

Planning Calendar

You've sussed out your priorities, not to mention limitations. Next up: translating it all into a manageable course of action. Below is a comprehensive checklist based on the 16-month length of the average U.S. engagement.

Sixteen to Nine Months Before

- ☐ Start a wedding folder or binder. Tear out pages that inspire you from bridal, lifestyle, fashion, design, and food magazines.
- ☐ Work out your budget.
- ☐ Determine your wedding party.
- ☐ Settle on a head count.
- ☐ Hire a planner, if desired.
- ☐ Book your date and venues. Start from the most important place and choose your second spot after factoring in travel time between locations.
- ☐ Book your officiant.
- ☐ Research photographers, bands, florists, and caterers.
- ☐ Put the names of vendors and their contact information in a master contact list.
- ☐ Throw an engagement party, if you like. Attendees will expect invitations to the wedding, so choose them accordingly.

Eight Months Before

- ☐ Book the photographer and the videographer.
- ☐ Book the entertainment. Attend gigs of potential acts to see how they perform in front of audiences, then reserve your favorite.
- ☐ Start meeting caterers, if your location doesn't offer its own. Hire a caterer this month or early next.
- ☐ Purchase a dress. Custom gowns can take months to make, and even if you're buying off the rack, you'll typically need three fittings.

- ☐ Book a block of hotel rooms for out-of-town guests. Pick three hotels at different price points close to the reception venue.
- ☐ Register. Sign up at a minimum of three retailers.
- ☐ Set up a wedding website.

Seven to Six Months Before

- ☐ Select and purchase invitations, and hire a calligrapher, if desired.
- ☐ Start planning a honeymoon. Going abroad? Make sure your passports are up-to-date, and schedule doctors' appointments for any needed shots.
- ☐ Shop for the bridesmaids' dresses. Allow at least six months for the gowns to be ordered and sized.
- ☐ Meet with the officiant. If one person is converting to a new religion, schedule the requisite counseling.
- ☐ Send save-the-date cards, if desired.
- ☐ Reserve structural and electrical necessities. Book portable toilets for outdoor events, extra chairs if you need them, lighting components, and so on.
- ☐ Book a florist. Florists can serve multiple clients on one day, so you needn't nail them down as early as other vendors. Plus, waiting longer means you'll have a firmer grasp of how flowers fit into your vision.
- ☐ Arrange transportation.
- ☐ Start composing a day-of timeline. Draw up a schedule of the event and slot in each component (the cake cutting, the first dance).

Five to Four Months Before

- ☐ Book the rehearsal and rehearsal-dinner venues. If you're planning to host a day-after brunch for guests, book that place as well.
- ☐ Check on the wedding invitations. Ask the stationer for samples.
- ☐ Select and order the cake.
- ☐ Send your guest list to the host of your shower. Since there aren't umpteen things to do during these months, now is a great time to get "showered."
- ☐ Purchase shoes and start dress fittings.
- ☐ Try out hairdressers and makeup artists.
- ☐ Choose songs. Keep a running list of songs you do—and do not—want played.
- ☐ Plan welcome baskets for guests, if desired.

Three Months Before

- ☐ Finalize the menu and the flowers.
- ☐ Order favors, if desired.
- ☐ Make a list of the people who are giving toasts. Aside from the standard people, is there any other loved one whom you would like to speak? If anyone fits the bill, ask him now so he can plan what to say.
- ☐ Finalize the readings.
- ☐ Purchase your undergarments and have your second fitting. Always save the fabric that's cut off your dress; you can use it to wrap flowers and for other decorative details.

Planning Calendar (continued)

- ☐ Finalize the order of the ceremony and the reception.
- ☐ Print menu cards, if you like, and programs.
- ☐ Purchase the rings so you'll have time for resizing and engraving.
- ☐ Send your event schedule to the vendors. Giving them a first draft now allows ample time for tweaks and feedback.

Two Months Before

- ☐ Meet with the photographer to discuss shots and locations. Complete a walk-through of the locations and point out spots that appeal to you for photos.
- ☐ Sit down with the band or the deejay and review the playlist. Come prepared with your wish list, and ask the band (gently) to learn any songs not in their repertoire.
- ☐ Send the invitations. The rule of thumb: Mail invitations six to eight weeks before the ceremony, setting the RSVP cutoff at three weeks after the postmark date.
- ☐ Touch base with the vendors. Make sure you have gotten feedback and have answered all questions about the schedule you sent the previous month.
- ☐ Submit a newspaper wedding announcement, if desired. Note that some publications have strict rules about how the photograph should look; check your local paper's website for specifics.
- ☐ Enjoy a bachelorette party. If your friends haven't mentioned it about two months before the wedding, feel free to ask—for scheduling purposes, of course!—if they've set aside a night to celebrate with you.

