



# Stepping Stones To Your Dream Wedding

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## Introduction



Since you are reading this, chances are congratulations are in order so...

Congratulations! If not, chances are that you are planning ahead and that is wise. Planning a wedding can be one of the most rewarding and frustrating experiences of your life. The rewards are obvious; the realization of what is for many a lifelong dream. The frustrations come in many cases from the mere fact that this is, for most, uncharted waters.

While it is simple enough to just assume that you can do exactly as your cousin Jessica did in her wedding, the reality is not always that simple. Perhaps the photographer that she used has moved to Maui or was one of the photography companies that farm

their extra work out to freelancers that you won't meet until they show up at your wedding, and your cousin just happened to get lucky. Or maybe because you are not using the same facility you find, after it's too late, that you haven't scheduled enough time for your pictures or for the flowers or wedding cake to be set up, and the result is rushed and it shows.

The point of this E-book is to give you a glimpse into the wedding industry so that you can know that you are getting what you are paying for. Secondly, this book was written so that you don't inadvertently make it impossible for the wedding professional to provide the service for which you have contracted (imagine the florist locked out of your wedding location with ten more weddings to decorate or the cake decorator still setting up the cake when your guests arrive). Finally, this E-book attempts to help you sort your priorities so that your wedding will be just that, *your wedding* with the emphasis where you want it, free of the constraints of what some expert across the country claims you should spend on each part of your wedding.

Now it's your turn. Dive in. Dream. Plan. Enjoy the adventure of planning the wedding that you will look back on for the rest of your life.

# Chapter One

## It's Not All about the Wedding Location (Unless it is)



In the world of business there is an old adage saying that location is everything. That maybe true, but your wedding is not all about business. It's about making a memory and celebrating the lifelong commitment of two people to one another. So unless you are one who has to go wherever people go in your area to be seen, consider these five factors as you choose your wedding location.

First a note to those who do feel a need to have their wedding celebration at the hottest wedding location in town: Plan ahead. Wedding locations like those fill up early, and I mean really early. In my corner of the country the top wedding locations fill their prime wedding dates upwards of eighteen months ahead! And unless your family has a lot of money, you might want to start saving your pennies now. Those most prestigious wedding locations are not cheap, commanding a price that is in direct relation to their level of prestige.

For the rest of us choosing a wedding location might seem simple, and it is, but that doesn't mean there aren't important considerations to be weighed prior to putting deposit money on the line:

First, talk with your spouse to be. That's right, the first thing you need to do when choosing a wedding location is to talk to your future spouse. "Why? He doesn't care about that stuff! As a matter of fact he's practiced in his disinterest, so why should I bother?"

Exactly.

"What?"

Exactly. In our experience guys have been told all of their lives that the wedding celebration is for the bride, that he doesn't get a say. As a result they tend to take a practiced disinterest in wedding preparations. It makes having no say in the event easier to deal with. The problem is that this is a day that you want to be able to look back on as a couple with fond memories. To do that you need to talk to him and convince him that you really do care about designing a wedding that fits both of you.

It might take some time for you to convince him that you are serious and not just being polite, but it could go a long way toward opening up the communication lines between the two of you and that is worth its weight in gold even if it doesn't end up affecting your wedding plans.

Second, consider the needs of the support people who will be doing the work that goes into creating your special day. That includes Aunt Gladys who volunteered to decorate the reception hall. Make sure you arrange to gain access to the reception hall with plenty of time for her complete her decorations without killing Uncle George in the process. Likewise, consider the needs of the professionals who provide your photography, set up the cake, or flowers. Each business has its own realities that make it difficult, if not impossible to provide you the service that you're paying for if the schedule that you arrange with the managers of the location doesn't allow enough time.

A good practice is to make a quick survey of wedding professionals that you are considering using regarding the time constraints they anticipate before you book your wedding location. Most professionals will appreciate the effort and be more likely to do what they can to accommodate your constraints when you get to their stage in your wedding planning. More about that in the chapters that deal with each professional discipline.

Thirdly, consider the type of wedding location that best reflects the wedding celebration you and your spouse want. For people who are active members of a local community of faith this might be as simple as a trip down to your place of worship. For outdoor enthusiasts, a park or ranch might be more appropriate. For those that want to

celebrate into the wee hours of the morning, a hotel ballroom might be appropriate for the reception, if not for the wedding location itself.



