

GROOMING THE BRIDE

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TAMPA - He popped the question. You said yes. There's going to be a wedding.

You've got to choose invitations, flowers, bridesmaids and, of course, the dress.

But let's not overlook the most important thing of all - you!

You'll be photographed, videotaped and scrutinized by everyone attending. So you want to be sure you walk down the aisle looking fabulous.

Here's a step-by-step beauty guide to help you glow on your wedding day.

Five to Six Months Before The Wedding

Find a makeup artist. Even if you're a whiz with the blush brush, you've got more important things to worry about than which shade of lipstick to wear on the big day. Get referrals from friends and start making calls to check prices and availability. "Once you whittle them down to a few, make appointments and go through a trial run," says Fran Fernandez, owner of Artist Hair & Makeup in South Tampa. "For a wedding, you're talking a very long day. Make sure you get a makeup that's long-wearing and will stay on the entire event." For Florida brides and outdoor weddings, Fernandez recommends air-brush makeup. It's long-wearing, waterproof, smudge-proof and transfer-resistant. When you decide on the look you want, make sure the makeup artist documents everything on a face chart so it can be duplicated on your wedding day.

Get a hair stylist: If you don't have a regular stylist, now is the time to start looking, says Michael Angelo Rizzi, owner of Michael Angelo Hair Studio in South Tampa. Bring in pictures of styles you like. "A stylist can tell you if a particular hair style will be complementary to you and if it will work with your hair texture," says Rizzi, who likes classic styles for brides. "We have the luxury of having hair pieces we can use to give the bride any hair style she likes." Hair color, however, should remain consistent. "Never make a drastic change in your hair color before the wedding," he adds. "Be as natural as you can be. You don't want to look back on your wedding day and ask, 'What was I thinking?'"

Three to Four Months Out

Put your best face forward. Visit an aesthetician and begin monthly facials and treatments like microdermabrasion, which exfoliates the skin using tiny crystals. If you're wearing a strapless gown, make sure to take the treatment down to your neck, chest and back, says Lourdes Gali, a clinical aesthetician with Body Science in Tampa. "Wedding preparations can stress the skin," she says. "It's common to see breakouts, acne and hives on the skin

when people are under extreme stress." Use products that will soothe and calm stressed skin. Vitamin C is an excellent antioxidant for the skin, Gali says.

Four to Six Weeks Out

Brighten your smile. Want those pearly whites to knock 'em dead? Visit a dentist to have your teeth whitened or to get an at-home kit. In the office, you can get white teeth in less than two hours. Do-it-yourself kits usually take about six weeks for full results, says Jason Olvera, owner of Gentle Dental in Temple Terrace. "The decision really depends on how much time you have," he says. "If time is an issue, go with the in-office. But if you have the time, I would recommend the take-home trays, because you get custom-fitting trays and you can always use them to touch up in the future. And after a couple of weeks, if you like your shade, you don't have to bleach anymore." Brides planning restorative work should let it settle for at least a month before beginning any teeth-whitening procedure, Olvera says.

Two to Three Weeks Out

Get knock-out nails. Whether you want your nails long or short, natural or artificial, a visit to your favorite nail tech will ensure they look fabulous in all those close-up photographs.

If you want to grow out your own nails, begin a once-a-week manicure, says Cathryn Myers, a nail tech at the Nail Shop of Carrollwood. If you want artificial nails, but you've never had them, now would be a good time to get a set. "There's an acclimation process for those who've never had them done before," she says. "It gives additional time to get used to them before the wedding."

Get your hair in shape. The last cut and color should be done two weeks prior to the wedding so it looks fresh. Hair color tends to fade and oxidize with time, says Angelo.

One Week Out

Do a light exfoliating facial so your skin is smooth for the makeup application. Make sure not to try anything new on your face, Gali says. You don't want a surprise breakout from a new product before your wedding.

Three Days Out

Wax. Now's the time to shape your brows and bikini line, and to get rid of hair anywhere else you don't want it, says Laura Campbell, lead aesthetician at Natural Health Studio in Temple Terrace.

"And if you get little red bumps or irritation from the wax, this is enough time for it to all disappear."

An important note: Never tan right after waxing. Wait at least 48 hours. Waxing exfoliates the skin and you will burn very, very quickly.

Choose your tan. An airbrush tan will give you a bronze body that will last about a week, says Johanna Manzy, salon coordinator for Tahitian Gold Salon & Spa in Temple Terrace. Use a tan-extending lotion and it will last right through the honeymoon. Once the color is dry, it's colorfast, so you don't have to worry about orange streaks on your gown. If you prefer a tanning bed, you'll want to start the process three weeks earlier to get that golden glow.

24 to 48 Hours Out

Get a final fill for acrylic nails, or paint and polish for real nails, and get a pedicure. Remember, natural colors always look best on a bride. Today's acrylic nails already are completely cured and painted - pink and white - so you don't have to wait for them to dry. And they can be done on your toes (without adding length) to match your hands.

Shampoo your hair the night before your wedding. If it's freshly shampooed, it will be limp and hard to manage, Rizzi says. Sleeping on it roughs up the cuticle and makes it easy to work with.

Make sure your bridesmaids have taken the time to refresh their hair color. You don't want any roots showing in the wedding pictures.

Wedding Day - Relax and walk down the aisle knowing you look marvelous!