

How to choose a meaningful wedding day perfume

CHRISTINE STODDARD

NOVEMBER 16, 2016

Selecting a signature bridal scent is more important than you'd think.



Miles Studio | Stocksy United

If you're engaged, you've probably thought long and hard about how you want your wedding to look and even sound ... but do you know how you want it to smell?

It may sound trivial (and, of course, it's not as important as your vows), but scent is actually a powerful emotive tool, and experts say it's not to be discounted as an important detail of your day. Having one distinct smell can help you create a lasting memory, and it may help set your mood. In fact, according to researcher and *Psychology Today*, "smells trigger more vivid emotional memories and are better at inducing that feeling of 'being brought back in time' than images." That means your wedding scent might be more important than your wedding album when it comes to remembering your marital moments.

MORE TO READ: [11 gorgeous wedding dresses with long-sleeves](#)

We spoke to Amy Marks-McGee, founder of the fragrance market research company Trendincite and columnist for the trade publication, *Perfumer & Flavorist*, to learn more about this wedding perfume phenomenon.

"A personalized wedding scent can communicate the bride's individual style and make the wedding day memorable not just for the bride but for all of the guests," she says. "Fragrance is linked to memories and can transport you to a specific time or specific place. The personalized wedding scent would be associated specifically to the bride and her wedding."

But if you're interested in creating a special day-of smell, how do you go about picking the perfume for you? Marks-McGee helps break down the process into four easy tips.

1. Evaluate the perfumes you already own

To begin brainstorming the fragrances that resonate with you, start with what's already on your bathroom shelf. What bottle do you wear almost every day? Do you have a special bottle just for evenings out? Look at the brands you tend to use, and then take a look at what those fragrances consist of. (If you don't know, you can easily look up the top notes and base notes of almost any bottle on perfume.com.)

"A bride may not know the classification of the fragrance direction she likes, but she should know which brands and perfumes she [already] likes," says Marks-McGee. "This will help narrow down the fragrance direction and help guide a scent designer or perfumer towards certain materials and ingredients."

“

Perfume is sort of like wine—you can learn all the fancy terms by heart, but, ultimately, enjoying it comes down to personal taste.”

She adds that some brides like to make totally new, custom perfumes, rather than buying off the rack. If that's the case, you may need to do even deeper research into which types of smells appeal to you: “Before making a custom scent, brides should know what type of fragrances they like or do not like. There are a lot of different olfactive fragrance directions available such as floral, floriental, chypre and woody.”

MORE TO READ: [How to decide on your perfect wedding dress](#)

Either way, don't be intimidated by the jargon. Perfume is sort of like wine—you can learn all the fancy terms by heart, but, ultimately, enjoying it comes down to personal taste. So let your heart play a part in the decision-making process, too. Nostalgia and tradition may help you decide. Is there a perfume your elegant grandmother always used to wear? Do you remember what fragrance did you wear on your first date with your husband? There may be a scent that already has special meaning to you that you'd like to double-down on.

2. Consider what you want to communicate

When you wear a fragrance, you're not only doing it for yourself; you're doing it for those around you. Some scents are more subtle than others for sure, but scent is something everyone notices, consciously or subconsciously. Don't be afraid to ask for opinions from your husband-to-be or your maid of honor. (Though keep in mind that everybody responds to scent differently, so don't be surprised if your bridesmaids' suggestions are far from what you have in mind.)

Most importantly: think about what you want your scent to say on your wedding day. The emotional element is key.

“

How can you describe what it will feel like when you kiss for the first time as husband and wife ... and then translate that into a smell?”

“I would also suggest a bride have an idea of the type of emotion she wants to evoke,” says Marks-McGee. “This could also be tied into the style and vibe of the wedding she wants to create.” But emotions aren't always the easiest thing to articulate and then translate into a perfume. How can you describe what it will feel like when you kiss for the first time as husband and wife ... and then translate that into a smell? Sounds tricky. But Marks-McGee says that's what experts are there for.

MORE TO READ: [What your mother-in-law is really thinking](#)

“In general, I think it may be challenging for a bride to define and articulate what type of scent she wants because fragrance and the language of fragrance are a bit intangible,” says Marks-McGee. “Fragrance is personal, emotional and subjective. It also has its own vocabulary that the lay person most likely does not know. How I perceive rose might be different than how someone else perceives rose and trying to articulate this may be challenging.” So use your research, then walk into a department store or perfumer and ask for help. The experts will help guide you, especially if you describe details to them like what your dress looks like, the venue, or how you want to feel on the dance floor.

3. Decide where to take your business

Minding your budget is a reality for every bride, so it's essential that you understand what services cost. Above all, your love and commitment are what matter, not the price tag on each piece of your wedding. That said, remember that your wedding is a special, once-in-a-lifetime occasion. It's okay to treat yourself just a little.

"I think a bride needs to decide what her working budget is ahead of time," says Marks-McGee. If you're considering developing your own perfume, consider online creation sites like [Mix-o-logie](#), which sells alcohol-free perfumes that you can mix and match. There are eight roll-on scents that you can layer to blend your own signature fragrance. Or search for "specialty perfume design shops" in your zipcode that you can visit in person. Stores such as [Aroma Workshop](#) in Chicago and [Fragrance Shop NYC](#) sell a much wider selection of fragrance oils for mixing and matching, as well.

MORE TO READ: [*Ballerina Misty Copeland proves you don't need an elaborate wedding*](#)

"Personalized scent prices vary," says Marks-McGee, "but an in store specialty experience typically ranges between \$30 to \$80 while an online kit ranges from \$65 to \$235." The more exclusive you go, the pricier the services run. "A one-on-one consultant with a perfumer could cost between \$500 to \$2000," she says.

If that smells like fantasy to you (not many of us can afford a \$500 perfume!) then remember that you can stick to shelf brands in your department stores. Go to Sephora to do a little field research of your own, as well as the counters of Nordstrom, Macy's, or Lord & Taylor. These brands have tons of options, and you can get a great designer scent for around \$65.

4. *Take your fragrance for a trial-run ahead of time*

You might think you've found your dream perfume, but this isn't a decision you should rush. A fragrance is much more than what you get at first whiff.

"For scent, it is important for the wearer to spend time wearing and experiencing the fragrance," says Marks-McGee. "Many fragrances are composed of top, middle and bottom notes that change during the length of time the perfume has been worn." In other words, the fragrance will evolve as you wear it. "A bride may love how it smells when she first applies a perfume and then may not like how it smells hours later. Before a bride commits to a scent she should spend time wearing it."

When you first spray a scent, "you smell the top notes, which create the first impression," says Marks-McGee. "A few examples of top notes are: citrus, airy, watery, bright fruits and light florals."

So as you wear your perfume throughout the day, think about how it's changing: "After the perfume is worn for a little while it leads to "the heart," which can be composed of fuller florals, warmer fruits and aromatic herbs," she says. "The dry down, also known as the base, is the warmest most long-lasting of all and occurs after hours of wearing a scent. Substantive ingredients such as vanilla, amber, woods, patchouli, spices and musk are examples."

Discovering how a fragrance transforms requires patience. So if you feel like this is just one more stressful item on your giant to-do list, simply buy a fresh bottle of an old favorite, and let that transform itself into your wedding day memorabilia. And, of course, remember that it's the actual memories that you're about to create with the love of your life that are more important than any picture or smell.

CHRISTINE STODDARD

Associate Editor Christine Stoddard's work has appeared in Marie Claire, Bustle, Good Housekeeping, The Huffington Post, the Catholic News Service, and beyond. She is also the founding editor of the socially-minded art and literary magazine, Quail Bell.