For more wedding location options try contacting your local tourism board. They can provide you with a list of wedding locations and reception facilities in your area. Likewise an internet search might provide some ideas that you hadn't thought of or weren't aware of, as would a local wedding coordinator.

Fourth, consider the calendar when booking the wedding location. This sounds obvious, but it has deeper implications than merely finding a date that works for everyone in the party. The calendar dictates what kind of flowers will grace your wedding celebration (unless you are rich enough to import flowers from the other side of the globe), but it can also save you or cost you a lot of money. If you plan a wedding in a church or other public building during the Christmas season, for example, you might not have to worry about decorating. Just remember that this can backfire on you too because you won't be in control of the decorations.

Obviously, there are times of the year when weddings are common and during those times you can expect to pay a premium for all of the services. The obvious example is Valentines and Mother's day when the price of flowers go through the roof, but this also includes everything from the wedding location itself to the flowers, cake, food, and photography. But more than that, did you know that you can save a significant amount of money by scheduling your wedding on a Friday or a Sunday? You can, and the reason is simply because those are not the times that people traditionally demand so it is entirely possible that you will be able to get a better price on everything if you schedule your wedding celebration on a day and time other than Saturday afternoon.

Another aspect of the calendar to consider is major events in your town. If you book your wedding on the same weekend that the national square dancing association is having their convention in your city (or rodeo weekend, or, or...) you might find it difficult, if not impossible to get hotel rooms for any guests traveling in from out of town.



Finally, consider the restrictions that each wedding location places on your wedding celebration either intentionally or by default. A park, for example, could be a great wedding location but it might not provide enough power to allow a band or DJ to set up. Churches, likewise, might have restrictions on what kind of music you can play (to be fair, we have to recognize that many businesses are placing restrictions on the playing of religious music as well), your dress, or whether or not you can have a dance as a part of the celebration. Furthermore, many hotels require that you use their staff and catering services as a part of the agreement (this is convenient but you can often do better both in quality and price by going with an outside vendor).

Bottom line; consider the details of whatever wedding location you settle on. It is most likely that it will shape the rest of your day in some way. Be sure that the effect it has on your wedding celebration fits with the wedding memories that you are trying to build.

## **What are you paying for?**

In many cases the primary cost factor regarding wedding locations is demand. Unless it is something like a church that often simply has a flat fee structure to cover insurance, loss, and the salary of the churches representative (who makes sure the doors are open on time and locked up afterwards), the cost is determined by both demand and / or what the business would expect to make if your wedding celebration was not using the facility. If the property is set up as solely a wedding location (or reception) then you would be paying a portion of the mortgage as well. Ultimately, however, what you are paying for is for the right to create your wedding memories in that spot.



## Wedding Venue on a Budget

If our world was perfect our wedding plans would be unaffected by financial realities... our wedding is, after all, the biggest day of our lives. However, when we find ourselves in tight financial times, whatever the reason or season, we often find that we need to find ways to save or spend less. Regrettably, sometimes this reality includes the need to find ways to cut back on our wedding plans.

True. Ideally the flowers for our marriage ceremony and reception would be set by the hand of the most accomplished florist in the area, if not the world. Similarly, our wedding dress would be handmade by world class artisans from only the finest of materials as we celebrate our union with our soul mate.

Realistically, however, most all of us have to make choices. How many of us, after all, can actually afford to fly in a pastry chef from Paris to create our wedding cake? This proves, of course, that we all make these decisions in our wedding planning on some level.

Happily, this truth also reveals what we all instinctively know... that as long as the individuals involved take a few moments to consider the options instead of just allowing themselves to go until they run out of money and stop memorable weddings can still be achieved. All it takes is a bride that takes the time to decide what elements of the wedding are most important to her. Then she can invest her resources into those elements while cutting back or eliminating extraneous items from her design with the result that she can still have a stunning wedding.

Sometimes, the effect of cutting out the clutter can even elevate the entire matrimonial event!