One Month Before

- ☐ Enter RSVPs into the guest-list database. Phone or e-mail invitees who haven't yet responded.
- ☐ Get your marriage license. The process varies by state and county and can take up to six days, but it's good to leave yourself lots of leeway. If you're changing your name, order several copies.
- ☐ Mail the rehearsal-dinner invitations.
- ☐ Visit the dressmaker for your last fitting. For peace of mind, it may be a good idea to arrange a fitting the week of the wedding. If you try on the dress that week and it fits like a glove, cancel the appointment.
- ☐ Stock the bar. Now that you have a firm head count, order accordingly.
- ☐ Send out as many final payments as you can.
- ☐ Confirm times for hair and makeup and all vendors.
- ☐ E-mail and print directions for drivers of transport vehicles.
- ☐ Assign seating. Draw table shapes on a poster board the same way they appear in the room. Write the names of female guests on pink sticky notes and of male attendees on blue ones, and stick them to the tables. Rearrange as needed.
- ☐ Purchase bridesmaids' gifts to present at the rehearsal dinner.
- ☐ Write your vows, if necessary.
- ☐ Get your hair cut and colored, if desired.

The Week of the Wedding

- ☐ Reconfirm arrival times with vendors.
- ☐ Delegate small wedding-day tasks: someone to bustle the dress, someone to carry your things, someone to be in charge of gifts (especially the enveloped kind), someone to hand out tips, and someone to be the point person for vendors.
- ☐ Send a timeline to the bridal party. Include every member's contact information on the document, along with two or three point people for vendors to call if there are problems.
- ☐ Make arrangements for your dress to be delivered, or pick it up.
- ☐ Supply your photographer with a list of moments that you want captured on film.
- ☐ Set aside checks for the vendors and tips in envelopes to be handed out on the wedding day.
- ☐ Book a spa treatment (like a massage), if only to preserve your sanity, and a manicure-and-pedicure appointment for the day before the wedding.
- ☐ Send the final guest count to the caterer and the venues hosting any other wedding-related events. Typically, companies close their lists 72 hours in advance.
- ☐ Break in your shoes. Turn up the stereo and see how they feel while you dance to "We Are Family."
- ☐ Assemble and distribute the welcome baskets.
- ☐ Pack for your honeymoon.

Registry Essentials

There isn't anything romantic about being carried over the threshold...into an empty house. That's where your guests come in. They'll fill it up with bed linens, stockpots, bowls, and, of course, a blender. Here, in six categories, the staples to register for, along with less-expected ideas (beach towels!) and lines for filling in wish-list items.

| For the Kitchen | For the Bedroom | For the Dining Room |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 stand mixer | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 pillows | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 place settings (formal, casual, or both), including bowls, bread-and-butter plates, dinner plates, and salad and/or dessert plates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 food processor | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 sets of pillow shams | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 cups and saucers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 toaster (or toaster oven) | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 sets of 2 to 4 pillowcases | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 drinking glasses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 blender | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 sets of flat sheets | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 wineglasses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 coffeemaker | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 sets of fitted sheets | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 mugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 knife set, including bread knife, chef's knife, paring knife, and utility knife | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 bed skirt | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 sets of silverware (formal, casual, or both), including main-course knives, forks, and spoons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 10- to 12-inch skillets | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 winter duvet or comforter | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 steak knives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 cutting board | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 summer duvet | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 teapot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 2-quart saucepan | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 duvet cover | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of serving utensils |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 6-quart stockpot | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 cotton or wool blankets | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 large salad bowl and servers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 multipurpose pots | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 cloth napkins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Dutch oven | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 napkin rings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of measuring spoons | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 to 12 place mats |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of measuring cups | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 tablecloths |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of mixing bowls | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of salt and pepper shakers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 salt shaker | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of serving dishes or bowls |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 pepper grinder | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 set of covered dishes or bowls |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 serving spoons | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 serving platters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 wooden spoons | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 whisk | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 baking sheets | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 round cake pan | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 round pie pan | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 oven mitts | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Registry Essentials (continued)

[illegible]

Wedding-Budget Worksheet

Use these guidelines to figure out how much to allot to each component. (Adjust the percentages as you wish; just make sure the total adds up to 100 percent.) To manage expenses, consider installing computer software like the iDo Wedding Couple Edition (elmsoftware.com, \$30), which tabulates amounts you plug in.

