



# Wedding Gown Care Guide

*Everything You Need To Know About Caring For Your Wedding Gown Before, During, and After Your Wedding*



# About the Author



*Kyle Matthews is a fifth generation dry cleaner and Wedding Gown Specialist at Janet Davis Cleaners focused on cleaning couture wedding gowns and salon relations. Before working at Janet Davis Cleaners, Kyle worked as a mortgage banker and graduated from Michigan State University with honors. Follow him on Twitter [@JDCleaners](https://twitter.com/JDCleaners)*

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## Before Your Wedding

### Pre-Wedding Cleaning

There are many reasons you may need to clean your wedding gown before you tie the knot. Cleaning a bridal gown does involve some risk, so if it's not dirty, don't clean it. If your dress is dirty, then don't fret, the chance of something happening to your dress if you choose the right cleaners is extraordinarily low.

### When To Clean Your Gown Before You Wear It

There's no need to come unraveled if you have a new gown and something happens. We once cleaned a silk wedding dress with dog urine on it less than 24 hours before the bride was leaving (it was an out of town affair). We had the dress looking as good as new just in time. That was an extreme case, but it should illustrate what can be done.

If you purchase a sample gown, chances are you'll want to get it cleaned before you wear it. Even if the gown looks clean, keep in mind that anywhere from one to a few dozen people have tried on the gown on before you purchased it.

Most vendors that will sell you a pre-worn (used) wedding gown require that it be cleaned first. This doesn't mean it was cleaned well. Look for dirt at the hemline (unless you are significantly shorter than the previous wearer). Open the hem with your hand and lay it flat to get a true sense of how dirty or clean it is. Also look at the bust area and near the under arm area. If there are any areas of concern, you will want to have those taken care of now, not later.

Maybe you are going to wear a dress that your mother or grandmother wore, or you found an amazing dress at a vintage shop. If you are going to be married in a vintage gown, you will most definitely want your gown cleaned first. In fact, what you want is a wedding gown restoration service.

### Wedding Gown Restoration

Wedding dress restoration is the art and science of taking an old wedding gown and returning it to a condition that is as close to new as possible. Several factors go into a successful restoration, most of them happening before the dress is ever brought in for service. The care and storage of the gown over the years largely determine the final product. Only the best wedding dress dry cleaners will even attempt this process. If the technician is experienced, it is a very safe process.

### **Before Alterations or After?**

There are a few risks involved anytime you clean a wedding dress. Because of this, you'll want to clean your gown as early in wedding planning process as possible and **before any alterations** are made to the gown.

### **Steaming/Pressing**

If you purchased and had your alterations done at the same place, chances are they pressed or steamed the gown for you before you picked it up. When you travel with your dress before the wedding, you will want to find someone to steam and or press your dress before your big day.

### **Quick Fixes for Pesky Wrinkles**

To relax most wrinkles hang your gown on the bathroom door, turn the shower to hot, close the door, and let the shower run until the room is filled with steam. Don't let the water from the shower reach your dress.

Invest in a portable hand steamer you can use whenever you travel. Guard against spotting water-sensitive fabrics such as silk by wrapping the head of the steamer in a small towel. Some hotels provide hand steamers for guest use in each room.

### **Professional Pressing**

Of course, the easiest solution to the wrinkle problem is to have your gown professionally pressed once you arrive at your destination.

Try visiting [www.WeddingGownSpecialists.com/locator.htm](http://www.WeddingGownSpecialists.com/locator.htm) for a recommendation of a professional cleaner at your destination.

### **Storing Your Gown**

Most bridal salons will steam or press your gown after they perform the necessary alterations. To preserve the work they've already done, carefully hang it in your vehicle with only one fold if possible. When you get home, take your dress out of the car right away and hang it up so it is not touching the floor.

You'll want to store your wedding gown away from any kids, pets, moisture and of course the groom. Only you know the best place for this, but a suggestion is in a guest bedroom with the blinds closed, or in a closet with enough space so that you don't crush it.

Ensure that your wedding gown is hanging properly as it may have shifted on the way home. The dress should be hung on the hanger with straps connected to the seam in addition to the

shoulder straps (if you have any). The important thing here is that the dress isn't being distorted on the hanger.