*Easy ways to save money on the wedding venue:*

1. Use property that is owned by someone in the family or wedding party - just be certain that there is sufficient parking and noise issues are considered.
2. Many who are active in their neighborhood community of faith can often gain use of the facility at the house of worship for their wedding for a minimal charge or sometimes no charge at all!
3. Sometimes city or county parks are available inexpensively - though noise and privacy may be a factor depending on the layout of the park.
4. Recreation Centers - I know of a new city owned recreation center that is as nice as most hotel ballrooms I have been in. It even has a nice, private courtyard which would be great for a wedding or reception! And the best part is the rental fees truly are miniscule.
5. Depending on the regulations and private ownership issues in the area getting married on the beach or next to a lake or river can save a bride a lot of money she would otherwise spend on the wedding venue.

Reception Venue: Preferably, hold the ceremony and reception in two different parts of the same place. For example in an outdoor wedding, have tents with tables set up behind and to the side of where the ceremony is held and have the guests carry their chairs from the ceremony. This will save money on a separate location and renting extra chairs!

Truly, it is possible to plan a wedding without spending large amounts of money. The benefit of having to prioritize protects us from cluttering our wedding plans with extraneous fluff. Such clutter only hurts a couple's efforts to create a memorable wedding celebration.

## Chapter Two

### Turning Bridal Gown Fantasy into Reality

There is little in life that matches the wide eyed expectation of a young girl dreaming of that perfect bridal gown that transforms her into Cinderella making the grand entrance. In that dream the wedding dress is perfect and so is she. But in the real world where people are not shaped by an artists pencil finding the perfect bridal gown is sometimes more of a challenge than we would like. However, by understanding a few basic things about bridal gowns and the industry that supply them it is possible not only to navigate the gauntlet, but to find the wedding dress of your dreams.

The bridal gown industry is, for the most part, a special order industry. Its goal is to provide you with a bridal gown that fits perfectly and compliments your individual body style. Because of this, if you are even thinking about buying a special ordered bridal gown, plan to finish your shopping for the wedding dress at least six months in advance of your wedding date. Doing so will help to reduce the chance that mistakes or shipping issues will leave you without a bridal gown when the day finally arrives.

Likewise, look at pictures of bridal gowns in magazines and discover what you like, but consider your body type as well and use that knowledge to help you focus in on the type of dress that works on you. Talk to a wedding consultant and get the name of a good bridal wear shop in your area and go in for a fitting. A well trained consultant will help you to figure out what bridal gowns work on you and which ones don't.

Furthermore give every bridal gown she recommends a try. Who hasn't had the experience of looking at an article of clothing on the rack and disliking it only to be talked into trying it on and ending up loving it?

Your choice of a bridal gown should take into consideration what specifically you expect to be doing while you wear it. Are you going to wear the wedding dress all through the reception? If so, what activities can you reasonably expect to do? Are you going to dance? Is it reasonable that you will end up doing the Limbo while you're still wearing your wedding dress? Will your wedding ceremony require you to kneel? You'd better be sure the dress will allow you the flexibility be involved without destroying your bridal gown. I mean who wants to kneel in front of the entire congregation only to hear the ominous sound a seam popping?

When you do go shopping for that bridal gown, take your mother or a friend and go early in the day when you are fresh. But whatever you do, don't buy anything that first day – even if you find the wedding dress of your dreams. Instead, go home and sleep on your decision. The bridal gown will have to be ordered anyway so one day isn't going to change anything and the time away just might protect you from making a wedding dress decision you will regret later.

One exception to this rule is for those who choose to purchase a used wedding gown at a charity fund raising event (such as the one that Making Memories Breast Cancer Foundation sponsors) or other first come, first served wedding dress sales event. Many of these events can offer you a great opportunity to get a designer bridal gown at a discount price but by their very nature you have to have done all of your homework before the day of the sale if you hope to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Finally, after you've found and ordered your wedding dress, when it finally comes in, go in to pick it up on a day that you are not rushed. Bring a friend along, preferably someone that is detail oriented, and take the time to carefully inspect your bridal gown before you pay the balance. Try it on; make sure that the wedding dress really does fit like it is supposed to. Check the seams and the look of the fabric and if you find any problems have the shop see that the bridal gown that you ordered is the one that you get. Remember, the bridal gown business is a special order business, and in a special order business accepting and paying for the bridal gown often constitutes approval.

