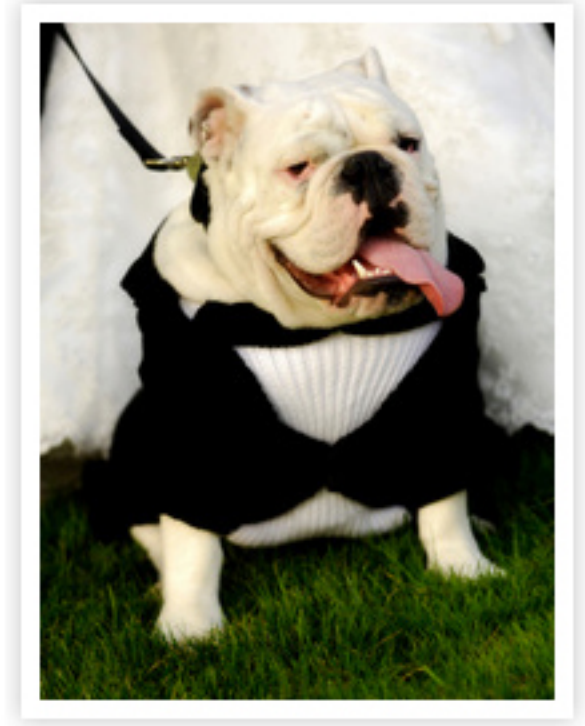


## Man's Best Bridesmaid: How to Include Pets in Your Wedding

By: [Vicki Santillano](#) (View Profile)

When Adam Sandler recruited his two bulldogs, Matzo Ball and Meatball, to participate in his 2003 wedding, I thought it was one of the cutest ideas I'd ever heard. But now that I've witnessed a few friends and family members plan weddings (and subsequently lose their sanity in the barrage of details and unsolicited opinions from loved ones about said details), I can't imagine adding that kind of anxiety to an [already stress-filled day](#). What if Meatball had abandoned his duties as ring bearer to chase an attractive squirrel? What if Matzo Ball had decided to mark his territory on the flowers?



And yet including pets in weddings is an increasingly popular trend. A 2006 survey by the American Kennel Club found that 18 percent of dog owners would include or want to include their pets in their wedding ceremonies. Twenty-seven percent of [owners under thirty years old](#) said the same thing, which means this practice might soon be as ubiquitous as wedding blogs and cupcakes instead of cakes. Luckily, there are steps people planning weddings can take to ensure that their special day includes their special pets—without including a host of problems to worry about.

### Ask yourself whether your pet's cut out for the job.

On the big day, brides and grooms want themselves surrounded by their loved ones, and often that includes their pets. But not all pets are well suited to large crowds or new areas. "I always inquire about [the demeanor of that particular pet](#)," says event designer and producer Debra Michelle Hiebert, of [Très Fabu Event Planning and Design](#). "Is this pet easygoing? Loves people? Loves a large and loud group of people?" Your pet should've gone through proper training well before the ceremony; attempting to train him or her a few weeks beforehand could present problems. If the lessons don't take, you could have a willful pet acting out and ruining the big day. "You don't want a fidgety, jumpy, or nervous pet," Debra advises. "The ceremony will rock [his or her] nerves." She suggests starting training lessons six months to a year before the ceremony.

If the pet's ever bitten anyone, that might call for disqualification. "I would not have that pet at your wedding. Period," Debra cautions.

### Make sure the venue allows for pets on the premises.

Though the pets-in-weddings trend is on the rise, some event spaces still don't allow animals. Sometimes you can work out a special arrangement; other times—with churches, for example—the answer is usually no. "More than likely, the event will have to take place outside or at a home residence," says Debra. If home's not an option, she recommends looking into courtyards, parks, and facilities that offer outdoor wedding-ceremony spaces. Bear in mind that these places might charge an extra fee for animals on the property.

If pets are excluded from your chosen venue, consider including them in wedding pictures. This is also a good compromise for people with pets that wouldn't perform well in the ceremony or reception. Remember, they still can be part of your special day without playing a leading role.

### Let guests know that your pet will be among them.

This isn't the same as asking for people's blessings about including your pet. Chances are, you'll hear a few dissenting opinions, just as you probably have for all other wedding-related decisions. Not everybody understands the bond between owners and pets, nor do they have to—this is your day, and it should involve the most important people (and animals) in your life. However, it's your responsibility to alert guests and anyone working at the wedding and/or reception (officiants, caterers, etc.) that a pet will be around, in case someone has animal allergies.

### Prep your pet for the big day.

First, you should get your pet acquainted with the area. The wedding day shouldn't be the first time he or she visits the venue; you run the risk that natural curiosity will overwhelm good behavior that way. In the weeks or months leading up to the big day, try to take your pet to places with lots of people and activities going on, so he or she can get used to the excitement. If your family and friends are okay with having your pet over for parties, Debra says, bring your animal with you. "The more [your pet is] surrounded by loud and unexpected noises, people running and walking around, and people coming up to hug you, the better prepared that pet will be for the big day," Debra says. And don't forget to make an appointment with a groomer to get your furry friend spruced up. No one should look haggard walking down the aisle, even our four-legged friends.

[Hire a pet sitter](#) (or recruit a close friend) to take care of the pet before, during, and after the ceremony so that you don't have to worry about him or her. Make sure that person knows to have hand snacks, plastic bags, and anything that brings the pet comfort, like a favorite toy or blanket to lie on.

### Accept the fact that problems can always arise.

Even if you follow all of these steps, it's possible that your little angel might bark during the vow exchange or try to sneak some buffet goodies. If you're going to include your pet in your wedding, then you've got to roll with the punches. As a pet owner, you probably know that a pet's behavior can't always be controlled, so if he or she starts acting up, take a deep breath and don't let it take the joy out of your special day. If you laugh it off, the rest of your guests will, too.

One important thing to remember is that including pets costs money. There's the potential venue fee, paying for a pet sitter, buying pet wedding outfits (top hats, fancy collars and leashes, etc.), and so forth. "My clients will normally spend just under \$350 to \$500 on their pets' being in the events," Debra shares. That may seem like a lot, but for some pet owners, doing otherwise would be unthinkable. Pets are family members and deserve a place at the wedding if that's what their owners want. And their inclusion can cause zero problems, as long as owners make sure they're properly socialized beforehand and looked after during the event. But whatever you do, don't force your pets to wear those cute wedding outfits for too long. As anyone who's been forced to don uncomfortable togs for a stretch of time can attest, it'll make you unreasonably grumpy—and that's when bad behavior goes from potential to probable.

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