Next, take your wedding gown out of the plastic, and wrap it in a breathable material. Plastic is good for short term storage and transportation. For long term storage, plastic can trap moisture, push dirt onto your gown, cause it to yellow, and set any stains. The best thing to store your gown in is unbleached muslin (available at any fabric store). The next best thing is to drape the gown in two (clean!) white bed sheets. This will protect it from light, dust, and any rogue dirty hands.

### **Traveling With Your Gown**

Whether you are headed half way around the world or just to the next town, you want your gown to look fresh and unwrinkled for the ceremony. Here are some tips to help you and your gown travel safely!

#### **Traveling by Car**

Since most shops protect your gown with a garment bag and stuff it with a bust form plus lots of tissue to keep the gown from being crushed while it is in the bag, the most your gown should need is a quick fix. If you do not have a bag, stuff the bodice with as much tissue as possible and buffer the folds of the gown's skirt with more tissue. Use one large sheet (fitted sheet works best) to cover the front of the gown and another to cover the back and then pin the sheets together.

Hang the gown so the bodice is facing the car door, and the bust form and tissue will protect the bodice from wrinkling. Lay the rest of the gown across the back seat.

#### **Traveling by Ship**

Pretty much the same advice applies to water travel because you can carry your gown with you on board. And if you're getting married at sea, most cruise lines offer pressing services!

#### **Traveling by Plane**

There was a time when you could carry the gown with you and hang it in a storage cabin. Today most airlines insist you check your gown with your other luggage so unless your gown is very informal you will need a large box or an extra suitcase to protect it. Call your airline for details. Later we'll talk about how to pack it.

### **Packaging at the Bridal Salon**

You could ask the bridal salon to pack the gown for you, but the salon may not have a box that is large enough. Gowns are often shipped to the salon in very small boxes, and pressing out the creases is one of the amenities offered by full-service shops.

### **Packing at a Gown Specialist**

Or you could also ask a professional who specializes in gown cleaning and preservation to prepare your gown for shipping. Janet Davis Cleaners is experienced in packing gowns and has boxes with shipping cartons on hand.

### **Packing at Home**

If you pack the gown yourself, use a large box about one-third the length of the front of your gown.

Line the box with tissue and lay the gown over it – face down. Make sure you have the gown centered in the box and the part that is face down is spread flat so there are no creases or folds.

Beginning at the side seams, fold the skirt length-wise over bunched tissue until the skirt is no wider than the box.

Then add more tissue and fold the top of the gown over into the box.

Add still more tissue and fold the top of the gown over into the box. The top of the gown will now be facing up. Think of your gown as you doing the impossible: lying on your stomach with your legs folded over backwards while your head and shoulders are lying on top of your legs – facing up!

Now use still more tissue to stuff the bodice and cushion anything else such as bows or sleeves that should be protected. When you are finished, the dress should not move or “dance,” as the Spanish say, even if you shake the box. Save the dancing for the wedding day!

## Day of Your Wedding

A little bit of preparation goes a long way when trying to keep your wedding gown stain free. When asked, a bride's biggest worry is to keep her dress looking perfect for pictures throughout her wedding. I've compiled a few tips to keep your wedding dress spot free on your big day.

### Morning of Your Wedding

Keep your wedding gown some place that has a moderate temperature, is dark, not in a plastic bag and where it isn't being touched/crushed on any side. Some brides go so far as to choose their menu items without any items that are typical culprits for staining (like pasta sauce). It is a good idea to have your florist remove the stamen from your flowers. Also, if you are going to have bubbles at your wedding, I would test them before hand to make sure they don't stain. Make sure every part of the gown and it's accessories are present before you leave if you aren't getting dressed at home.

## Getting Dressed

Use a deodorant that contains an antiperspirant sparingly. Underarm stains (both from perspiration and deodorant) are some of the toughest stains to remove. Use trial and error beforehand to find one that works for you to keep you dry and deodorant stain free. Put your perfume on before getting dressed.

Look over your dress and accessories a couple days before the wedding to ensure everything is ready to wear. Hang your veil near the shower to smooth any wrinkles.

When it's time to put your dress on, put something over your face, like an old cotton t-shirt, to protect your dress from your makeup. Arrange for somebody (or two somebodies) without a fresh manicure to help you get dressed. Make sure they know how to work the bustles on your dress BEFORE the day of the wedding.

## After You Get Dressed

Stick to clear liquids only so that if you do spill, nobody will notice. Always make sure to get help going through doorways, especially car doors. Grease and dirt from door hinges is black and hard to remove.

