at each pew end *would* be stunning – but so would the price tag. Instead, line your walkway with candles or lanterns, or tie the end chairs with heart-shaped lavender sachets, ribbons in your colour scheme or ornaments that fit your theme (give them away later as thank-you gifts).

HAVE HEAVENLY HYDRANGEAS

"In late summer, white hydrangeas have such high impact in a church," says Jens. With just five heads and big sculptural leaves like montsera, allium or palm, you're good to go.

MAKE A STATEMENT

"Choose a structural flower like a calla lily, which makes a big statement with fewer total blooms," says Jens. "And since it doesn't need to be seen from all sides, do a front-facing half arrangement."

PLANT SOME STYLE

"In general, a big plant is a lot cheaper than 300 stems of cut roses," – again, it's the labour involved that ups the price – "so try planted hydrangeas in a huge basket or bucket," suggests Miss Pickering.

THINK OUTSIDE THE VASE

Cooler containers mean fewer blooms (and a smaller bill!)

HOW IT WORKS

"Inventive containers introduce extra interest," explains Simone at Miss Pickering. "You can then get away with less expensive varieties, or just three hydrangea heads and some foliage."

HIRE POWER

"Good florists have a wide stock of eye-catching pieces to hire and have access to prop hire companies which offer all sorts of vessels, from birdcages and cake stands to hot-pink candelabra," says Suzie at Hayford & Rhodes.

GET DECORATING

"We're now re-covering vessels we've had for years in things like bark, feathers, ribbon and crystals to turn them into statement pieces," says Javier at By Appointment Only Design.

WRAP IT UP

Miss Pickering covers containers in scraps of fabric, giftwrap or old maps, and Sabine Darrall at G Lily (glily.co.uk) has transformed tumblers into centrepieces with patterned wallpaper and paint. "Enamel pots, galvanized buckets and terracotta pots are cheap and easy to work with," she says.

The reception...

CREATE A FOCAL POINT

"Avoid small arrangements and go for a couple of large displays instead – they'll look great in photos," says Suzie. So, skip the small bouquets on the gift and guest-book tables and invest in a statement piece (or ask maids to display their bouquets on those tables while they're busy partying).

SCATTER PETALS

"You don't need a massive amount of flowers to have a beautiful table centre," says Robbie Honey. If you're super-skint, even lovely candles with rose petals scattered around will impress your guests.

STICK WITH SIMPLE

As Javier Salvador suggests, small flourishes can be just as beautiful as full arrangements. "We've been doing big candelabra with pomanders rather than full floral wreaths at the bottom, which can cut the price by half," he says. "Use tiny spray roses, which give you five heads per stem, rather than bigger roses which can cost £3 each."

KEEP IT CLASSIC

The most budget-friendly reception style? Vintage! "Collect cake stands, tea pots and cups to save on hire fees," says Marianne Johnson. "And because the containers are part of the look, you can use fewer flowers, keeping costs down."

VARY HEIGHTS

"Low table centres can be up to half the price of tall arrangements," points out Marianne, who suggests alternating high and low designs to add a sense of drama to the room.

MIX AND MATCH

"Choose three different styles of decoration," says Javier. The first will be the focal point for the room; the second, a tall wow-factor centrepiece that appears on half the tables; the third, small potted plants scattered on the remaining tables that guests can later take home.

FLOAT 'EM

"Single blooms floating in glass fishbowls can be just as enchanting as a big bouquet," says Robbie. Try peonies or hydrangeas for romance, or phalaenopsis orchids for a modern look.

Blow your budget on...

AN AMAZING BRIDAL BOUQUET AND BEAUTIFUL CENTREPIECES

"Your bouquet is the most important arrangement of the day and is in every picture, so don't skimp," advises Simone. And gorgeous table decorations are also a must. "People are sitting down, staring at them for hours!"



DARE TO DO IT YOURSELF

Hit the flower market and start arranging with these tricks of the trade

"Simple table centres are great to DIY because guests are going to sit there for a long time while you bask in the glory of creating them yourself!" says Sabine Darrall, director of Somerset-based flower shop and school G Lily (gily.co.uk). If you're a novice, stick to rustic-look arrangements like chamomile daisies in jam jars, hydrangeas in goldfish bowls or hand-tied bouquets of lilies and roses. Or, try these other tips ...

- **Choose carefully.** Go for hearty blooms that don't require expert timing to be open on the day, like roses, orchids and hydrangeas. "Tulips aren't bad, but can flop, and gardenias, lily of the valley and stephanotis are tricky," Sabine warns.

- **Work with your wholesaler.** Build a rapport so you can call the week of the wedding for advice on when to pick up the blooms. Buy flowers that need time to open a week in

advance, and save anything with a short vase life until the day before. Store in a cool dry place, but move into sunlight if they need a push at the end.

