

Engagement Rings

There are tales of engagement rings being given to one's mate as long ago as ancient Egypt, but there are historical records about the practice in Rome, which had both a tradition of wearing rings as a metaphor for eternal love and laws saying only nobles could wear gold.

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Diamond rings are more recent, with the first given in 1477 by the Archduke of Austria when he got engaged, and they remain fashionable to this day. Quite reasonably, costly rings became less popular after the Great Depression, with more people in poverty. It was the De Beers diamond company – which has a monopoly on diamonds worldwide – that revived the practice through marketing and introduced the profitable nonsense that an engagement ring should cost one month of a man's earnings. Not wanting to rest on their laurels, the company doubled-down on their slogan, increasing that amount to an arbitrary two months' income amid the 1980s recession and again to three months' income in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash.

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However, when deciding how much to spend, it may be best to remember the original Roman tradition. Expensive rings were only for public show; the real marriage band was made of iron.

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Who gave the first diamond engagement ring?

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Who invented the idea that an engagement ring should cost one month's salary?

What were the traditional Roman wedding rings made from?