## Wedding Day Survival Kit

Here is an extensive list of everything you might need on your wedding day (essential items in bold):

- Aspirin (or pain reliever of choice)
- **Band-Aids**
- **Bottle of water**



- Breath mints/spray
- **Camera** for taking getting dressed candid
- Cash (just in case)
- **Cellular phone** (make sure to turn off at appropriate times)
- **Chalk/baby powder** (will cover small spots/stains on your wedding dress)
- Clear nail polish (for stocking runs)
- Comb/brush
- Corsage pins
- Cotton Swabs/Q-Tips
- Dental floss/toothpicks
- Emory Board
- Extra earring backs
- Extra panty hose
- Eye drops
- **Granola bars or other easy-to-carry snacks** (avoid things that will melt)
- **Hair pins/ponytail holder**
- Hair spray
- **Hem tape/Hollywood Tape/Toupee Tape**
- Krazy Glue (for nail fixes, shoe heels, decorations, even jewels)
- List of vendors phone numbers
- Lint Roller
- **Makeup** (for touch-ups)
- Mini sewing kit
- Mirror
- **Moist towelettes**
- Perfume
- **Safety pins**
- Scotch tape
- Small folding scissors
- Spot remover
- **Straws** (so the bride can stay hydrated without messing up her lipstick)
- Sunblock
- Tampons/sanitary napkins
- **Tissues**
- Tweezers
- Wristwatch

### What To Do If Something Happens To Your Dress

If you do get a spot on your dress, don't fret. Spots are typically less noticeable than you think they are. Remember, the guests at your wedding are there to share in your special day, not to critique you. It's also likely that in trying to remove a spot or stain that you'll cause damage to your wedding gown (especially on silk wedding gowns).

The first step in safe stain removal is to blot the area dry. **DO NOT RUB** as you can damage the delicate fabric in the dress. If you have a wedding gown safe spot removal kit, go ahead and follow the directions to attempt stain removal. Finally, after the gown is dry, cover any remaining portion of the spot with chalk or baby powder.

### Professional Gown Attendant

Many brides have heard of day of wedding coordinators, but an emerging trend is to hire a professional gown attendant. The role of this person is to assist in keeping your gown looking its best all night. Her main function is to help the bride get dressed. Next she will ensure your bustle is done and undone properly at the appropriate times. Finally, she'll be there should any emergencies pop up (like a bustle rip during pictures).

If you are interested, inquire with your bridal salon or seamstress for more details.

## After Your Wedding

### Immediately After

Arrange for a family member or friend to collect your gown and accessories before you leave for your honeymoon. It's best if you can make a face-to-face handoff, but if that isn't possible, pre-arrange this with the hotel to ensure your gowns safety.

### Preserving Your Gown

#### Why Preserve Your Gown?

Some brides choose to preserve their gown after the wedding. The following are the most popular reasons to preserve your gown.

- To keep your wedding gown as beautiful as the day you wore it for as long as possible. Your daughter or granddaughter may want to wear your gown one day. Preserving your gown will slow the aging process and offer the best environment for storing your gown.
- To diminish yellowing, pre-mature discoloring and fading. Yellowing is the number one thing people look to correct down the road... prevent it now.
- Poor storage can reduce a once beautiful wedding gown to rags. Storing a gown without preserving it first will allow the pH of the gown to change causing the gown to become brittle and weak. Over time the fibers will break down and the gown can be reduced to shreds. Once set into motion, this process can be slowed but is not reversible.
- Stain removal is easier today than tomorrow. Body oils and makeup need to be removed or they may cause permanent stains in your gown. As time passes certain stains may be set forever while others are just more difficult to remove. Wedding gown preservation includes cleaning of your wedding dress.
- Invisible stains will start to caramelize and become visible. Soda, wine and cake spills or spots may not be visible on your wedding dress. Much like cutting open an apple, over time the stains will turn brown and ugly.
- To sell it. Preserved gowns are much easier to ship than hanging gowns. Also, if you preserve your gown with an Association of Wedding Gown Specialists member, pressing will be free for the new owner.

