

Bridal Guide



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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 textural 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 say something about the couple. Cakes provide a window into the minds of couples.

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.



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What to consider when shopping for rings

Engagements precede wedding dresses, flower arrangements, limousines, and even a couple's wedding vows. And no proposal is complete without a ring. Knowledge of rings and stones is essential for those who plan to propose in the near future.

A recent survey from the wedding resource The Knot in which 12,000 brides and 1,200 grooms in the United States were asked about their rings, found that people spend an average, of \$5,978 on engagement rings. Recognizing the potential cost of engagement rings can help ring shoppers prepare for their purchases.

In addition to considering costs, couples can employ the following tips to shop with confidence.

- **Cut costs with style.** Engagement rings can be costly, but many couples feel they are worthwhile investments. According to In Style magazine, a ring with a classic solitaire of one carat weight can cost thousands of dollars, while a band covered in just under one carat of tiny pavé diamonds will offer plenty of sparkle for a lot less money.

- **Know your settings.** How the diamond is framed can affect how big it looks and even how much it sparkles. Gems framed with a bezel can give the illusion of a larger stone.

- **Get the desired cut.** A skilled jeweler knows how to properly cut a stone to bring out its best radiance. From round to princess to emerald to marquise cut, cut styles can affect how the stone looks as well as the price.

- **Know ring metals.** Platinum and gold are some of the most popular ring setting metals. Platinum costs considerably more than gold or silver, but is long-lasting. Couples should weigh the cost versus benefit of splurging on a more expensive metal, or speak with a jeweler about a suitable substitute.

- **Investigate personal style.** Men should pay attention to the jewelry their girlfriends wear so the engagement rings complement their style. Some women love modern jewelry, while others gravitate

toward vintage pieces.

- **Come in under carat.** Buying just shy of the next carat weight can save between 20 and 30 percent, offers The Knot. Plus, the size discrepancy probably will not be visible to the naked eye.

- **Think about trading up.** Some couples like to replace engagement rings with a more elaborate ring for a big anniversary. Some jewelers will accept the purchase of the engagement ring toward the price of a future ring.

Jewelry stores are in the business of developing relationships with their customers. When purchasing engagement rings, couples can discuss their desires in regard to a ring, as well as their budgets.

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Wedding costs and what to expect

Newly engaged couples may experience an array of emotions when they sit down to plan their weddings. Some couples cannot wait to jump into planning and want to catalog every aspect of the process, while others may proceed with caution because they don't know what to expect — particularly in regard to cost.

Many couples find it difficult to create their wedding budgets because they have no previous experience to draw on. The wedding planning advisor CostofWedding.com indicates the average wedding cost in the United States is \$26,720, with most people spending between \$20,000 and \$34,000. Seventh Heaven Event Catering states that, in Canada, the average wedding costs around \$30,000. Such costs can vary greatly depending on couples' preferences, including where they hope to tie the knot.

By breaking down wedding expenses, couples can get a clearer picture of how much they may need to pay for their weddings and where they may need to cut costs.

- **Reception site:** According to The

The smaller details, such as accessories, gifts, officiant fees, stationery, spa services, and favors can quickly add up as well. Couples should be sure to leave some wiggle room in their budgets for incidental expenses that may pop up.

Knot, a premiere wedding planning resource, couples can expect their receptions to eat up the largest chunk of their wedding budgets. Wedding reception venues may cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000. The average price for catering per person is roughly \$70. Bar service may be around \$2,000 for a three- to four-hour party. Some reception sites combine the room cost with the

food and beverage costs, while others have à la carte fees.

- **Cake:** Wedding cakes tend to be multitiered intricate designs, so they will cost more than birthday cakes. According to Statistics Brain,

wedding dessert will come in around \$390.

- **Music:** The Knot says wedding bands cost around \$3,500, which is more than twice as much as hiring a deejay (\$1,200). Soloists or ceremony musicians may cost around \$650.

- **Wedding planner:** Many couples employ wedding planners to make planning their weddings easier. Wedding planners cost an average of \$1,300, says Thumbtack, a company that matches professionals with people

who require their services.

- **Transportation:** Limousines and other transportation prices vary depending on the vehicle(s) couples choose. The Knot notes that budgeting between \$400 and \$500 for transportation might be wise.

