

THE BRIDES GUIDE TO WEDDING CAKES

Choosing your wedding cake can be a lot of fun, but it is also hard work, I hope you find the following information helpful in taking some of the uncertainties out of the choosing process.

Once you have decided to get married, your life becomes filled with a list of things to do. Setting the date, choosing the location, and the list goes on and on. You must decide whether you will do all the planning and preparation yourself, or whether you will hire a caterer or wedding consultant. No matter how perfect your wedding day turns out to be, the planning process can be filled with glitches and imperfections. Ordering your wedding cake is no exception. Many couples put off ordering their cake until all the other plans have been made, but the longer you wait, the harder it will be to find a really good cake decorator or designer. Call the bakeries or cake decorators and designers in your area to check for their availability for your wedding date. If your date is available, make an appointment to go and check out designs, taste, and the skill levels. Many decorators book months (some a year) in advance and many specialty cake designers limit the number of wedding cakes they do each week where bakeries have a larger staff and can do a larger quantity of cakes. So start searching for the perfect cake designer/ decorator or bakery well in advance of your wedding date. Please consider that Thursday through Saturday are very hectic for baking, decorating and delivering weekend wedding cakes, so please call ahead.

Each designer specializes in certain things and if you have a very unusual or intricate decorated cake, you will need to know if she can deliver what she promises. Ask for several references and make sure you can see a portfolio of cakes she has created in the past. If the cake decorator designs the cake of your dreams, you will remember her forever. Likewise, you will remember her forever if she creates something disastrous. You and your cake designer will come to have a very personal relationship so make sure that both of you can agree on what type of cake you want, colors, style, and whether you feel you can work together to create the cake of your dreams.

DEPOSITS

Be prepared to leave a substantial deposit to insure that the decorator reserves the date for you.

Don't be surprised when your decorator asks you for a deposit that may be up to 50% of the total price when you order your wedding cake and requires you to pay the remainder two weeks to three months before your wedding date.

Also be aware that often you will be required to leave a deposit on any equipment that belongs to the cake artists, such as plates, stands, fountains, etc. If you don't return them, they will have to be replaced at the current decorator's cost and time.

CAKE DESIGNS

Bridal magazines now show some wonderful stylish, unique, creative wedding cakes. Keep in mind that most of the cakes featured have been designed by top decorators who have been paid a higher price for their design. Most cakes featured in Bridal magazines start at \$1,000.00 and go to \$12,000.00.

Be prepared to pay for the cake designer's time. Simple cake designs are the least expensive, while more complicated designs the more you should be prepared to pay the decorator. Know ahead of time what amount of money you can budget toward your cake. If you have your heart set on one particular beautiful cake, you

may find it difficult to find a decorator in your area who can duplicate that specific cake, particularly if you have a limited budget. Most cake decorators have their own styles and creative ways of decorating a cake and may even have a design that you like better than the one you found in a magazine. Your cake decorator should be able to help you adapt a cake to satisfy your design as well as your budget.

Do you want a cake that is stacked one on top another, or do you want them separated by pillars? Do you want squares, rounds, ovals, or heart shaped cakes. It is important to always remember that what you want is right regardless of whether it is "in" or not. Trends in today's world are changing faster than ever, and it is impossible to keep up with all of them. Take advantage of the trends that are out there if you like them but don't feel you have to. If fountains are out of style and you want one, don't let anyone talk you out of it. Go ahead with what you want. People will remember a beautiful cake whether it is "in" or not, and you will be happy. It is good to keep up with the trends in case you come across something new that you enjoy.

Wedding cakes today reflect the bride's individual characteristics, allowing your tastes, rather than everyone else's, to shine through. The white on white cake has given way to every flavor, every filling and every color imaginable. Buttercream icing isn't the only option anymore. The groom's cake which has been a long time Southern tradition is now spreading to all parts of the country and giving the groom a chance to also reflect some of his own personality. Your cake decorator should be able to help you choose a cake that shows off your personality and the times, yet still satisfy both you and your guests.

ICING

The most popular icing for wedding cakes is buttercream. It is butter or shortening based icing with a sweet taste used for covering, filling and decorating all types of cakes. It is sensitive to heat and humidity and may not be the right choice for an outdoor wedding. Rolled Fondant is a smooth icing that is rolled out, draped over the cake and smoothed to conform to the shape of the cake. It is growing more in popularity. The outside will crust and become hard but can be peeled off and allow the icing underneath to remain moist. It is more difficult in cutting and serving the cake. Rolled fondant can be embossed or molded to make decorations for the cake.