| Suggested Percentages | Budgeted Amount | Vendor Estimate | Amount Spent |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Reception (50 percent) | | | |
| Venue and rentals | | | |
| Food and service | | | |
| Beverages | | | |
| Cake | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Attire (10 percent) | | | |
| Gown and alterations | | | |
| Headpiece and veil | | | |
| Bridal accessories | | | |
| Hair and makeup | | | |
| Groom's tux or suit | | | |
| Groom's accessories | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Flowers and Decorations (10 percent) | | | |
| Floral arrangements for the ceremony | | | |
| Flower girl's buds and basket | | | |
| Ring pillow | | | |
| Bride's bouquet | | | |
| Bridesmaids' bouquets | | | |
| Boutonnieres | | | |
| Corsages | | | |
| Reception decorations | | | |
| Lighting | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Music (10 percent) | | | |
| Ceremony musicians | | | |
| Cocktail-hour musicians | | | |
| Reception band, deejay, or entertainment | | | |
| Sound-system or dance-floor rental | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |

Wedding-Budget Worksheet (continued)

| Suggested Percentages | Budgeted Amount | Vendor Estimate | Amount Spent |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Photographs and Video (10 percent) | | | |
| Photography | | | |
| Videography | | | |
| Additional prints and albums | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Favors and Gifts (3 percent) | | | |
| Welcome gifts for out-of-town guests | | | |
| Bridal-party gifts | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Ceremony (2 percent) | | | |
| Site fee | | | |
| Officiant fee or church donation | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Stationery (2 percent) | | | |
| Save-the-date cards | | | |
| Invitations and RSVPs | | | |
| Programs | | | |
| Seating and place cards | | | |
| Menu cards | | | |
| Thank-you notes | | | |
| Postage | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |
| Wedding Rings (2 percent) | | | |
| Bride's ring | | | |
| Groom's ring | | | |
| Transportation (1 percent) | | | |
| Limousine or car rental for bride and groom | | | |
| Limousine or car rental for bridal party | | | |
| Transportation for out-of-town guests | | | |
| Valet parking | | | |
| Miscellaneous fees | | | |

Photographer Shot List

Don't leave your memories to chance. A week or so before the ceremony, supply the photographer with a list of moments that are important to you. Pick and choose from about 80 traditional and unexpected photo ops, keeping in mind that each shot should take about four minutes on average.

[illegible]

Photographer Shot List *(continued)*

[illegible]

Reception Sound Track

What song do you want playing when the wedding party is introduced? Or during the first dance? To get the party started, request that your musicians refer to this set list. (And for a list of more things you may want to discuss with your band or deejay, go to realsimple.com/askyourmusicians.)

| Necessities | Reception Must-Play | Don't Play |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| WEDDING-PARTY INTROS song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ |
| FIRST DANCE song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ |
| FATHER-DAUGHTER DANCE song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ |
| MOTHER-SON DANCE song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ |
| CAKE CUTTING song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ | song: _____ artist: _____ |

BEYOND “BUTTERFLY KISSES”

Give a listen to these song suggestions for three important dance-floor moments.

| First Dance | Father-Daughter Dance | Mother-Son Dance |
|--|--|--|
| “All I Want Is You,” by Barry Louis Polisar “All You Need Is Love,” by Nada Surf “Dixie Chicken,” by Little Feat “Everything,” by Michael Bublé “God Only Knows,” by the Beach Boys “I Just Knew,” by Better Than Ezra “Love Me Like the World Is Ending,” by Ben Lee “Stand by Me,” by John Lennon “Stay With You,” by John Legend “You Are the Best Thing,” by Ray LaMontagne | “Daughter,” by Loudon Wainwright III “Father and Daughter,” by Paul Simon “I Loved Her First,” by Heartland “Lullabye (Goodnight, My Angel),” by Billy Joel “Steal My Heart Away,” by Van Morrison “Sunshine,” by Matt Costa “You’re the World to Me,” by David Gray “Through the Years,” by Kenny Rogers “While You Were Sleeping,” by Elvis Perkins “You Make Me Feel So Young,” by Frank Sinatra | “Ain’t That Love,” by Ray Charles “Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy),” by John Lennon “Beyond the Sea,” by Bobby Darin “Forever Young,” by Bob Dylan “How Sweet It Is (to Be Loved by You),” by James Taylor “In My Life,” by the Beatles “What a Wonderful World,” by Louis Armstrong “You Are My Sunshine,” by Ray Charles with Chris Isaak |

Liquor List

Estimate one drink per person per hour. (A bottle of wine contains five drinks; a liter of spirits, 22.) For each bottle of spirits, you'll need three bottles of mixers. Below, how much to buy for a four-hour event based on your guest list. You may want to bump up the numbers for a Saturday-night affair; lower them for a Sunday soiree.