## 10 Tips to Properly Preserve Your Wedding Gown

1. Hands Off! Do not touch your wedding gown with your bare hands after it is clean. The oils from your skin will be absorbed by the dress which could yellow your gown over time. Use gloves (cotton works best) to handle your wedding gown after it is clean.
2. Treat invisible stains. Most sugar based stains (from cake icing, white wine, etc.) are invisible at first, but quickly yellow over time leaving nasty stains. Make sure your gown is treated for all stains, visible and invisible.
3. 100% Clean. Make sure your gown is 100% clean meaning all stains (both visible and invisible) have been treated, nobody has touched your gown after it is clean and nothing has been applied to your wedding gown to preserve it.
4. Remove pads. Bust pads absorb body oils and perspiration and then slowly release them over time (a process called off-gassing) which will age your gown at a faster rate. Removing these items before cleaning will prevent this process from occurring.
5. Acid Free Box. Use an acid-free preservation chest, not one which is only pH neutral. If the box isn't fully acid-free, it could re-acidify over time which will cause your gown to prematurely age.
6. Use an acid-free bust form and acid-free tissue paper at every fold. This will hold the shape of your wedding dress, prevent wrinkles, all while helping to fight the effects of time.
7. Lignin-Free Box. Lignin content will decompose over time, releasing acidic and corrosive elements, making the box yellow, brittle and weak. Make sure your wedding gown preservation chest is lignin-free.
8. High Alpha Cellulose Content in box. A high percentage of alpha cellulose (87% or more) is necessary for longevity and stability in the wedding gown preservation chest.
9. No plastic window. Plastic is another material which will off-gas and turn your bridal gown yellow over time. A window in the preservation chest is fine as long as it's made of a material that will not off-gas over time, such as archival clear oriented polyester.
10. Allow the garment to breath. A wedding gown that is properly preserved WILL NOT be vacuum or plastic sealed. Trapping air with your wedding dress will cause it to yellow faster and will set folds and wrinkles permanently. Cardboard has microscopic pores which will allow your gown to breathe properly. A plastic bag around the box is normal for transportation; just make sure to remove the plastic when you get your gown home.

## Questions to Ask Your Dry Cleaner Before Preserving Your Gown

You have a large amount invested in your wedding gown and you want to be sure the dry cleaners you choose to preserve your gown will invest as much care in your wedding dress as you have. Here is a list of questions to ask the dry cleaner before leaving your gown to be preserved.

*Where is my gown going to be processed? Who is going to be the one to actually clean and preserve my wedding gown?*

Many dry cleaners send the wedding gowns to somebody else to process. You want to look for a dry cleaners who does all of the work themselves.

*Can I inspect my wedding gown after you clean it?*

If a dry cleaners is unwilling or unable to allow you view your wedding gown after it is clean and before it is placed in the preservation chest, how will you know what is in the box? Yes, there may be a window in the box, but that doesn't show the whole picture. If you are not able to view and inspect your wedding gown after it is clean, you have to ask yourself, what is the drycleaners trying to hide?

*What is the preservation box made of? What about the tissue paper and everything else used to preserve my wedding gown?*

The wedding gown preservation box should be fully acid free (not just pH neutral), if there is a window it should NOT be made of plastic and all materials such as tissue paper used in the box should also be fully acid free.

*What precautions will be made to protect the beads, sequins, flowers and other delicate features on my wedding dress?*

Wedding gowns are not the same as normal dry cleaned items and they shouldn't be treated that way. The dry cleaners should not clean your wedding dress with any other items and should take special precautions to protect your wedding gown from damage during the cleaning process. Ask to see before and after pictures if you have a couture wedding gown or if your dress is particularly ornate.

*What is your guarantee?*

If you preserve your wedding gown, it should come with a guarantee. Ask what the guarantee covers, how long it's good for, what happens if you open the box, and anything else you can think of to make sure the guarantee is legitimate.

## How to Sell Your Gown

Many brides today are opting to sell their wedding dress to help cover the cost of the wedding (or to afford a more expensive dress than otherwise possible). There are many ways to sell your dress and a few things you have to do in order to get the most for your dress. The biggest decision you have to make are whether you want to sell it online or in person and whether you are going to do it yourself or have somebody else do it for you.

### The Basics

Before you sell your gown, you need to have it professionally cleaned. This is a requirement for all of the options we talk about here. It only makes sense, would you want to buy a gown that has been worn all day? Also, be prepared to not make as much money as you thought you might. The starting price for most pre-owned gowns is 50% less than you paid (not 1/2 of the retail price) and this is only the starting price, you may get less. Finally, the faster after your wedding you sell your gown the better. If you wait as long as three years, you are probably out of luck when trying to sell your gown (so get it listed relatively quickly)!

