

The heat is on: Solving Summer Wedding Fashion Woes

by Sharon Mosley

When you get an invitation to a summer wedding, the heat is on. The burning question? What am I going to wear? (No, not "do I really have to go to this?" Of course you do!) "You put away what you really think and dress to repress. Er, respect," says Kimberly Bonnell, author of "What to Wear: A Style Handbook" (St. Martin's Griffin; \$12.95), and an online style pro. After all, most couples getting married these days are very tuned in to their guests' reluctance to attend a long, drawn-out ceremony, so they're throwing some great parties to celebrate their nuptials with family and friends.

SUMMER WEDDINGS - J. Crew's™ collection of summer dresses will put you into the mood to say "I do" and attend any wedding in style. CNS Photo courtesy of jcrew.com

But the question of what to wear comes down to a few simple choices, admits Bonnell. And of course, it's perfectly fine to seek the guidance of your hosts, always. But there is one rule of thumb she says, in this world of "no-rules" fashion: "No matter when the wedding is, don't wear an outfit you'd wear to work. Even - especially - a workday suit. And no plain, working-girl pumps." OK, now that we've got that straight, let's move on to some of Bonnell's other "what do I wear to a wedding" tips: - You can wear white, just "don't look bridal," she says. Choose a white linen or techno-nylon sheath dress with bare black heels. Or a white techno-nylon knee-length skirt, black cashmere tank top and bare silver heels. White menswear trousers with a metallic top in silver, gold, bronze or copper with bare heels is another possibility. - Remember, no clunky shoes on the big day. "Bare" shoes mean strappy sandals, mules, slingbacks, slides or open toes, notes the style expert. - Yes, you can wear black, "but don't look funereal," says Bonnell. "Show skin. Bare arms, neckline or back swing black from somber to festive," she adds. "Picture a black slip dress or a sheath, not a buttoned-up black suit; bare black heels, not plain black pumps; or a black sleeveless shell, not a black long-sleeve turtleneck." - Daytime summer weddings are perfect occasions to wear short, knee-length or midcalf hemlines. "If the invitation says 'formal,' ankle-length is OK, too," she says. But be careful about wearing pants to a daytime wedding: Tux pants in a flowing fabric might work as long as they are not too businesslike, and if they are worn with sexy, bare heels or a "stellar" top like a taffeta party blouse, a modest halter or a sequined or beaded shell. - Evening weddings call for more "overtly dressy" apparel. "Something more bare, yet elegant, than you'd wear for a day wedding, like a bare-back top or dress," says Bonnell. She suggests leaving your cotton and linen florals at home and dressing up in a day/night combination like a thin charcoal cashmere shell with a pink taffeta ball skirt. Bring out your "highest-beam" jewelry and evening bags. "The fancier the event, the smaller your bag," she adds. - If you're invited to a summer wedding that is a little more nontraditional - on the beach, at a dude ranch or in a hot-air balloon, your dress should be a little more "festive," according to Bonnell, that's appropriate for the location. "Wear flat sandals, not heels, to the beach nuptials, and skip stockings. Wear jeans to the dude ranch, but not weary faded ones. And why not wear the long, satin slip dress to the night ceremony at the ballpark?" - Black-tie and white-tie weddings are very open to interpretation, says Bonnell. Consider the bridal couple's taste: Are they conservative? Wacky? Baroque? Devoted to simplicity? Is it the bride's first marriage? If it is, the wedding will usually be more elaborate and grand. For black-tie events, above-the-knee hemlines are acceptable; for white-tie weddings, they are not, because a more formal length is generally worn, such as midcalf or gown-length. Flat shoes are acceptable for a white-tie wedding only if they are "spectacular." - If the invitation says "creative black tie," don't cringe. "Hosts specify 'creative black tie' when they want you to dress up but not necessarily in something so predictable as a tux or its feminine equivalents," says Bonnell. "It means you have the freedom to wear something atypical and not be scorned." It also usually means the party promises to be fun. "Get creative if that's easy for you," adds Bonnell, "but if it's not, just dress up and have fun." Copley News Service

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