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Make a statement with your wedding cake

Brides and grooms may pour over every detail of their weddings, but few components of the festivities may be as fun, especially for foodies, as deciding what the wedding cake will look like. Couples who want to deliver show-stopping visuals often express some measure of their creativity and personalities through statement wedding cakes.

Many couples now eschew the classic three-tiered white cake in favor of a dessert that garners instant attention. Whether the cake is brightly colored or hand-painted, a towering architectural marvel or shimmering in metallics, couples are opting to make

a statement with their confections. Apart from clever cake-toppers, here are ways to stand apart when dessert is served.

- According to the Perfect Wedding Guide, a rising trend in cakes is to cover a white or naked cake with translucent glaze tinted in the couple's wedding colors. This artistic expression can be especially stunning in boho-chic weddings.

- Statement tiers also are popular. The cake may be traditional in nearly every way, but couples then set the cake apart by featuring an elaborate design or a different hue in one tier.

- Martha Stewart Weddings advises that more than just color can be used to

make a statement. Lifelike sugar flowers can really set cakes apart.

- Guests may not be sure if they can consume all aspects of some cakes. But delicate sugar flowers taste as good as they look.

- Hand-painted tiles on a cake are another way to add panache. A bride and groom may be inspired by a European vacation or the stained-glass effects of religious windows and want to add that feel to the tiers of the cake.

- Sometimes a statement comes by way of texture. Even an all-white cake can be dressed up with interesting textural effects. Ruffles, lace, embossing, and 3-D rosettes are different tex-

tural components that can be incorporated in cake designs.

- Couples also may want to tell their unique stories with cake. Individual tiers designed to reflect various milestone moments from the couple's relationship can be quite engaging.

- Capitalizing on the trend of edgier weddings, couples may opt for darker hues on their cakes even a black tier or nontraditional geometric shapes to the cake itself or its design elements.

Statement cakes can really say something about the couple getting married. Much like other wedding elements, cakes provide a window into the minds of happy couples.



Wedding flowers becoming larger than life

Move over bouquets and centerpieces. Flowers are taking over weddings in a big way. While wedding

trends come and go, flowers will always have a place at the wedding table.

The blooms brides and

grooms choose and how they decide to display them can say much about the couple's style. Many modern

couples are opting for statement pieces with their flowers to rival the big and bold ideas they're incorporating elsewhere into their occasions, such as in cakes and clothing.

In fact, floral designer Tom Uberuaga says traditional hurricane vase centerpieces are outdated and only focus the eye on the middle of the table. He prefers guests enter the wedding and have their senses stimulated by flowers from all angles. Large flower installations, as well as blooms popping up in unexpected places, are some of the hot trends for couples to keep their eyes on.

Floral chandeliers

There's no need to worry about seeing over table centerpieces or flowers getting in the way of photo moments. Thanks to hanging flowers and floral chandeliers, flowers are quite literally moving up in the

world. Hanging floral pieces can add instant drama and make a large visual impact. Florists can hang flowers from beams over tabletops to increase visual impact, whether as individual baskets, single stems or floral swags. Hanging floral chandeliers are dramatic but naturally expensive. Think about a large installation that forces guests to look up into a sea of greenery and flowers. The smell and the sight can be breathtaking.

Welcome wreaths

Why should wreaths only be reserved for front doors and holiday decor? A welcome floral wreath can be placed by the entryway to a chapel or reception hall with a heartfelt sentiment that shows guests how much they're appreciated.

Fairy-tale flowers

A floral curtain of hanging flowers can line a chuppah or drape the altar in

beautiful blooms. Couples who would like a fairy-tale entrance also can make their debut as a couple by coming through a flower curtain at the reception. Martha Stewart Weddings says a cascade of flowers and greens can be romantic and elegant.

Dance floor blooms

Who says flowers have to be overhead or on a table? With a plexiglass dance floor, or one made from some other transparent material, flowers can be underfoot, creating a magical floral carpet.

Floral necklaces

Brides needn't carry their bouquets, they can wear ethereal and whimsical floral pieces around their necks or on their waists instead.

Couples are urged to speak with their florists about the innovative ways they can make flowers an even more awe-inspiring component of their weddings.



Couples are moving away from traditional centerpieces to floral chandeliers and curtains made of blooms for their weddings.

Wedding flowers becoming larger than life

Gone are the days when wedding reception menus were limited to the one-size-fits-all offerings of meat, chicken or fish. Thanks to modern diets, couples hoping to accommodate guests may need to provide a wide array of food choices.

