

2024 BRIDAL GUIDE

Choosing your menu

French queen Marie Antoinette is credited with a phrase that loosely translates to “Let them eat cake.” Guests at a wedding certainly will have their chance to enjoy cake, but it’s likely that wedding planners will need to offer a bit more sustenance to guests than this confectionary creation to keep them happy.

Many things stand out as memorable on a wedding day: the dress, the music, the adorable children who trip up or do some sort of zany antics down the aisle, and the food. Guests often look forward to a wedding to wish a couple well in their new lives together, but also to enjoy a great meal. Couples should give careful consideration to their wedding reception menu so everyone ends the night with great memories and full bellies.

Decide on the type of service

Buffet, plated dinner, server-passed foods, or food stations are the options at couples’ disposal when planning reception dinners. The type of service often dictates the formality of the event. For example, a cocktail party where guests mingle and sample small bites throughout the night may be a more casual affair, while a plated multi-course meal is much more formal. Couples can decide which type of service fits their budgets and ideas of for the reception.

Expand your options

Largely gone are the days when guests select dishes on the R.S.V.P. months in advance and then are locked into their choices. Now guests have more options and flexibility, particularly because couples and catering venues offer greater variety. A buffet-style meal gives guests chances to sample various foods in one sitting. However, even if couples choose a plated meal, they can select packages that offer guests the greatest number of options. Be sure to include a vegetarian or vegan option, a fish option, and a standard beef or chicken option to appeal to most.



Confirm food allergies or sensitivities

It’s likely someone on the guest list will have a food allergy or sensitivity. Making sure there is no cross-contamination is a serious consideration for such guests. The person or persons should be consulted about what the person can and cannot eat, and then those requirements should be conveyed to the catering manager.

Certain people with food allergies are so leery about eating out that they may prefer to bring their own food to ensure it is safe. In this instance, ensure that the kitchen staff will be able to safely heat up or plate the food.

Time management tips for the big day

As any married couple can attest, a wedding day has a tendency to fly by. Couples have much to do on the day they tie the knot, which can make the day feel like a whirlwind.

Certain skills can come in especially handy on a wedding day, and the ability to manage time is certainly one of them. As their big day draws closer, couples can employ these time management tips to slow the day down a little bit.

- **Create and distribute a schedule.** A schedule can ensure the happy couple and all members of the bridal party know when and where they need to be at certain times during the day. Include all pertinent information on the schedule, including when and where hair and makeup appointments begin, when transportation to and from the ceremony and reception site will arrive and, of course, the start time for the ceremony. A printed copy can help, but a digital copy sent via text or email can guarantee the schedule is accessible via smartphone at all times during the day.

- **Collaborate with your photographer in advance of your wedding day.** Couples can streamline wedding day photography sessions by collaborating with their photographer in advance. During these sessions, identify the bridal party shots you want to take and then create a schedule of photos so all party members know where they need to be and when. Some couples choose to schedule bridal party photoshoots before the ceremony, while others prefer theirs after the couple has made it official.

- **Don’t forget to set aside time to eat.** Anything can derail a wedding day schedule if it’s forgotten when couples devise their initial plan for how the day will unfold. Couples might be less inclined to forget hair and makeup appointments and photo sessions because such components are integral to wedding planning. But couples should not forget to leave time for themselves and their bridal party to eat. Schedule a breakfast for all bridal party members (separate ones if couples insist on avoiding each other until the ceremony) to ensure no one sleeps in and throws off the day’s timeline. Include time to eat lunch if the ceremony is in late afternoon or early evening.

- **Go over schedules with your vendors.** In the weeks prior to your wedding, reach out to your vendors to confirm the day’s timeline. Do this prior to handing out a schedule to your bridal party so no one is confused if any last-minute changes are made.

How to find the right officiant for your wedding

Weddings consist of a lot of moving parts. As engaged couples plan their weddings, many become masters at multi-tasking as they try to coordinate a day that will make them happy and prove fun for their friends and family.

Deciding on a wedding officiant is one of the tasks couples will have to address in advance of the big day. There’s no shortage of officiants, from religious leaders to people who specialize in nondenominational ceremonies. As couples begin the process of looking for a wedding officiant, they can keep these strategies in mind to ensure they find the right fit for their wedding.

- **Determine the location and type of ceremony you want to have.** Before they begin searching for an officiant, engaged couples should discuss where they hope to get married and the type of ceremony they want to have. This may differ within the couple, as one person might prefer a religious wedding in a house of worship while the other might want a secular ceremony outdoors or in another location. The requirements to get married in a house of worship differ by faith, and restrictions may dictate who can officiate a wedding in a church, synagogue, mosque, etc. Couples are urged to learn the qualifications to get married in a house of worship before hiring a wedding officiant.

- **Take your time and meet with various officiants.** When the time comes to interview officiants, speak with as many as possible. The interview process can give couples a feel for what’s out there and help them identify the type of officiant they want. If a rapport develops between a couple and a particular officiant, that can make for a better ceremony.

- **Consider a friend or family member.** Couples have increasingly looked to friends or family members to officiate their weddings. Statistics differ considerably depending on the source, but the 2020 Brides American Wedding Study found that one in four couples are married by a friend or family member. A friend or fami-



ly member serving as an officiant can lend a more personal feel to a ceremony, but couples should first confirm a loved one is willing to take on the responsibility, which will require the individual become licensed. It also may spark some nerves, so couples should confirm the person is comfortable doing so and should not pressure someone into performing the task.

- **Ask around.** Couples who don’t know where to begin when looking for an officiant should not hesitate to ask around. Wedding vendors, including representatives at the location where the ceremony will take place, may be willing to recommend officiants whose work has impressed them in the past. Google Reviews and other review aggregators also can offer insight into officiants and their approach to officiating weddings.

Questions to ask when vetting vendors

It may be tempting to simply sign on the dotted line when hiring wedding vendors and hope for the best. But the process can prove more fruitful when couples prepare for it by compiling a list of questions designed to ensure they know what they’re getting before they enter into a contract.

- **Is the date available?** The most important question to ask is whether the vendor is available on the day you have chosen to get married. The house of worship or place where you will be exchanging vows should be set first, and then additional vendors can be interviewed to confirm their availability and the scope of their services.

- **How long have you been in business?** How long a company has been in business, and more importantly how much experience they have with weddings, can be a telling detail. Experience is not always indicative of ability, but vendors with long track records of success may prove easy to work with.

- **Will you be on site to oversee things?** From florists to private caterers to specialty performers, it is acceptable to ask vendors if they will be there the day of the wedding to manage

things or if it will be a third party or another representative.

- **What is your payment schedule and cancellation policy?** Understand how the vendor expects to be paid. Many businesses require a deposit up front to book the date. Some may want payment in full a week or so before the wedding day. Others may enable you to make monthly payments for a set period of time. Ask how the vendor handles cancellations, and whether any deposit or portion of the money already paid will be refunded.

- **When is the last possible date for making changes?** Know how long you have to make any changes to your plans, colors, music choices, or other details.

- **Are there any additional fees?** It’s important to determine if gratuity, travel, overtime charges, cleaning fees, or any other charges are included in the contract or if it leaves room for additional expenses.

- **Do prices differ depending on time of day, month or year?** Certain dates are busier than others. Find out if the vendor charges a premium for holidays or particular times of the year.