## **What are you paying for?**

In the bridal gown industry the cost is mainly found in the labor. A high quality dress will feel comfortable. It will be smooth and silky against your skin. Its seams will all be finished with no threads hanging. Surprisingly, the highest quality dress in the shop might well also be the simplest. The reason this is true is that beads, lace, and ruffles cover flaws in both the material and the workmanship of a wedding dress. A simple

bridal gown requires the most perfect materials and the finest of craftsmanship to make it lay properly on your body. Of course, if you like the beads or lace, go for it, but don't assume that it's better quality because it's more ornate. If you do, you just might end up paying more than you should.

## Wedding Dress Money Saving Opportunities

Our wedding dress is a key part of our wedding celebration and memories. Our gown reveals how beautiful and special our marriage is to us. We want it to be a flawless symbol of our love. We want to feel beautiful in it. The question is do we need to spend vast amounts of money to find such a wedding dress?

The answer depends on what it takes for each bride to find what she needs. The good news is that brides do have options that we often forget about or overlook that go beyond the special order bridal shop or department stores that sell bridal gowns off the rack. After all, if you can get a bridal gown that is just as beautiful (sometimes more beautiful) for a fraction of the cost isn't it worth it?

Four places to look in your search for that perfect wedding dress without breaking the bank:

**Charity Sales / Auctions:** Some charities have turned to accepting wedding gowns that they can resell to raise money. As a result you have the opportunity to buy dresses that are usually either new or worn once for a fraction of their original price. Call around. Check the Internet for a sale near you.

**Sample Sales:** Is there a bridal store close by? How about a high end wedding dress manufacturer? Check with them to see when they have their annual sample sale and / or close out. If a bride is able to wade through vast numbers of dresses, you can sometimes find some gems.

**Grandma:** "Something borrowed, something blue..." This is a fantastic opportunity to import some family meaning into the wedding by borrowing the wedding dress grandma wore all those years ago - or mom, or aunt, or big sis. If this option presents a dress option that works a bride could save vast amounts of money compared to the cost of special ordering a dress - not to mention the headache of wondering if the dress will arrive on time!

One caveat - double check to ensure Grandma's dress either fits as is or permission is given to make alterations. This is usually not a problem, but saving money is not worth family discord over a misunderstanding.

**EBay:** Most bridal gowns are never worn more than once anyway. This means that it is possible to find one on an online auction site like EBay that will save a lot of money and possibly enable the bride to get a more elegant dress than they otherwise would be able to afford.

Indeed, it is easier to simply travel to the bridal shop and special order a wedding dress. If you do not special order your gown the chances are good that you will need to have it altered so it fits right, so include that cost in your calculations. Even so, if the budget for your nuptials is not quite as full as you like one of these four options for finding a wedding dress at a bargain price just might be the ticket.

## Chapter Three

### Wedding Photography: Making the Wedding Memories Last



Wedding photography is the one discipline that does not produce a product that you can enjoy on your wedding day. Instead, the money that you spend on wedding photography is an investment in capturing the joy of your wedding day for you to look back on for years to come. The trick is to coordinate everything so that your wedding photographer is able to actually capture everything that you want recorded.

Start by sitting down as a couple before you book anything and deciding specifically what you want wedding pictures to record. Coordinating and compromising your expectations may turn out to be challenging enough. If it is, imagine how challenging the wedding photographer would find it during the craziness of the actual wedding day when most everyone is dressed so that the wedding photographer can't tell the difference between Aunt Betty and Mrs. Johnson that lives down the street (Chances are you will want a picture of Aunt Betty in some form where Mrs. Johnson might be a lesser priority). If deciding what the two of you want from your wedding photography is not a challenge, count your blessings and move ahead to the next step.

Once you have decided what pictures you want, take the time to speak with a couple wedding photographers and find out how much time and what kind of schedule a good wedding photographer will need to actually capture the pictures you want. This seems obvious, but often weddings are planned in such a way that the wedding photographer is put in the awkward position of having to try to keep up with what is going on, which could leave you with less than the best in wedding photography.

Chances are the wedding photographer will want to know how important it is to you that the groom does not see the bride before the wedding on your wedding day. If it is not important, there is probably a good chance you can arrange for all of the wedding party to show up at the church (or wherever the wedding ceremony is held) early to get most, if not all, of the posed wedding photography taken care of. Even if you do not want the bride and groom to see each other until she walks down the aisle, it might be possible to schedule your wedding so that most of the posed wedding photography are taken care of and only those pictures that include both the bride and the groom are left until after the wedding ceremony.

