



Engagements are clear cause for celebration, and what better way than with a party! From cocktail soirées and backyard barbecues, to printed invitations and last-minute phone calls, engagement parties are a couple’s first taste of the planning that’s about to come their way, along with all of those congratulations. (And yes, it’s okay to say “congratulations” to a bride nowadays — it’s no longer considered code for “you finally got one!”) Just keep in mind a few guidelines for starting your journey to the altar off on the right foot.

Step #1: Announce your good news

While shouting from the rooftops may be the first method of spreading the word that comes to mind, it’s important to take a minute and map out a strategy. If either of you have children already, they must be the first to know of your engagement. Regardless of how well they get along with your partner, it may also be a good idea to tell the kids without your future spouse in the room so they can have a chance to react privately with you first. As for the rest of your loved ones, you could cover all of your bases at once and choose to announce the news at a family party. The only trick with this is timing — can you gather everyone dear to hear the news before your excitement gets the better of you and you spill the beans? I know I couldn’t!

If standing in the spotlight isn’t your style, then your closest family, such as parents and siblings, should hear the news first. And it may be a good idea to ask them to keep it to themselves for a few days. Excited as your mom may be, this is your news to share and others may be hurt if they hear it through the grapevine. Next up are grandparents and best friends, usually followed by aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, and anyone else especially close to you. From there,

word of mouth may get to others before you.

Of course, all of this goes out the window if the proposal itself is public! Just be sure to personally contact anyone close who was unable to be there so they don't feel left out.

Step #2: Select a date and your guests

Parents of the bride are usually the first to be given the option of hosting an engagement party, followed by the groom's parents. It's rare for both to do so unless they live very far from each other. Though typically held within one to three months of the engagement, timing and logistics may call for something else. Perhaps you are both finishing graduate school and want to wait for summer when you can both enjoy your party more. Regardless, the idea is that the event occurs closer to the engagement than to the wedding — even if the engagement is only a month! Along those lines, invitations are usually mailed two to four weeks in advance, again adapting as your schedule may require. Invitations can be printed, handwritten, or even telephoned on short notice, but should match the level of formality of the event. Creating a guest list is the most important planning element to pay attention to, as the decisions you make will reverberate all the way to the wedding — literally. Everyone invited to the engagement party (or any pre-wedding celebration, such as a shower or bachelorette party), must also be invited to the wedding — it's one of the reasons people often keep engagement parties on the smaller side. So choose wisely — you can always invite more people to the wedding.

Step #3: Have a great time

Engagement parties occupy a funny little niche in the wedding process: They are one of the few events brides and grooms will experience for which there isn't a common American tradition to look to. They are a matter of course in some places, and more or less unheard of in others. This may seem unsettling: It's your first wedding event, and there's no blueprint to follow? But the beauty is that you have the chance to create your own style of event, one that is most meaningful to you. A clambake, a catered dinner, a casual brunch, or even a picnic in the park are all completely acceptable settings for an engagement party — you simply need to choose whichever type of celebration you'd most enjoy. The party itself has no requirements, though an announcement and toast, usually given by the father of the bride, is common. Guests may or may not bring presents, depending on local customs. If you're unsure, check with your host

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Written by Anna Post

rather than worry, as it can be different even within regions. And don't be concerned about breaking your guests' banks; engagement gifts are usually small, such as my personal favorite of two champagne flutes and a bottle of champagne. The overall goal of an engagement party is to celebrate your joy, so relax and enjoy a get-together that is as formal or relaxed as you are.

This article by Anna Post originally appeared in the Fall 2008 issue of [Inside Weddings](#) .

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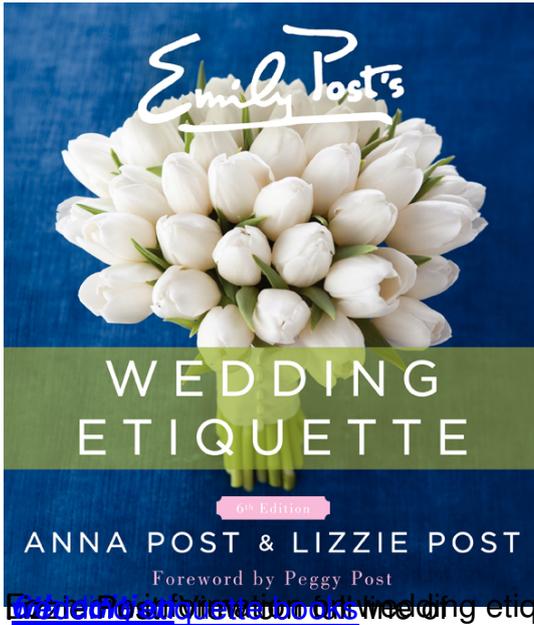
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