- **Wedding gown:** Brides-to-be should expect their gowns to cost around \$1,100 and the veil or headpiece to be roughly \$120, according to the Association of Bridal Consultants.

- **Photography and Video:** Preserving wedding day memories costs around \$2,800 for video and photography services, based on data from Statistics Brain.

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Although shaving is a seemingly simple task, some men struggle through the process because they haven't mastered the basics for a clean, comfortable shave.

A wedding day shaving guide for grooms

Grooms are often content to let their brides-to-be shine on their wedding day. But weddings are a showcase of the two people getting married, and grooms matter! Grooms can take steps to look handsome and polished, but may wonder what they can do to put their best feet forward when all eyes and cameras are facing their way.

Addressing skin care and proper shaving techniques is essential. Although shaving is a seemingly simple task, some men struggle through the process.

Brickell Men's Products advises that the first step to a good shave is to shower before shaving. The warm

water and steam will open up pores and follicles, allowing the hair to protrude as much as possible out of the skin. The more it sticks out, the cleaner the shave will be.

Many men fail to prep their skin before shaving. It is important to rinse the face with a pre-shave soap and warm water to remove excess oil and dead skin that clogs razor blades.

Try a non-lathering or natural shave cream that offers lubrication to help get a closer shave.

The right razor can make all the difference. While an electric shaver can serve in a pinch, come the day of the wedding, work with a traditional razor, either

disposable or cartridge style. Start with a fresh, new and sharp blade. Grooms should use what has worked for them in the past, as now is not the time to experiment.

While shaving, go with and against the grain, or what feels comfortable to take off the hair without having to go over areas repeatedly. Do not tap the razor against the sink to dislodge the whiskers, as this can damage or dull the razor.

Finish up by rinsing with cool water and applying a moisturizer or aftershave product. It can take up to 48 hours for skin to heal after a shave and keeping it hydrated can diminish irritation.



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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



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

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 re-

served 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.

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Get schooled on wedding terminology

Couples about to embark on their wedding journeys will likely learn a thing or two about party planning once their engagements are over and they are newly married. Wedding planning can seem overwhelming and a tad confusing at times, but a crash course in wedding terminology can help couples make more informed choices along the way.

- **Blusher:** A short, single-layer veil that covers the bride's face before the ceremony.
- **Boutonnière:** A single flower bud worn by the men in the bridal party.
- **Canapés:** Bite-sized appetizers served during the cocktail hour of a reception.
- **Civil ceremony:** A marriage ceremony conducted by a council official or justice of the peace at a municipal location rather than in a house of worship.
- **Cocktail hour:** Typically an hour-long interlude between the wedding ceremony and the main dinner of the reception. Guests have time to arrive and mingle before being seated.
- **Corkage fee:** A fee some establishments charge to allow guests to bring their own wine.
- **Dais:** A podium or platform raised from the floor where the bride and groom are seated.
- **Deposit:** A percentage of the total cost of service given to a vendor to secure a date for their services.
- **Dragées:** Round, small edible balls of sugar that appear on wedding cakes.
- **Escort (seating) cards:** Printed cards that direct reception guests to their seats.
- **Fondant:** A sweet, pliable product used to decoratively cover layered cakes. It can be used in lieu of straight

buttercream.

- **Handle wrap:** Ribbon or fabric that wraps around the stems of a bouquet the bride and wedding party carries.

- **Maid/matron of honor:** The title given to the woman who assists the bride and stands closest to her at the altar. "Maids" are those who are unmarried, while "matrons" are women who are.

- **Master of ceremonies:** An individual who will work with the DJ or band to announce the various components of the wedding reception.

- **Nosegay:** A small bouquet or flower arrangement typically given to the mothers of the bride and groom before the ceremony.

- **Processional/Recessional:** Musical pieces that mark the entrance and exit from the wedding ceremony.

- **Receiving line:** A line of the key people in the wedding who welcome and greet guests.

- **Stationery:** All of the paper products used at the wedding, including invitations, programs and enclosures.

- **Tablescape:** A word that describes the multiple components of centerpiece designs.

Learning some basic wedding terminology can simplify wedding planning.