If not, however, you might need to consider a schedule that includes a considerable gap of time between the ceremony and the reception (In some parts of North America this is very common, while in other parts it is quite uncommon) to make sure your wedding photography turns out to be the photographs that you will treasure (and make sure that Uncle Floyd doesn't disappear on you).

Once you have a good idea of the schedule that your wedding photography needs to get the pictures that you want, take the time to go out and book your wedding facility(s) (See chapter on finding your wedding location) making sure to allow enough time in the reception facility for decorating as well as for the florist and cake decorator to get their creations delivered and set up (often a couple of hours prior to the arrival of guests – see chapters on the wedding cake and the florist).

After you have booked the facility it is time to get down to the serious business of finding the right wedding photographer for your wedding celebration. This can be tricky because 1) you need to find a wedding photographer whose style agrees with your taste; 2) you need a wedding photographer whose body of work is up to your standards; and 3) you need a wedding photographer whose personality clicks with both of you.

This last trait is quite possibly the most important of the three (although you don't want to sacrifice any of them if you can help it) in choosing a wedding photographer because it is the wedding photographer's job to set everybody, and you especially, at ease so that the pictures that you get reflect the people that you love and not some sick caricature of them. And this is best achieved by using a wedding photographer that you feel at ease with. True, there is no guarantee that everyone will feel as at ease with the wedding photographer that you choose which is why it is so important for you to choose one that at least you will be comfortable with.



Before we move on, however, be aware that some of the bigger photography studios have a small number of representatives for you to meet with and sell you their wedding photography packages. The problem is that once your wedding party is booked they will give the assignment to someone else, even a freelance wedding photographer that you have never met before. Protect yourself by either using an individual wedding photographer, or a wedding photography company that will guarantee the particular individual that will photograph your wedding. If you can't get a written guarantee that the individual that you have become so comfortable with will actually be the one providing your wedding photography, keep looking.

Likewise, be sure when choosing your wedding photographer that you see several entire weddings worth of wedding photography that he (not his company) shot. Anyone can shoot hundreds of pictures and have a few that have turned out great, especially in particularly photogenic situations like weddings tend to be, it takes a real skilled individual though to turn out an entire wedding worth of great wedding photography. Isn't that exactly what you are hoping to get when you hire your wedding photographer?

Finally, regardless of how sharp and how much of a people person the wedding photographer is there is no way that they are going to know who your great uncle Charlie is or where to look for him if he disappears. So save your wedding photographer (and yourself) time and grief by choosing someone within your wedding party (someone with a strong personality) who knows everyone involved to be the wedding photographer's contact person.

Remember, any given wedding photographer is only one person (or, in some cases, one team). This means that they can only be in one place at a time. Since most weddings happen on Saturdays they are most busy on Saturdays, meaning that they will often charge a higher price to do a Saturday wedding than they would a Friday or Sunday wedding. It also means that the wedding photographer may well be coming from another wedding before yours, or be heading to another wedding after yours if you do have a Saturday wedding so your cooperation with the wedding photographer will go a long way toward getting great wedding photography.

## **What are you paying for?**

The primary cost of wedding photography is the wedding photographer's time, both at your wedding ceremony and in the lab afterward. Therefore, if you need to save money find a way to make the most of your schedule and / or cut down on the pictures

that you want to take (for example: does he really need to photograph the entire reception or will the first half hour be enough?). The second source of cost is materials such as film, paper, etc. Finally, you are paying for the photographer's popularity. As is everything else in life, the best photographers command the highest prices – but then again, if you do your homework, you get what you pay for, and thirty years from now your wedding photography will be priceless.

## Chapter Four

### Wedding Flowers Dressing the Ceremony



The wedding flowers that decorate the church will go a long way to setting the mood for your wedding. Done right, a selection of well placed wedding flowers can give your event the sense of joy, expectation, solemnity, or pageantry you and your intended anticipate for your wedding. Done poorly... well, your wedding flowers will set the wrong mood for your wedding at best. At worst, your wedding flowers will make it appear that your wedding happened in a tacky looking facility or several decades earlier (actually, it can get worse, but we won't talk about that – The point is to make sure we stay on the top of the scale with our wedding flowers, not the bottom).

