

A Man and the Boutonniere



Introduction to the Boutonniere

Most men will wear a flower on the lapel of their jacket only a handful of times in their lifetime. This is a shame. Nothing adds panache to a man's appearance like the confidence embodied in wearing a stylish boutonniere. A simple flower worn on the lapel of a jacket is a gesture full of meaning that extends beyond the flower. Boutonnieres are a symbol of fragile life, of beauty in nature, of love undefined yet captured in a single bloom.

The purpose of this article is to re-introduce you to the boutonniere. Many of us have had one forced upon us, either at a high school prom where we wore it for a picture and then disposed of it or at a wedding where we had one pinned on us at the last minute for the ceremony. Not the best way to introduce perhaps the most perfect menswear accessory. So let's hit the reset button and try this again.

Flowers and Masculinity

To start off, let's address the issue of wearing flowers and masculinity; there are many men who will dismiss the boutonniere as feminine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Great statesmen, warriors, and poets have worn flowers for over a millennium. Soldiers headed to war have proudly worn flowers on their chests, and here in the United States every January 1st two of college football's best teams square off wearing roses on their uniforms. The victors of our greatest athletic events are congratulated with bouquets of flowers — and on days of remembrance we honor our fallen with poppies and other blooms.

When to Wear a Boutonniere



For most of us the only time we will ever wear a flower on our lapel is at formal events like weddings, anniversaries, proms, quinceañeras, or a night at the theater or opera. The irony in this is that the only rule to wearing a boutonniere is that you do not need a special occasion to wear one. All a man needs is the confidence to swim against the current, to be the only man in the room who is sporting a flower on his left breast. However a man should not wear a boutonniere when he does not want to stand out from the crowd or when he is being judged. Funerals and interviews are not the place for drawing attention or displaying too much individualism.

How to Wear a Boutonniere

The boutonniere is worn on the left lapel of a men's suit, sport jacket, or blazer jacket; it can also be worn on an overcoat. The boutonniere is always attached above a man's heart, and it should be worn in the lapel's button-hole, a 1 to 1.5 inch opening that is a vestige of when a man's jacket lapels closed to protect his neck. Only on higher-end suits will you see the lapel button-hole 1) present 2) functional 3) with a latch and 4) built strong enough to support the flower.



A white carnation boutonniere worn with a colorful pocket square

Expanding on these four points, it's important that if you plan on wearing a flower in your lapel that you ensure the area where you'll wear it is prepared. As a clothier I do

this standard with all my jackets; however 99% of jackets made today are not. To accommodate a flower, a jacket needs to have a strong hand sewn inner lining, the buttonhole needs to be cut and hand stitched, and a silk latch must be sewn one to two inches underneath the lapel button hole. All of this requires extra money in terms of the jacket's cost — something no mass manufactures are willing to cover.



A working lapel button-hole and boutonniere latch - a quick indicator of the pedigree of a jacket

With that being said, how do you wear a flower on your lapel when you have no buttonhole or the hole is uncut? You have a few options. First you can do what most people do and that is to pin the boutonniere to your lapel. Once considered unsightly, it has become more acceptable because florists have done a great job making the stem look attractive. A second option is to have the buttonhole cut — this is a good solution if you have the time and the jacket is yours (if it's a rental...pin it). Any seamstress can do this in 20 minutes for \$15. Beware of the limitations though — you'll want to wear a flower that's lightweight (as the lapel is most likely flimsy) and if possible a flower whose stem is either professionally prepared or naturally simple and attractive.

Why Wear a Boutonnière?

Why should a man wear a flower on his lapel, especially when he is likely to be the only fellow sporting one? I'll give you three reasons:

- It's a great conversation starter — I guarantee someone will ask about it; the key is to be confident as to why you are wearing it. If a compliment is given, simply say thank you, and then move on with the conversation unless your conversation partner(s) wishes to dwell on it. Nothing sours a conversation more than a man who displays arrogance and who talks about himself too much — the flower in your lapel should be like a spark...a conversation starter, not the subject of the conversation.
- You have something to give — How many times have you spent a wonderful evening with a woman you just met, and at the end of the night the only thing you can give her is your business card? Try leaving her with something a bit more unique and memorable. Or perhaps you want to make your aunt's 70th birthday even more special — there are few things nicer to receive than a sincere showing of love accompanied by a flower.
- It shows you pay attention to details — When wearing a boutonniere, it's about realizing and showing that the little things matter.

How to Choose the Flower for Your Jacket's Lapel

First the flower should fit the occasion — simple white or red blooms for formal occasions, while for less formal occasions more colorful and exotic flowers are fine. Second, the boutonniere should be coordinated with the clothing you are wearing. If in doubt, a simple white bloom, like a white pocket square, is always a safe bet. And speaking of pocket squares, you are permitted to wear a boutonniere with a pocket square, although a boutonniere by itself can stand in for a pocket square. The rule here is balance; avoid too much of a good thing by muting down the color of your square or wearing a white pocket handkerchief. The final factor in selecting a boutonniere flower is how long you plan on wearing it — many flowers will wilt after a few hours in the heat and without water, so if you are looking for something that will last all day in the West Texas heat consider consulting a florist.

The Carnation Boutonniere — Simple, affordable, easy to find; of all the flowers a man can choose for his boutonniere, the carnation is perhaps the most versatile and easiest to pull off. White is always acceptable, although it is best suited to more formal occasions. Red is a close second, and can bring a dash of color to a black tie outfit or dress up a

sport jacket and jeans. I personally prefer miniature carnations; however, a normal bloom that hasn't fully opened works well. The only downside to a carnation is that it will begin to droop after a day of wearing, so wear it fresh or if for a long day consider having it professionally prepared by a florist.

The Rose Boutonniere — About as easy to find as carnations, roses are more complicated to wear as they are substantially larger and must be free from imperfections. To the general public, they are considered the most formal flower, and they are perfect choices when celebrating love at either a wedding or anniversary. Rose boutonnieres look best when they are professionally prepared as then they can be permanently tilted and even hydrated with a tiny water stop. If you head down this route ensure your jacket lapel can support the weight.



A red rose boutonniere - the message here is passion and love

Other Flower Options — Gardenia, Lily of the Valley, Sweet William, Orchids, Hyacinths, Daisies, and Lilacs are all excellent choices. You may have to special order these, but the reward is that you'll have a unique and beautiful companion.

An underused favorite of mine is static. Popular as a filler flower with an average of 5-8 tiny blooms clustered together, its lavender color and long lasting life make it a great choice when you don't want to spend much and need something you can wear and forget. This tissue paper-like flower can be found at any florist shop.



The simple, inexpensive, and durable lavender statice boutonniere

Final Thoughts on Wearing a Boutonniere



Wear It with Confidence — Do not be afraid to be an individual. Wear a boutonniere because you want to.

Pay Attention to Proportion — If you're a small man, wear small flowers. If you're a large man, consider something that is more befitting your size.

Never Upstage the Ladies — A boutonniere is a single flower or a small collection of tiny blooms; never wear something unwieldy.