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Wedding dress fitting guide

Because fashion preferences were once ornate and dependent on precise fits, ready-to-wear clothing really did not become widely available until the early 20th century. Such attire is now available in just about any retail store.

Because ready-to-wear clothing is so readily available, the average person may be unfamiliar with custom-made or tailored items. In fact, a couples' wedding may be the only instance in their lives when they require the services of a seamstress or tailor.

Fittings are a part of wedding planning, and here's how brides-to-be can navigate the process of finding and being fitted for a dress.

- **Try on sample gowns.** The first step is

to make your rounds to various gown shops and try on the samples they have available. Most sample sizes will not be the size you wear every day, so expect them to be ill-fitting. Do not be discouraged.

Open communication with a seamstress and bridal shop can ensure brides-to-be get a dress that fits like a glove.

Once a gown is chosen, the dress shop will take your measurements and order the gown according to the manufacturer's sizing guide. Again, this can be shocking, since the size will likely be larger than what you wear in street clothes. Some shops will also order a little larger to allow for adequate tailoring.

- **Schedule the first fitting.**

The first fitting should be anywhere from eight to 12 weeks before the wedding date, according to experts at WeddingWire, an online wedding information provider. This is the time it takes to complete most standard alterations. Complex customizations can take even longer. Brides should also budget a minimum of \$500 for alterations, which may or may not be included in the price of the dress.

- **Bring shoes and undergarments.** Remember to bring along the exact shoes and undergarments you will wear with your gown. A change in shoes or bra/corset can result in the alterations fitting poorly the next time. Bring these items along to all subsequent fittings.

- **Speak up.** Martha Stewart Weddings suggests speaking up at fittings if anything is uncomfortable or needs tweaking. Seamstresses are masters at their crafts, but only if they understand the desires of the bride.

- **Check the details.** The second fitting is designed to check that all issues from the first fitting have been addressed, the gown is comfortable and you can move freely. At the last fitting, ask the maid of honor to come along so that she understands how to bustle or help you handle complicated straps or closures.

Open communication with a seamstress and bridal shop can ensure brides-to-be get a dress that fits like a glove.



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Factors to consider before including Fido in your wedding

Pets are full-fledged members of many families and even, apparently, families-to-be.

In its 2016 American Wedding Study, Brides magazine found that 8 percent of wedding ceremonies included pets. While the couples of yesteryear might have left Fido at home, many of today's couples want their four-legged friends to be there on their big day. Though no studies to date have examined which animals are most likely to make an appearance at couples' nuptials, it's fair to assume that dogs, which tend to get out of the house more than most other types of pets, are the most common furry bridesmaids, groomsmen or ring bearers.

Before including dogs in their wedding plans, couples may want to consider a few factors to ensure asking Fido to be there come the big day is what's best for



In its 2016 American Wedding Study, Brides magazine found that 8 percent of wedding ceremonies included pets.

couples, their guests and, of course, their beloved pooches.

ELIGIBILITY

Some venues do not allow pets that are not documented assistance animals on the premises. Confirm a venue's pet policy before purchasing any wedding day attire for your dog. Couples who are intent on includ-

ing their pets in their wedding ceremonies should only consider pet-friendly facilities, which may be hard to

find. Couples who plan to take a limousine to and from their wedding also should confirm that the cars allow pets before booking.

PERSONALITY

No two dogs are the same. Some dogs might love people and attention, while others might prefer one-on-one time with their owners. Dogs that are sociable and unaggressive may make perfect additions to wedding ceremonies, while animals that exhibit anxiety around strangers or seem uncomfortable in noisy settings should be kept out of the ceremony.

HEALTH

Dog owners also must consider their pets'

health when deciding whether or not to include them in the wedding ceremony. Couples who bonded over a love of their dog may really hope to include their furry friend in the festivities, but should not do so at the expense of the animal's health. Outdoor wedding ceremonies under sunny skies may produce potentially unhealthy conditions for certain breeds or older dogs. Dogs that have difficulty getting around may need a red wagon (and attendant) to make the rounds at the wedding.

ASSISTANCE

Couples will be busy on their wedding days, so they may need to arrange for a caretaker to look after their dog during and after the ceremony. Asking a guest or guests to play this role may be asking too much, as guests will want to celebrate without having to take care of a dog. A professional pet sitter might work, but that can be costly, as couples must pay for the sitter and will likely need to pay for the sitter to have a seat and a meal during the reception.