The success of your wedding flower arrangements and decorations depends on your florist's attention to detail, sense of style, flair, expertise, and the connection that the two of you achieve. Don't assume that because a particular florist is highly respected you will get the wedding flower arrangement of your dreams. If there is no meeting of your minds, if you don't feel like they are grasping what you are trying to communicate about your wedding flowers, theme, or both, keep looking. In most cases your wedding flowers will be more to your liking with a your second choice that fully understands the theme and mood you are trying to set than with the reputed best florist in the city who isn't listening or just isn't managing to understand what you want from your wedding flowers.

Finding the right wedding flower specialist is easy if you begin your search prepared and know what to look for and what to stay away from: Being prepared means doing some dreaming about your wedding flowers. Doodle. Search bridal magazines. Look at wedding flower schemes in books and dream. Go to bridal shows. Go to weddings, if you can get an invitation, and dream. Collect pictures of wedding flower arrangements that you think will fit into the theme that you want to design your wedding flowers around. In short, have a pretty clear idea of what you want in your wedding flowers before you ever start visiting florists and bring pictures. This will help them understand your vision for your wedding flowers.

The second step is like the first: Don't even think of going to a florist without swatches of the material from your dress, the bridesmaid's dresses, and any other fabric that might affect the wedding color scheme (this is true of your cake decorator too). This is most especially true of your dress. White wedding dresses come in a wide variety of shades of white, so to ensure that the wedding flowers will properly accent your dress bring a swatch. A professional florist will know how to set it off so that the wedding flowers draw the attention to you in just the right way.

Once you have done your homework it is time to start actually looking for a florist to provide your wedding flowers. As in every other discipline, your first move should be to talk to people who have recently gotten married and get referrals from them.

There is no shame in learning from the success and failures of others and doing so will generally save you a lot of grief. In the process, no doubt, you will discover that while most any florist can provide wedding flowers, some are more skilled, gifted, and experienced than others. Your goal is to identify these people and choose one of them to take the stress of your wedding flower needs off your hands.



After you have a list of florists in hand, the visits begin. Pay attention to your first impression when you enter their shop. Remember, you are hiring a wedding flower professional for their attention to detail and their ability to create an atmosphere that invites you in. If their shop doesn't invite you in or seems extreme in relation to your personal style, most probably the wedding flowers they provide you won't be satisfactory to you either. There are always exceptions, but the chances are that this rule will prove true in your case. Do you really want to gamble on your wedding flowers just because your cousin Freda insisted that you had to use this particular florist?

Show the florist the wedding flower pictures and the swatches.

Talk.

Make sure they grasp the concept that you have in mind for your wedding flowers and understand your budget and any other constraints that you are operating under (i.e. facility rules, etc.), and then let them go to work. Resist the urge to micromanage. In most cases at least one of the florists you visit can make your ideas for wedding flower combinations come to life in a manner that you never dreamed of. At the same time, however, go over every detail of the proposal (including set up time and schedule – which will vary greatly depending on how much there is to set up for your wedding flowers and how many other weddings the florist has that same day) carefully before you sign the agreement to provide your wedding flowers. Get several proposals for your wedding flower needs before you decide. It's your wedding so be sure that you are getting the best wedding flowers for your budget.



Though it can be difficult to do, try not to get your heart too set on a particular type of wedding flowers (the possible exception to this might be your basic red rose). Flowers are beautiful but being living things they can be temperamental. Some flowers, such as gardenias and lilies are famous for triggering allergic reactions. If you have someone in your wedding party with bad allergies it might be wise to steer clear of flowers like these. Likewise, hollow stemmed flowers, such as the daffodils can drip sap on your wedding dress. Yes, this is a problem that can be overcome, but you need to be aware and prepared so your wedding flowers don't ruin your wedding dress. Other flowers, most notably the lilies will drop a yellow pollen stain on your gown if you don't have the wedding flower professional remove the stamens before you carry them down the aisle.

Two last notes about your wedding flowers. First, remember that not all flowers fare equally well in all types of weather. Some flowers wilt quickly in warm weather while other flowers actually turn black in colder temperatures. Either way you won't be happy with the flower's performance if you take it into a situation for which it is not suited.

Finally, remember that despite the advances in horticulture around the world, flowers (even wedding flowers) are still seasonal. Sure, if your pockets are deep enough, you might be able to have the florist import them from the other side of the globe but that

will be expensive and even at that, there are some flowers that just won't be available to join your wedding flowers in celebrating your marriage unless it's just the right season somewhere.