Royal icing is a very white, greaseless, meringue based icing used mainly for making flower, string work, lace and other decorations. It dries hard and is very crunchy but it can also be used to decorate your cake to give it a very crisp texture. Grease or oil will break down royal icing and it doesn't handle humidity well.

Gumpaste is another icing option for the decorations on your cake. It is rolled out very thin and can be used to make flowers that look very realistic. This is a form of edible art and is very time consuming because the petals for the flowers are often cut out and molded one by one and may be dusted or sprayed with food colors to create a flower as close to the real thing as possible. It dries porcelain hard. Gumpaste decorations are almost never intended to be eaten and should be removed from the cake before it is cut. One of the great advantages to gumpaste flowers is that they can be sprayed with clear acrylic paint and saved for many years as a keepsake of your wedding. Remember though, because they are considered art, and they are time consuming, they can be very expensive.

There are other icing possibilities you may wish to discuss with your decorator, such as chocolate clay, rolled buttercream, cream cheese, ganaches, whipped cream, glazes, poured icings and others.

Keep in mind that some designs are simply incompatible with certain icings and/or conditions. The cake artist has done this many times and can best advise you on your one chance to have a perfect cake.

CAKE FLAVORS

The taste, flavor and texture of the cake itself is the most important decision you will make when you order your cake. The outside beauty of your wedding cake will be important for your pictures and your personal statement. But, the inside of that cake is what you will be serving to your guests. You want a cake that is flavorful, moist and yummy to eat. Ask friends or people who have attended recent weddings about how the wedding cake tasted. You might want to ask if samples of the cake flavors will be available for you to try when you visit with a bakery or individual you are interviewing.

In the past, wedding cakes had a reputation of being dry, heavy, and not too tasty. With the changing trends and the rising importance of great tasting wedding cakes there are now many cake decorators who will offer choices of flavors of cakes to their brides. Decorators are reporting that white cake is the least flavor ordered. Chocolate remains the bestseller year round. Carrot and spice flavors are more popular in the fall and winter, and lemon filling, fresh fruits and light flavors have more popularity in spring and summer. Raspberry is another year round favorite, as is strawberry. Ask your decorator if they offer a choice of cake flavors and fillings and if certain flavors add an additional cost.

Although, it is impossible to expect your decorator to provide you with a sampling of all flavors offered, you should be able to taste some more common flavors at no charge. If you want to try a certain flavor combination, you might order and pay for a cake in well you and your friends like the cake. advance for a birthday cake or for another occasion to see how.

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FLOWERS

If you plan on using fresh flowers on your wedding cake, consider the possibility that they have been treated with insecticides and/or preservative chemicals. Also, some flowers and greenery are toxic if ingested, so select carefully. If you decide to use fresh flowers, know who is going to put the flowers on the cake and be sure they know the toxicity concerns. Don't assume that you can have the florist leave the flowers for the cake decorator. Many cake decorators have a very tight schedule and simply do not have time the time to do the flowers for you. You must Ask for that service. You must also be prepared to pay the cake decorator an extra fee if you want him to arrange the flowers and greenery for you. If you choose the florist to arrange the flowers on the cake for you, you must inform the cake decorator. Some decorators may choose to have you sign a release form protecting them from damage done to the cake or liability from toxicity concerns.

If you choose to use gumpaste flowers, you have the concern of making sure they are all removed from the cake before serving the cake, as most gumpaste flowers are arranged on wires. Gumpaste flowers offer you the privilege of matching your colors more perfectly to your color scheme, they look natural, and you can keep them for years as a keepsake, but because they are a form of art... you must be prepared to pay for the time it takes to make these exquisite flowers.

Other choices are the use of silks, buttercream flowers, and royal flowers.

COLORS

A customer once ordered a cake with peach colored flowers. When the cake was delivered, the room was decorated tangerine orange. Needless to say, the flowers looked pink on that cake in that room. So don't

assume everyone's understanding of color terminology is the same as yours. If you expect the cake decorator to come close to the colors you are using in the wedding, take a swatch of fabric at least 3 inches square, preferably solid colors in each swatch. If fabric is not available, then a paint card from the paint store is helpful, or ribbon matched to the colors that you are using. Also keep in mind that colors are really difficult to use on a white wedding cake. Dark colors are difficult to achieve the right shade and color in icing.

