

Rehearsal Dinner Planning Checklist



Step by simple step, here's how to make this a night for both families to meet, mingle, and relax before the formality of the big day.

Four to Five Months Before

Book the venue. Tradition says that the groom's family hosts the rehearsal dinner, which may or may not be true in your case. Even if the groom's parents are taking the reins, you still need to offer options and be available to weigh in. Don't feel constrained to go the restaurant route. A clambake on a beach or a burger fest at a bowling alley could be more fun, more you, and even more memorable.

Negotiate the costs and the menu. If your guest list will be long, consider having cocktails and hors d'oeuvres rather than a full meal—or look into a casual, less expensive venue, like a favorite pizza parlor.

Three Months Before

Enlist those you'd like to have give toasts. This will give them time to come up with a speech. Generally, the father of the groom, if he's hosting the dinner, speaks first. Then the best man or a return toast from the bride's father, followed by anyone else who wishes to give a toast. You and your husband-to-be may want to toast each other, welcome family and friends, and thank everyone for being there. (Of course, the toasts could also be spontaneous, with anyone speaking who cares to.)

Check with the venue about audiovisual equipment. You—or your parents or friends—may have a slide show or photos planned as entertainment during the toasts.

One Month Before

Mail invitations. The guest list should include the wedding party and their spouses or significant others; the parents, stepparents, grandparents, and siblings of the bride and groom; and the officiant. Out-of-town guests and close friends and relatives may be added as well. If entre selection is involved, include the choices in the invitation.

Draw up a seating plan. You'll probably want both sets of parents (and possibly your maid of honor and best man) at your table, which should be centrally located. Other than that, you can choose to keep families and friends together or mix them up into potentially congenial combinations so they can get acquainted.

Purchase bridesmaids' and groomsmen's gifts to present at the dinner. The bridesmaids' gifts may alternatively be presented at a bridesmaids' lunch. You may also want to give parents thank-you gifts.

Touch base with the vendors. Make sure you have gotten answers to any questions you may have.

Order flowers for tables, if desired. Or, if you have a lot of tables, create numbered centerpieces.

Send out final payment to vendors, if possible.

Week of the Wedding

Send the final guest count to the venue. Typically, companies want to close their lists about 72 hours in advance.

Make up place cards for the tables.