### **What are you paying for?**

The discipline of the florist is perhaps the most difficult discipline to get a consensus answer. In truth, it really depends on what flowers you are using for your wedding flowers. If you are having all of your flowers flown in from the four corners of the world, then the largest part of your wedding flower cost might well be the flowers themselves. In most cases, however, you are paying for the wedding flower professional's time, experience, and expertise. Mostly, you are paying to not have to worry about whether your wedding celebration takes place in the inviting atmosphere of your dreams, or not.

# Chapter Five

## Wedding Cakes Edible Art to Dress Your Wedding Reception



The wedding cake is the centerpiece of the wedding reception. It is a work of art created specifically to your specifications as a representation of the hope that you have for your new life together. At the same time, the wedding cake often serves as a dessert to symbolically allow each guest to enjoy the sweet savor of your new marriage.

The search for a bakery need not be an arduous task, but neither should it be put off until the last moment. Like other wedding professionals, the more skilled the cake decorator is, the more likely they are to book up leaving you to the unpleasant task of discovering a new talent or settling for second best.

Your selection for a bakery to produce your wedding cake begins with you and your future spouse. It begins with your decision about what is important to you:

- Is the taste of your wedding cake more important or is the appearance more important?

- Is the wedding cake going to be the only food served, or is it going to be just one of many deserts?

If appearance is most important in your wedding cake choice, and if money is not an object, you might want to choose a cake decorated with fondant icing to grace your wedding cake. Fondant gives the wedding cake a luxuriously smooth finish and allows the cake decorator to create designs that no other icing allows. The problem with fondant, however, is that it can cost as much as 30 % more than buttercream icing and most do not enjoy the taste, which could mean that most of your wedding cake will be left uneaten.

If taste is important to you in your wedding cake choice, then you probably want a buttercream icing. It tastes much better than fondant and while it will not get as smooth as fondant, it can still look stunning! Know, however, that many if not most bakeries make their buttercream icing with shortening. Unless you want your wedding cake to leave a greasy aftertaste make sure that the bakery you choose uses butter (which will produce a nice ivory colored icing) or white margarine. It will stand up nearly as well (I even know of one such wedding cake that stood up to one hundred three degree temperatures for more than three hours before the wedding party got to it – don't try it, but it worked in that dry climate) and will taste much better.



If neither is important to you but you still want a wedding cake, in most cases you will save money by going to a bakery that is attached to a grocery store. Be warned, however, that there have been reports that grocery store bakeries (and even some larger specialty bakeries) bake their wedding cakes weeks or even months in advance and freeze them to save time when the crunch is on to get your wedding cake delivered. Unfortunately, contrary to what some will tell you, frozen cakes are just not as good as a fresh cake.

After you have decided what is important to you in a wedding cake, it is time for you to do your homework. If you can get an invitation, go to every wedding that you can and look at the wedding cake and taste it. If you like what you see and taste, ask the bride or wedding coordinator about the bakery that provided it. Likewise, if you know someone that got married recently, ask them what bakery they used for their wedding cake and how they felt about their results.

Consider the design that you want. Yes, the pastry chef will be able to help you polish your design concept but in order for you to get a design that fits your wedding you need to have a pretty good idea what you want before you walk into the bakery.

Accomplish this task by:

- Sketching your ideas
- Searching online for cake pictures
- Searching through magazines

Just one thing: Be sure and include your [wedding cake topper](#) or [crystal wedding cake jewelry](#) into your design. You want the wedding cake and topper to look like a unified centerpiece for your wedding, not two pieces of art stuck together that may or may not match.

Next, it's time to begin visiting bakeries. When you do, be sure to taste their wedding cake samples. Don't let yourself be swayed by talk about the ingredients they use, taste their wedding cake samples and decide for yourself because, frankly, your guests aren't going to know if your wedding cake was made from flour imported from a water powered mill on the south bank of a coastal stream in upper Scotland. All they are going to know is whether or not your wedding cake tastes good and looks good. So let taste (and artistry) be your gauge in choosing your bakery to provide your cake.

Look at the pictures that the bakery has of past wedding cakes to decide if the bakery is even capable of doing what you have in mind. Toward this end, it is helpful to have a picture in hand to show the decorator what you want, that way they will know what part of their wedding cake portfolio to show you (though you might want to peruse the entire thing just in case you see a wedding cake that you like even better).