PEARLS

If you require the cake decorator to use strings of pearls on a wedding cake, those pearls must be removed before the cake can be cut and served to your guests. You don't want someone accidentally getting one of those pearls in their mouth and breaking a tooth or choking. Since it is your choice to use those on a cake design it is your responsibility to make sure that the person cutting the cake understands to remove those pearls. You should also be aware that not all artificial pearls are food safe, so understand that if you have something in particular in mind, flaking or toxicity could be a concern.

Some cake decorators offer the use of edible pearls that look like the real things. Keep in mind that there could be an extra charge since they are time consuming to make by hand and then pearlized with a non toxic coloring. Edible pearls can be made in different sizes and also can be attached to give the string effect.

CAKE SERVINGS

Many cake decorators charge per serving and calculate the ingredients used and the labor involved into that cost. Therefore the more people your cake serves, the more it will cost and you should know that you will not typically be paying for the exact number of servings your guests will eat. You will probably end up paying for some extra servings, but don't despair- that just means bigger servings and left overs ! The standard serving size is figured on 4" high x "1" wide x "2" deep. Some cakes may be figured on shorter height but wider slice. Once in awhile, your commercial bakeries will figure a cake to serve between a predetermined number of guests. You must also keep in mind that if you want to save your top cake to freeze until your one year anniversary that it is usually not figured in the overall servings and/or cost of the cake. The Cake designer or bakery can guide you as to the number of servings of cake you will need. But, it is ultimately you who must decide on the numbers.

CAKE PLACEMENT

Where will your cake(s) be placed in the reception area? Consult the reception site manager and your cake person. Look at the walls and consider the background for your wedding pictures. Are there air conditioning returns, outlets, fire extinguishers, signs, etc., in the background of your cake? Does the reception site furnish extension cords for fountains, or lightening, or will you need to provide those? Also consider foot traffic. A cake placed near a dance floor can be hazardous to traffic flow. Is there a door that can open into the cake? Are tables sturdy and level? Does the reception site have table coverings? Is the ceiling high enough for a towering cake? Will the cake be in the direct Sun? You will want your cake to be placed where it will be a focal point but at the same time, be out of traffic flow, have proper lightening conditions for pictures and beware of background mirrors for flash photography.

Outdoor receptions have two major pitfalls... unlevel ground and weather. Cake and food tables must be set up on level strong tables. Often the reception tables for seating are put onto solid level surfaces but the food and cake tables are scattered on the outskirts. Just make sure the people setting up your reception know to make those tables a priority in getting them sturdy and level. If you are planning an outdoor wedding in the

summer heat, remember flies love sweets, heat melts most icings, and high humidity will wilt many sugar flowers. Chocolate curls will melt and fresh flowers will wilt with prolonged exposure to heat. Rain and wind can cause havoc by collapsing tents and blowing tablecloths right off the tables. The weather is unpredictable. Plan accordingly to protect your cake (and the rest of your wedding).

CAKE ORNAMENT/TOPPER

When picking an ornament for your cake, consider the weight.

Icing and cake are very soft, so very heavy ornaments require some extra support in the cake. If you do select a heavy ornament and it should fall from the top, it can do damage to tiers as gravity pulls it downward. Also consider the size of the ornament. The ornament can dictate the size of your first tier which ultimately determines the next tier size. For ex., You would not want a 6 inch base to be expected to fit on a 6 inch round top tier or less.

Many cake decorators sell cake ornaments and can provide custom ornaments, so I would talk with the decorator before buying the cake ornament.

PERSON TO CUT THE CAKE

Don't assume that catering or reception site personnel will be cutting your cake. You should ask if this service is provided and if so, how much the fee will be for the service. It is better to know up front than to be placed in a position of finding someone at the last minute to cut the cake for you. Also ask if the caterer provides the cake serving knives or if you must provide them. If you ask a personal good friend to serve your cake, you are asking them to work at your wedding party event. Also be aware that there is skill involved in cutting large cakes. If your server cuts huge slices, you could run out of cake. If he cuts too small, people will be left wanting more, and there will be extra cake. Keep also in mind, that if you offer your guests more than one flavor choice this could be very difficult for the inexperienced person to do.