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Make healthy habits a part of wedding prep

After the big question is popped and loving partners decide to spend their lives together as a married couple, a whirlwind of activity will ensue. Although wedding planning is exciting, some couples may feel overwhelmed with all the decisions that need to be made before they can tie the knot. In this state of increased pressure, stress may build and health could falter. According to a Cornell University study, more than 70 percent of brides-to-be have weight loss on the brain, but shedding pounds shouldn't be the only health factor to consider. Here are some easy ways to stay mentally and physically fit in advance of a happy wedding day.

- **Get daily exercise.** Exercise is important for maintaining a healthy body weight and keeping stress levels in check. Exercise also can boost mood. The Department of Health and Human Services recommends getting at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity each week. Strength training exercises performed at least twice a week complete a well-balanced exercise regimen.

- **Slow down and relax.** Those who go

Feeling and looking one's best starts long before the wedding day. By making health a priority, couples can start their new lives together on healthy footing.

full-throttle with all of their responsibilities — including wedding planning — may burn out. Stress can weaken the immune system and make people vulnerable to illness. Schedule some time for date nights with your fiancé, and don't overlook the benefits of hanging out with friends and getting away from wedding planning for a bit.

- **Eat body-boosting foods.** The foods we eat can impact everything from energy levels to skin radiance. Foods like berries, sweet potatoes, broccoli, greens, green tea, and dark chocolate all contain antioxidants that boost the immune system, states The Food Network. Avoid drastic diets that can do more harm than good. Simply cutting 500 calories a day can help the average person lose a pound per week if weight loss is a goal.

Simple ways to trim calories are to choose skim

milk over whole milk and choose low-calorie snacks.

- **Cut down on alcohol consumption.** Toasting to the future with a glass of wine may become rote in the months leading up to the wedding, but alcohol is a diuretic and a source of liquid calories. Alcoholic beverages dehydrate the body and cause it to hold onto water. When imbibing, stick to low-calorie cocktails like a vodka spritzer (60 to 80 calories) instead of a calorie-laden frozen

margarita (300 calories).

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Overcome wedding weather obstacles

Summer approaches with the promise of warm temperatures. Weather is one reason why summer is such a popular season to tie the knot. But just because sunny skies and rising mercury are par for the course, that does not mean Mother Nature won't invite herself to the festivities - and attempt to upstage happy couples in the process.

Some feel it's good luck for couples to get rain on their wedding days, but many couples would trade in a

little of that luck for clear skies. However, weather can be fickle, and couples who build contingency plans into their wedding festivities are much more likely to overcome inclement weather than couples without such plans.

· **Have solutions for sun and heat.** Couples don't want their wedding guests or bridal party members passing out due to heat exhaustion. Make sure to offer shade if the ceremony or reception is outside. Stock the area with cold bottles of water or a chilled lemonade stand.

Have fans and umbrellas available just in case guests need a way to protect themselves.

· **Strong storms.** Over the course of hot

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and humid days, storm clouds can develop and roll in. Afternoon thunderstorms are quite common on summer days. Accommodate for sudden downpours by hosting early luncheon

receptions or ensure there is a plan B that includes a covered area. Couples can stash spare shoes or even rain slickers in a car to keep

their wedding attire protected against rain as they dash between venues or take photos.

· **Embrace the rain.** Vivid skies with lightning or overcast days can make for unique

and striking wedding photography. Couples needn't look at the downside of rain, but rather they should see opportunities for one-of-a-kind memories.

· **Keep a generator on standby.** Storms may knock out power. Some reception halls or banquet facilities may have their own backup power, but be sure to address how power outages are handled.

· **Plan for wind.** Coastal outdoor weddings present beautiful backdrops for weddings. But being near the shore may mean

accepting windy conditions. Tie down tents and use weights to keep wedding programs or other papers from catching a current. The bride and her wedding party should opt for free-flowing tresses so they needn't worry about intricate updos coming undone.

· **Maintain a sense of humor.** It's impossible to predict wedding day weather, but staying calm, going with the flow and laughing at things they can't control can help couples make memories that last a lifetime.

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