It is impossible to pinpoint an exact number, as there are no definitive surveys classifying all dietary preferences, but there are believed to be around 7.9 million people in the United States who follow a vegetarian-based diet. Of those people, around one million are strictly vegan, according to data in The Economist. In addition, NYU Langone Health says one-third of Americans are trying to avoid gluten. The Gluten Free Agency, which is a consulting group dedicated to helping advertisers, says some nine million people in

Canada are going gluten-free now for medical or personal reasons. Toss in the scores of people with peanut or other allergies and even more caution is needed when designing wedding menus.

Savvy couples who have guests' health and comfort in mind recognize the importance of offering a varied meal plan for wedding-related parties and receptions. The following are some ideas to consider when planning wedding menus.

- Consider a buffet-style service. Although couples might like the tradition and flair that a seated/plated meal offers, it creates a much more limited selection of meal options. Buffet-style dinner service often provides couples with multiple choices, and it's much more likely they can come up with a combination that caters to

any food allergies or dietary restrictions guests may have.

- Opt for food stations. In lieu of one long buffet table, a modern approach is to have staffed food stations. Foods as well as their ingredients can be clearly stated on food table placards so guests can make appropriate choices.

- Offer alternatives for dessert. Wedding cake can be a challenge to someone with a gluten sensitivity or an egg or a nut allergy. While not every guest indulges in dessert, make it a point to offer an alternative to cake. Perhaps a groom's cake can be revamped into gluten-free cookie bars or a nut-free trifle.

Couples who know in advance which types of dietary restrictions their guests have can work with caterers to devise a menu that suits everyone.



Did you know?

While flowers certainly add beauty and a wonderful aroma to wedding ceremonies and receptions, there

are other reasons behind their inclusion in such festivities. In ancient Rome, brides carried or wore

flower garlands because the Romans believed flowers signified hope, fertility and new beginnings. In the

Middle Ages, brides did not carry flowers, but rather strong-smelling spices and herbs. The rationale was that

the herbs and spices would drive away bad luck and evil spirits. Flowers also served another practical purpose.

In eras when bathing was a luxury, different flowers and herbs helped mask body odors. It wasn't until the Victorian era, when flowers were used to symbolize romantic love, that they became part of wedding ceremonies, according to Modern Weddings magazine.

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A guide to hosting a daytime wedding

Weddings dot the social calendars of millions of people across the globe. The Association for Wedding Professionals International says every year an average of 2.4 million weddings are performed in the United States and approximately 150,000 per year are performed in Canada. Evenings are the most common time of the day to host a wedding, but that does not mean a daytime wedding cannot be a beautiful event and make for a party to remember.

Couples are increasingly customizing their weddings to be a reflection of their personal styles. One of the ways couples are customizing their festivities is by moving the wedding to various hours of the day that meet the couple's needs. A wedding that takes place in the late morning or afternoon may be the perfect fit for some couples. Here's how to navigate the specifics of a daytime wedding.

- **Secure accommodations.** An early wedding means guests may have to travel from afar the evening before to be able to attend the festivities. Daytime weddings can be complemented by working with a hotel or bed and breakfast to ensure guests will have a place to stay and get ready to arrive at the early wedding in time.

- **Don't be afraid to negotiate prices.** The wedding resource Bridal Guide says that vendors are typically more amenable to price discounts or offering greater value for daytime weddings. That's because demand for their services is reduced during the day. Similarly, venues may have more availability during the day than at night, and, as a result, they're more flexible



on prices, especially since brunch foods generally cost less than dinner entrees.

- **Hire the right photographer.** Be sure to contract with a photographer who is a pro at handling photos in daylight and natural light. While many photographers are skilled in any light, many are used to shooting in churches and venues with low lighting. Be sure to see picture samples taken during the daytime to gauge a photographer's daytime experience and skill level.

- **Employ color to add dimension.** During evening weddings, lighting or candles help set the mood. Those same elements will be ineffective in daylight. Choose bright colors for your decor and flowers to

brighten up spaces.

- **Choose alternative entertainment.** Chances are guests are not going to feel as comfortable dancing during daylight hours. Consider other entertainment, such as lawn games, karaoke, or a comedian. A guitarist or pianist may be a nice musical touch.

- **Plan food accordingly.** Just because the wedding is early does not mean the food should be. Guests still will need to eat. If you are only opting for light appetizers and cocktails, be sure to mention this on the invitation so guests can plan ahead and won't go hungry. Daytime weddings can be successful with a little tweaking of traditional evening wedding planning.

The evolution of wedding favors

Wedding favors have changed and in many cases for the better. Favors have evolved from the inexpensive trinkets purchased in bulk into more personalized mementos that guests can cherish.