| Number of Guests | 50 | 100 | 150 | 200 | 250 |
|---------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| RED WINE | 10 bottles | 10 bottles | 18 bottles | 20 bottles | 24 bottles |
| WHITE WINE | 6 bottles | 12 bottles | 18 bottles | 20 bottles | 24 bottles |
| CHAMPAGNE | 10 bottles | 20 bottles | 30 bottles | 40 bottles | 50 bottles |
| BEER | 60 bottles | 120 bottles | 180 bottles | 240 bottles | 300 bottles |
| VODKA | 2 bottles | 4 bottles | 5 bottles | 8 bottles | 10 bottles |
| GIN | 1 bottle | 2 bottles | 3 bottles | 4 bottles | 5 bottles |
| RUM | 1 bottle | 2 bottles | 3 bottles | 4 bottles | 5 bottles |
| BOURBON | 2 bottles | 2 bottles | 4 bottles | 4 bottles | 6 bottles |
| SCOTCH (<i>blended</i>) | 1 bottle | 2 bottles | 3 bottles | 4 bottles | 5 bottles |

THREE SIGNATURE-COCKTAIL IDEAS

Jenny Early, the catering and beverage director of Cru Catering, in Charleston, South Carolina, suggests these sips.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Bride's Bouquet</p> <p>ingredients: ½ ounce elderflower syrup 5 ounces Prosecco or some other sparkling wine 1 sprig lavender or 1 edible flower</p> <p>directions: Pour the elderflower syrup into a Champagne flute and top with the Prosecco. Garnish with the lavender.</p> | <p>Lucy & Desi</p> <p>ingredients: ¼ cup fresh mint leaves 5 slices cucumber 1½ ounces tequila 1 ounce agave syrup 1 ounce sour mix 1 ounce lemon-lime soda or sparkling wine</p> <p>directions: In a cocktail shaker, muddle the mint, tequila, and 4 slices of cucumber. Shake with the agave syrup, sour mix, and ice. Pour into a glass and add the soda. Garnish with a cucumber slice.</p> | <p>Spiked Arnold Palmer</p> <p>ingredients: 6 ounces lemonade 2 ounces Firefly Sweet Tea Vodka 1 sprig fresh mint</p> <p>directions: In a cocktail shaker, stir the lemonade and vodka. Pour over ice. Garnish with the mint.</p> |
|--|---|---|

Vendor Contact List

You're going to be one busy lady for the next few months, so why waste precious time scrambling for your [fill in the blank]'s phone number? Instead, jot down important wedding-related contacts in one convenient place. When the Big Day rolls around, give a just-in-case copy to your maid of honor.

Cake Baker

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Caterer

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Ceremony Venue

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Dressmaker

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Florist

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Limousine or Taxi Service

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Liquor Store

(if supplying your own alcohol)

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____

Musicians or DeeJay

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Officiant

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Photographer

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Reception Venue

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Seamstress or Tailor

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Stationer

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Videographer

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Wedding Planner

name: _____
address: _____

phone: _____
cell phone: _____

Big Day Survival Kit

Some things you can't control (the clouds overhead, for example). But if other things go awry (say, an iPod loses its juice), you can be prepared with this checklist of lifesavers, as well as the following backup phone numbers, in case your limousine driver goes AWOL. (Not that that would ever happen!)

| Beauty and Wardrobe | Miscellaneous | Emergency Phone Numbers |
|--|--|---|
| <div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Ballet slippers or flip-flops</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Blotting papers</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Bobby pins</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Breath mints</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Buttons to match the ones on your dress</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Compact steamer</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Contact lenses (spares)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Curling iron and/or straightening iron</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Dental floss</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Deodorant</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Earring backs</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Eye-makeup remover (in case you get teary during the ceremony)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Face powder</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Hollywood Fashion Tape (hollywoodfashiontape.com), to keep strapless dresses in place</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Lint brush</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Lipstick or lip gloss</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Nail glue and polish</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Panty hose (extra pair, if wearing)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Perfume</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Small sewing kit with safety pins</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Stain-remover wipes</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Tissues</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> White chalk, to disguise dress stains</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> White gaffer's tape (sold at hardware stores), to patch tears in your dress</div></div> | <div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Aspirin or some other pain reliever</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Backup iPod and/or charger (in case the battery dies)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Bandages</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone and charger</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Cuff links for groomsmen (extras)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Granola bars</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Pepto-Bismol</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Straws (to avoid smudging your lipstick)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Umbrella(s)</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Water</div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div><div><input type="checkbox"/></div></div> | <div><div>MAID OF HONOR</div><div>cell phone:</div><div>BEST MAN</div><div>cell phone:</div><div>BACKUP BAND OR DEEJAY</div><div>name:</div><div>phone:</div><div>BACKUP FLORIST</div><div>name:</div><div>address:</div><div>phone:</div><div>BACKUP CATERER</div><div>name:</div><div>address:</div><div>phone:</div><div>BACKUP TAXI/LIMOUSINE SERVICE</div><div>name:</div><div>address:</div><div>phone:</div><div>24-HOUR DRUGSTORE</div><div>name:</div><div>address:</div><div>phone:</div></div> |

Go to realsimple.com/weddingbooklet to print out any of the worksheets in this pullout guide in an 8-by-10-inch size (perfect for hole-punching and slipping into your binder).