### Craigslist

This is the ultimate local, do it yourself, way to sell a wedding gown. All you have to do is post a few pictures and a simple description and price of your gown and you're on your way.

Pros: It's generally local, prospective buyers can see the gown in person before purchasing, you get the full sale price

Cons: Small pool of interested buyers, will get lowball offers

### Ebay

Selling here is similar to selling on craigslist except you may not be selling locally and potentially have a larger pool of interested brides. Good pictures and an accurate description will go a long way here. Be careful not to deceive anybody as it will only hurt you in the end.

Pros: Larger pool of potential buyers, you get most of the sale price (ebays fees are relatively low)

Cons: May have to ship your gown, gown may not sell, lots of other stuff for sale on ebay, cost to relist your gown if it doesn't sell right away.

### Preownedweddingdresses.com

This is a website that's all about selling once worn wedding gowns. They advertise which means brides will be coming to their site looking for gowns like yours. They also offer lots of

guides and tools to help you sell your dress. There is a one-time listing fee of \$25 to use their site (which is extremely reasonable) and no commission fees of any kind.

Pros: Site is all about weddings and pre-owned dresses, small listing fee, guides provided to help you sell, listing fee covers until dress sells

Cons: Not a full service site

### **Local Consignment Shop**

Taking your dress here is selling it the old-fashioned way (not that there is anything wrong with that!). Consignment shops sell your dress within a more traditional bridal salon feel. The staff at a consignment shop are more experienced at pricing and selling your gown than you are which may help your gown get sold faster.

Pros: Hands Off approach, since they only get a set percentage of the final sale they are motivated to sell it quickly at the highest price possible

Cons: Wedding Dress Consignment shops typically receive 50% of the sales price for the work they've done

*However you decide to sell you dress remember to have it cleaned first and to be realistic about the selling price.*

### **Donating Your Gown**

The Brides Project is a non-profit organization that sells donated wedding gowns to help fund free support services to those who have been touched by cancer.

### **How to Donate Your Gown**

The Brides Project is a bridal boutique that sells donated new and pre-worn wedding gowns at their retail location in downtown Ann Arbor. Proceeds from the sale of the gowns goes towards free support services for those touched by cancer. To donate a gown, call (734) 418-3332 or go to [thebridesproject.org](http://thebridesproject.org).

### **Where Does The Money Go?**

The proceeds from The Brides Project go to the Cancer Support Community of Greater Ann Arbor. This non-profit organization provides free social and emotional support that will help people better cope with the effects of cancer, while enhancing their quality of life.

## Choosing a Wedding Gown Specialist

You will always want to use a wedding dress dry cleaners that specializes in cleaning wedding gowns. Most places only see a handful of gowns per year. You will want to select a dry cleaner that cleans wedding dresses every day.

There are a lot of options when it comes to cleaning your wedding gown, but I would suggest using a local dry cleaners that specializes in wedding gowns. If you ship your gown for service, the risk of damage or loss increases.

To find a specialist online, start with The Association of Wedding Gown Specialists. They will likely have a proven specialist in your area. Next, check wedding sites like the knot and wedding wire. If you still can't find a wedding gown specialist, you can use google. Just search for "[your town] wedding gown cleaners". You will get a lot of results, but it is a good start.

Another good idea is to ask your friends that were recently married. Some will have good things to say, and some will have bad stories. When they recommend to visit or stay away from a place, ask why. What you are looking for may be very different from what she was expecting or looking for.

You can also get a recommendation from the bridal salon where you purchased your gown. They won't recommend just anybody. In fact they probably use a local dry cleaners to clean their stock gowns when they have an issue. If they trust their gowns to a local cleaner, you should feel safe in doing the same.

If you use just one of these methods, I would stick to asking the place where you purchased your gown. If you didn't buy locally, I would both ask around and check online.

## Janet Davis Cleaners

Janet Davis Cleaners has been family owned and operated since 1938. We specialize in cleaning wedding gowns and we clean gowns every day. You can visit our main store at 27607 Woodward Avenue in Berkley or our other store at 3645 Maple in Bloomfield Hills. You can also visit <http://www.janetdaviscleaners.com/wedding2.html> to get a quote for us to service your wedding gown.