FINAL CAKE PAYMENT

Final payment for your wedding cake will vary with individual bakeries or decorators. Full payment two weeks in advance of your wedding is reasonable for basic cakes. If you have chosen something like cascading gumpaste flowers, full payment may be required as much as two months in advance.

When you consider that your name and residence will likely be changing, and the expenses that, often self-employed, cake artists have, isn't it reasonable for payment to be expected in advance? Remember, checks need to clear the bank, ingredients must be purchased, and advance sugar work may be necessary for your cake design.

DELIVERY

Some cake decorators include the cost for delivery of the cake in their total fee, but if your reception is held out-of-town or some distance away, you may be charged an extra sum to cover the extra costs of delivery. You may also be able to have someone come and pick up the cake from the cake decorator. However, transporting a cake is no small thing, and it is best left to the professionals who know how to move a large cake without damaging

or ruining it. Once the cake is out of the decorator's hands she is no longer responsible for any problems or damage that may occur.

GROOM'S CAKE?

Traditionally Southern, the groom's cake is starting to show up in other parts of the country as more people are exposed to the concept. Grooms cakes can be introduced at the rehearsal dinner or at the wedding reception. Chocolate is extremely popular for the groom's cake, as are chocolate-dipped strawberries. Tuxedo cakes are popular in many areas, as are cakes resembling the college from which the groom graduated. Many groom's cakes are themed—they correspond to the personality and likes of the groom. Ski mountains, computers, golf and fishing are currently popular, however, just about anything goes with a groom's cake. It's all about the groom's favorite pastime or something he identifies strongly with. Remember, there is a point where a cake will leave dessert and become a work of art so be prepared to pay sometimes a higher price than the wedding cake.

LEFT OVER CAKE?

Be sure to discuss with your wedding planner, or reception site director, caterer, or server how you would like any left over cake handled. Some brides provide boxes for their guests to take cake home in. If this is a choice, be sure to have the boxes already folded and put in bags or boxes under the cake table. Some brides prefer to leave the cake for the servers, cooks, bartenders, and other helpers to enjoy, while other brides request that the cake be divided and wrapped between the bride's family and the groom's to be enjoyed later. Be sure to ask if boxes and wrapping is something the reception site provides or if you will need to provide. Ask your cake decorator if they bake ahead and freeze their cakes or if they are made fresh. If freezing is handled properly, freezing doesn't alter the taste of the cake for your wedding but it could prevent you from refreezing any left over cake if it has already been frozen once.

PHONE NUMBERS

Phone numbers would be appreciated by the persons you have hired to work together on your wedding, such as the caterer, florist, cake designer, and photographers. They generally need to know the other's schedules to be able to coordinate deliveries for your wedding day.

CANCELLATION

If for some reason you must cancel your wedding, you should notify the bakery or individual cake designer as quickly as possible. A forfeiture of the deposit may be required. This depends on the cake maker's cancellation policy, which you should inquire about at the first meeting. Because many cake artists book up well in advance, a cancellation often represents irreplaceable business. Unforeseen things do happen—accidents, illness, or date changes (or second thoughts). Not something to plan on, but something you just need to be aware of.

WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

Expect your wedding day to be the most wonderful day of your life. But with all the advance planning and the numerous people required to complete your wedding plans, sometimes things go wrong.

Far into the planning process you suddenly learn that you are expecting 100 fewer guests at your reception—or 200 more. Or, after ordering your cake, you see something you like much better. What do you do? When this happens, talk to your cake designer immediately to see what alterations can be made. You may have several options. . . your cake may be able to be scaled up or down in size, or you may wish to see if dummy cakes could be used for part or all of the cake. More people at the reception than you originally expected may mean that you have a cake made to compliment the wedding cake, or a sheet cake that compliments the wedding cake, or adding a groom's cake. You may also wish to see if the design can be altered if you find a cake that you like better than the one you had originally picked out.

Just remember that No one is perfect; we are all human. Most experienced cake designers, florists, etc., are well intentioned and do the best they can for you. If a mistake is made, don't let it upset your day. Memories are not only made up of the things that go right, but they usually include all the little and big things that go wrong.

If something goes wrong, try to think, "Ahhhhh, that will be another memory to look back fondly on someday in the future." It may not seem funny right now- but someday it just might be.