Today's couples are interested in customizing their weddings and offering guests something meaningful, or at the very least, edible, so that favors don't immediately get relegated to the trash can. According to Heather Jones of Wente Vineyards in California, favors have moved from "goodie bags" toward items that are experimental and fun. Wedding planners from across the country offer these wedding favor trends that couples may want to incorporate into their own celebrations.

Welcome bags

Rather than take-home bags, welcome bags have replaced the traditional favor trinket at some weddings. Many weddings have become multi-day events that ask guests traveling from out of town to

attend a wedding weekend. To help greet them and make their experience memorable, couples may fill a gift bag with items guests can use or enjoy during their stay like a bottle of locally sourced maple syrup or some handmade soaps from a nearby shopkeeper.

Experience gifts

Instead of a candle or a monogrammed cake server, think of experiences to offer guests. A coupon for free drinks at a nearby brewery, a tour of a local attraction while guests are in town or a group excursion for guests attending a destination wedding can be fun and will help guests create lasting memories.

Charitable donations

Some couples feel that favors are wasteful and would rather set aside a portion of their wedding budgets toward giving back. In such situations, a donation to charity in guests' names can be the way to go. Guests can vote

on two favorite charities advertised on a special table at the wedding reception. The one with the most votes will get the proceeds.

Late-night snacks

After a night of celebrating, some guests may want the festivities to continue, but may need some extra sustenance to make it through a few more hours. Some couples are eschewing traditional favors in lieu of making room for extra food or beverage expenses that can include after-party treats. These may run the gamut from wood-fired pizzas to food truck vendors to extra desserts. A tasty take-home option also may be given, such as fresh zeppolis or beignets, or even a personalized bottle of wine. Even if the food and drinks are not consumed right away, there's a good chance it will hit the spot when guests return to their hotel rooms.

Wedding favors are changing to keep up with the times and keep guests feeling extra special.



Like many other elements of the wedding, favors are evolving to help give weddings a custom feel.

More couples are embracing edgy, adventurous weddings

Brides and grooms once felt compelled to conform to the trappings of tradi-

tional weddings. From uber-romantic vows to pastel colors to the penultimate

white tiered cake, various wedding components were long considered must-

haves. But modern couples are increasingly expressing their individuality, and even embracing more edgy and adventurous elements, when planning their weddings.

According to The Knot, a leading bridal resource and information site, today's weddings are not what they were just a few years ago. Bold colors, exotic cakes and nontraditional foliage, are just some of the elements modern couples are embracing to set their weddings apart.

Adventurous locales

Vineyards and catering halls can be great places to tie the knot, but couples who like to push the envelope are looking to more adventurous locales to impart their unique spin on their weddings.

Sharing vows atop a mountain crest at the end of a favorite hiking trail or on

a roller coaster at a theme park that harkens back to a first date are some adventurous places to tie the knot.

Outside-the-box menus

Couples may want to break with tradition by offering a wide selection of foods at their receptions.

These foods can include items that fit with their specific ethnic cuisines, gourmet comfort foods (think cocktail franks w Wellington), or foods that fit with their dietary choices, such as organic or vegan options. Work with a caterer to provide a variety of tasty choices.

Bold wardrobe choices

Brides can put new spins on their gowns by adding color and texture. Sequins, bold embroidery, shorter hemlines, and whatever adventurous fashion style you want to impart can be

considered. If white isn't your thing, that's okay, too. Yellow and slate gray look great together. Gentlemen can choose to wear a black suit or any combination of color and style they want to make a dramatic impression.

Full of flavor

Cakes don't have to be white with white buttercream. In fact, couples can make things even more tasty by incorporating favorite flavor combinations into their cakes. For example, a chocolate and caramel filling reminiscent of a candy bar might be something to consider.

Modern couples are embracing bold, unique and edgy components when planning their weddings. Putting an individualized spin on the ceremony and reception can make couples even more excited to tie the knot.



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Wedding planning tips and tricks

Recently engaged couples are often so swept up in the excitement surrounding their engagements that they can be forgiven for initially overlooking all the wedding planning that awaits them. Planning a wedding is no small task, but many couples very much enjoy all the hard work that goes into making their special day a success.

It's hard for newly engaged couples who have never before planned a wedding to know what awaits them. But the following tips can help make the wedding planning process go smoothly.

- Find your organization method. Organization is the key to pulling off the wedding of your dreams. Whether your organizational style is best served by jotting details like dates and deposit deadlines down in a note-

book or utilizing an online spreadsheet or smartphone app, choose your method early on. Keeping information and reminders in one place can make it easier to manage all the tasks that lie ahead.

