As the nation is swept up in the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton, the British male is facing a sartorial challenge. While few of us will be attending the royal nuptials, a great many of us will have to find something to wear to a wedding, and this spring alone all others something special will be expected.

It is a potential quagmire. Whether you are the groom, the best man, the father of the bride or a passing acquaintance, the danger of looking like Christopher Biggins in a pantomime frock coat or some bumbling hop from a Richard Curtis film is very real. So where to start?

The most traditional and popular option for weddings is the morning suit (see images below). Three separate garments — one button tailcoat, trousers and a waistcoat. It signifies occasion and ceremony. The trick is to pay great attention to the detail and carry it off with panache. Ensure that your suit is 100 per cent wool — man-made fibres will cause you to sweat and shine like a beacon in the wedding photos. Wool is lightweight and easy to move in. When the clumsy dancing kicks off towards the end of the evening, you’ll be grateful. Stick to neutral shades, black or grey (preferably) or navy (at a push); anything else will look like Crawford on acid. Wear with a white evening shirt, ironed and starched.

Accompanying shoes should be black, never brown, and devoid of extraneous detail. Opt for classic Oxfords or Derbys. A plump, silk, block-colour tie lends a sense of sophistication — choose an intelligent shade such as plum, olive or mustard. Socks in bright shades cancel any funereal overtones, but make sure they don’t clash with the suit (black suit and yellow socks: no. Grey suit and lavender or soft pink: yes). Add a pocket square in sea-island cotton and a pair of solid silver cufflinks and the effect is elegant and refined.

The dress etiquette for today’s British wedding is always changing, however. New standards are being set about what constitutes a sharply dressed man, with a growing appreciation for hipster, less formal suiting. Call it the Jamie Oliver effect: when he married in 2000 he set a new benchmark for what was appropriate. He exited the chocolate box church in a blue cotton suit with rose-pink shirt and crocodile-skin shoes.

Since then, more and more men have opted for cotton and linen suits, shirts without ties or in vivid patterns or colours. Linen is also a considered choice for a summer suit; it’s breathable and light. But for weddings, suits such as these need accoutrements to make them formal enough — add a vivid pocket square and matching tie. If the latter has to be ditched, make sure the shirt has a stiff collar that sits up correctly. With this look, standard black shoes will be out of place. Suede slip-ons or tan brogues are the thing. Think Our Man in Havana rather than Quentin Crisp.

There is a middle way, and that is the classic suit: single-breasted, square of shoulder and with a white shirt. The risk is that a man in a grey or pinstripe number, no matter how expensive or exquisitely cut, can look as if he has just come from the office.

Either way, guard against the danger of not being seen to make an effort. Play with proportions. Make sure the trouser length is just cut enough to show an ankle shod in a shock of bright vermillion or aqua sock. Consider a bow tie as an alternative to a normal tie; it will give you that competitive style edge, though it might mean you hear a few sniggers from the uninitiated.

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