- **Get the right team.** "The worst thing is having tons of 'helpers' pointlessly running around," says Sabine. Instead, create a production line of three or four people so everybody has a specific job. "It gives the finished product more continuity."

- **Rent a van.** "It's heartbreaking when people spend hours working on beautiful arrangements only to then shove them in the boot of a car," she says. So save yourself the hassle of multiple journeys – and the drama of bruised blooms.

- **Don't ruin your nails.** "Make up the arrangements before your manicure," she advises. Or, dip green fingers in OrigiNails Bubble White (£1.99), an effervescent nail cleaner.

TRENDWATCH

Six right-now ideas that work at any price point

1 Sweet scents

"All our bridal bouquets have some scent," says Simone from Miss Pickering. "Fragrances are evocative and calming before your walk down the aisle."

2 Seventies style

"I'm loving cool retro vases with an industrial feel, in brown earthy tones," she adds. "We've found a lot of stoneware food canisters with Flour and Sugar written on them from auctions and antiques shops."

3 Cool coral

Move over, pale pink – this year's colour is coral. "The antique look is still big, but the palette's a bit fresher," says Marianne from Sweet Pea Flowers. "I adore roses and peonies in soft peach with accents of coral, very much like what's on the catwalks."

4 New vintage

'English country' doesn't have to mean mismatched tea cups in ditsy floral prints (gorgeous as they are!). "Yesterday I bought 10 rusty watering cans to dot around a marquee, and old baskets or terracotta pots are also gorgeous," says Miss Pickering.

5 Candle clusters

"Multi-element arrangements that use lots of different glass vessels – some filled with candles, some with petals, and some with flowers – are great for contemporary hotel weddings," says Marianne.

6 Personal flair

"Your flower arrangements should reflect you as a couple," says Miss Pickering. "For a recent wedding we used a variety of different champagne buckets as the vases – the groom was a wine dealer!"

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Make your flowers multitask from altar to after-party

HOW IT WORKS

"With flowers, you get what you pay for, so buy the best you can afford, then reuse pieces throughout the day," says Marianne at Sweet Pea Flowers. Recycling is easiest if your ceremony and reception take place within the same venue, but you can always recruit a burly usher or two to help transport items in a pinch.

UP TO THE TASK

Make sure you choose blooms that can handle the hard work. Big arrangements in water where blossoms are buffered by foliage hold up well, and coloured flowers tend to hide any bruising better than pure white.

AT THE DOOR

"Instead of a huge fresh flower garland around the door, place olive trees outside the church to mark the entrance," says Simone from Miss Pickering. "They'll

create a great frame for photography, but they can also be moved later and used outside the marquee or your reception venue."

ALL ABOUT PEW

Display your pew-end flowers in buckets or baskets lining the aisle so they can easily be transported to the reception and used as centrepieces. Got pew-end bouquets? Turn them into chair backs during the wedding breakfast.

TABLE TO TABLE

"We often reuse ceremony flowers at the reception," says Marianne. A long and low registrar table arrangement can easily become a top table decoration, as can pew garlands. Miss Pickering also recommends pre-using table centres by placing them on plinths during the ceremony and positioning them around the room.



SPEND LESS, DE-STRESS

Pick your own to cut the bill and the hassle!

"Brides seem to love it up on our flower plot, away from all the tension of wedding prep," says Jennifer Stuart-Smith, co-director of Kent's Blooming Green Flowers, where newlyweds can gather classic field blossoms like delphiniums, cosmos, zinnias and eryngiums by the bucketload to decorate their venue or fill their bouquets (from £50 per bucket in spring and summer). Here, she reveals how to pick the best of the bunch...

- **Keep them fresh.** "For a Saturday wedding, pick on Thursday or Friday directly into a bucket of water; then store in a cool, dark place."
- **Be open-minded.** "As you'll be using them so soon, pick flowers that are open rather than buds."
- **Pack 'em in.** "To fit more in each bucket and make the flowers last longer, strip the lower leaves off as you pick." Fewer leaves also means less water loss and longer life.
- **Mix in some greens.** "In nature, you rarely see flowers without lots of greenery, so look for some twigs, berries or quirky foliage."

Visit bloominggreenflowers.co.uk for details. Also see: [Flowers of Hatch \(flowersofhatch.co.uk\)](http://flowersofhatch.co.uk) in Tisbury, Wiltshire; [Durleigh Marsh Farm Shop \(durleighmarshfarmshop.co.uk\)](http://durleighmarshfarmshop.co.uk) in Petersfield, Hampshire; [Woodborough Garden Centre \(woodboroughgardencentre.co.uk\)](http://woodboroughgardencentre.co.uk) in Wiltshire.

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