- Take your time. There's no rush to the altar. Feel free to extend the engagement long enough to keep stress levels down and get the location and ceremony of your dreams. Many recently engaged couples feel pressured to get married right away. Stretching out the engagement to save money or give yourself more time to plan can make for a wonderful wedding day.

- Discuss the budget openly and honestly. Did you know a New York City wedding can cost \$77,000, according to Money magazine? Wedding costs can vary widely, and couples

should sit down together to decide what they can afford and are willing to pay for.

- Decide on a guest list. Planning decisions are often based around the projected number of guests. You'll need to have a ballpark figure regarding guests before you can choose a venue and make other decisions, such as where guests will stay. And if the majority of guests are coming from a certain area, such as your hometown, you may want to bring the wedding to them instead of asking them to come to you.

- Create a priorities list. Make a list of at least three things that are most important for each of you. It may be the ceremony location, the food or another factor. Knowing what is important can help you negotiate prices and understand what to look for when planning.



These are some of the considerations couples should make while planning

their weddings. While it's important to consider these factors and others, it's also

important that couples have fun when planning their nuptials.

5 ways to cut wedding reception costs

Weddings have a tendency to be expensive endeavors. According to The Knot's 2018 Real Weddings Study,

the national average cost of a wedding is \$33,931. Nearly half of that (\$15,439) is spent on the reception venue alone.

As expensive as wedding receptions can be, couples should know that there are many ways to reduce recep-

tion costs without sacrificing fun.

1. Choose foods wisely

Pour over the details of catering costs. The Knot says the average price for catering will be \$68 per person. If you opt for an appetizers and cocktails reception, you may be able to shave several dollars off the bill. Look closely at the pricing for buffet versus plated meals. Buffet service often means having a greater quantity of food on hand, which could drive up the cost. Find out if the catering hall can work with your budget to provide cost-conscious options, like familiar comfort foods instead of gourmet fare.

2. Serve a custom-made cocktail

A themed drink, such as

punch or a classic spirit with a reimagined, wedding-friendly name, can be less expensive than offering full open bar service. Some couples also opt to pay for only wine and beer rather than a full open bar that includes liquor and mixed drinks.

3. Book a weeknight

Weekend weddings are easier on guests' schedules, but not on couples' budgets. Couples can save thousands of dollars by hosting weeknight weddings instead of weekend affairs. Book the venue from Monday through Friday, as even Sunday prices have escalated. The further away from the weekend, the lower the prices tend to be.

4. Fake the cake

The Knot indicates a wedding cake runs roughly

\$530. Consider displaying a mock cake for photos and then serve a sheet cake during dessert hour. Decorating foam tiers to look like an extravagant cake can save a few hundred dollars, and guests won't know the difference when they're biting into a delicious, less costly dessert.

5. Skip the extras

Reception venues may upcharge for all the little details, such as linens in custom colors or chair covers. If you can live without these extras, do so. Ask for a list of itemized extras so you can assess what you want to pay for and what you'd prefer to avoid.

Wedding receptions are costly, but there are many ways to save money and still enjoy a memorable evening.



Is a Valentine's Day proposal right for you?

Valentine's Day is a special day when thoughts turn to love and romance.

Couples contemplating tying the knot may feel like Valentine's Day is the

perfect opportunity to pop the question and begin their journeys toward marriage.

Even though Valentine's Day is a very popular day to propose, it's tricky to keep such a proposal from becoming a cliché. By considering some dos and don'ts, Valentine's Day proposals can be unique.

DO ensure that you're both on the same page. It's one thing for couples who have already been talking about marriage to build on the romance of Valentine's Day with a proposal. But it's quite another if this is a push to wow him or her and you don't have the same goals; it may not go according to plan. Couples are urged to have honest conversations about key topics (i.e., children, compatibility, finances, living arrangements) to see if marriage is a desire they both share.

DON'T overlook the element of surprise for the proposal. Sure it is easy to have a waiter bring the ring after a meal at a favorite restaurant, but it can be even more special to catch your sweetheart off guard. Why not propose before you get to the restaurant, such as in front of where you first met, and then you can enjoy your meal without butterflies?

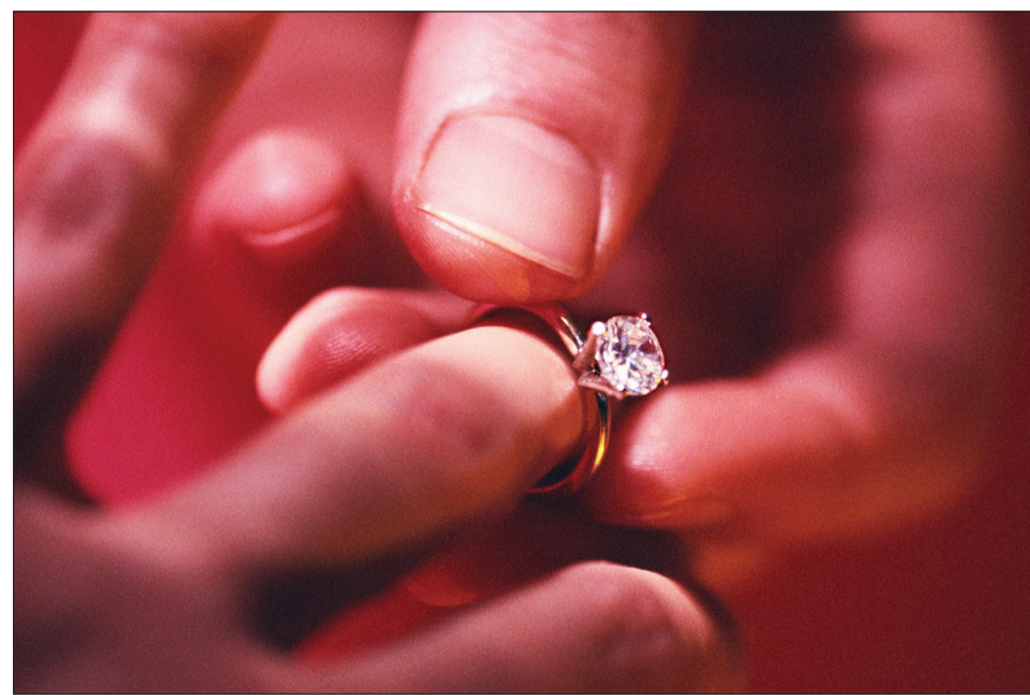
DO consider your sweetheart's personality before the proposal. A shy person may not like the attention of a crowd. However, someone who loves to be the center of attention may feel that more is merrier.

DON'T go overboard with the details. One or two big surprises is all it takes. The more details, the more things that can poten-

tially go wrong, which can adversely affect the overall proposal.

DO get input from friends and family, but do not feel pressured to do it exactly as they say. A close friend can help select a ring or contribute to the surprise by keeping the special someone unaware of the plans at hand. Having a helper can make the proposal go more smoothly.

DON'T feel pressured to propose on Valentine's Day or a birthday, Christmas, or other big holiday because it's "what you're supposed to do." A proposal and a marriage are unique to each couple, and individuals should abide by their preferences when making such important decisions. Only propose when it feels completely right.



Wedding Planning 101

First comes the proposal then comes the wedding planning. There are dozens of decisions that need to be made before it's time to walk down the aisle, which can be overwhelming for brides and grooms.

To help make it less stressful, these tips from Macy's can help couples through the entire wedding-planning process, from on-trend apparel and accessories for the entire wedding party to all the essentials to create a perfect registry.

Dressing the Ladies

When it comes to bridesmaid dresses, the mix-and-match approach is trending in popularity. Start by

deciding on a color palette, such as lilac, champagne and petal pink.

Then have each bridesmaid choose her favorite style within that range of hues. Bring it all together by choosing a uniform look for makeup, shoes and accessories.

There is no better time to thank the ladies than the morning of the big day. A few thoughtful gifts can go a long way, such as matching robes, tumblers to stay hydrated throughout the day and cosmetic cases to stow makeup essentials.

Dressing the Gents

Similar to bridesmaid dresses, groomsman attire

can be dependent on the venue and overall event aesthetic.

While a suit can fit the bill for a country club wedding, a city affair may call for the sleek finishes of a tux.

Tuxedo accessories, such as cuff links or bow ties, make great groomsman gifts and are classic pieces they can use time and time again.

Creating the Perfect Registry

When building a registry, it's never too early to start. People want to give gifts as soon as they know a couple is engaged. Start by taking inventory of what you already have, what you

need and what you want to upgrade. It's also recommended to update the registry regularly so there are enough gifts to choose from, especially if there is an engagement party and bridal shower coming up. To get started, some popular registry items include stand mixers, craft beer glasses, Dutch ovens, bath towels and vacuums. For extra guidance, couples can speak to advisors who can help with the full registry building process at Macy's stores.

For more wedding ideas and inspiration, and to find the right attire and gifts for your wedding planning, visit macys.com.

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