Take the time to talk to the decorator and try to develop a rapport. You may not have much contact with them once you place your order but it is important that you are certain that they have understood and are going to create the wedding cake that you want rather than some fantasy from their mind (which might or might not reflect your tastes and values).

To avoid surprises on your wedding day, ask your cake decorator how much time they need to set the cake up. In most cases they will need to set up one to two hours prior to the time the guests will begin arriving, but that all depends on the wedding cake you order and the other cakes your decorator has to deliver that same day. This will mean that your wedding cake location will need to already be established (in a highly visible but safe area – wedding cakes don't like fireplaces, children, and high traffic areas if your table is the least bit wobbly).

Likewise, ask about their policy for putting fresh flowers on the wedding cake, if your wedding cake design includes fresh flowers. Some cake decorators are very picky and will not allow the florist to place flowers on their cake (in fairness, in some cases this has come out of a bad experience where a bride wasn't happy with the cake after a florist placed flowers on the wedding cake). Of course, if the cake decorator is going to put the

flowers on the cake, the flowers will need to be in the reception hall when the cake is delivered. This way you can ensure that the flowers on the wedding cake match the rest of the flowers in your wedding and actually do get placed on the cake.

Also, ask about their policy regarding cake flavors. Some bakeries charge extra for a variety of flavors while others do not. Check also on delivery charges for your wedding cake as these too can vary greatly. If your wedding is close, delivery may be free, but if much travel is required expect to pay a delivery fee. Most bakeries will require, along with your initial deposit, a deposit for the cake plates and pillars. This deposit is usually returned as long as the plates and pillars are returned by an agreed upon time.



Likewise, if you want the bakery to match a color in your color scheme (such as the color of the bridesmaids dress) bring a swatch of the colored fabric to the initial consultation with your cake decorator. Her idea of mauve and your idea are probably not exactly the same so unless you want to run the risk of having colors that clash, provide a swatch. Be warned, though, icing has to be colored by hand so trying to match a color will be time consuming, which will mean more expense to you. If you want that elegant wedding cake but money is an issue consider a simpler design. A simple cake with ribbon or roses can look beautiful. Likewise, consider ordering a smaller wedding cake with plain sheet cakes to make up the difference in servings. The sheet cakes can be held behind the scenes and used to supplement the wedding cake and will hold down your cost tremendously.

### **What are you paying for?**

The primary cost in the building of a wedding cake which will adorn the wedding reception and feed your guests is labor. Each icing decoration, whether flowers or beading or lace work has to be done by hand and that means time, sometimes lots of it, and that translates into higher cost to you. Ingredients can be a factor as well. For example, if you want fresh strawberries in your filling in Vermont in December your cost will definitely increase. Other factors in the cost of your wedding cake can include how busy your cake decorator is at the time – if they are already full, but you want them to “squeeze you in,” be prepared to pay extra.

## Wedding Cakes: Money Saving Options

The wedding cake is to the reception as the bouquet is to the ceremony - and more. It is often the focal point of the decor for the reception hall standing tall and beautiful. Moreover, it is functional because it serves a dual purpose of providing, not only the symbolic imagery of the sweetness of a new marriage and the hope for all the goodness that will bring, but also because the wedding cake provides desert for the guests as well!

Indeed, to keep cost down many brides choose to skip the catered dinner completely in favor of cake and finger food because the wedding cake brings so much versatility to the wedding reception.

That does not mean, however, that no bride should ever consider how to save money on her wedding cake. Indeed, just a couple choices could make the difference of hundreds of dollars. That said, here are six suggestions for how to save money when ordering a wedding cake.

**Choose Buttercream Icing:** Many despise buttercream icing, and with good reason; often it is made with shortening and therefore tastes greasy. However, if you can find someone that makes their buttercream icing with real butter or white margarine (some less skilled bakeries will only use shortening because it is easier to work with because it holds up better in the humidity) it will taste divine and, in the hands of an artisan, can look nearly as smooth as fondant - without the cost. Often the savings over fondant are in the ballpark of one dollar per slice. \*See note below

**Choose Flavor:** This varies from one bakery to the next. Some bakeries demand that the cake be made entirely of a single cake flavor and requires an extra charge for orders that want more than one flavor. For example if a bride wanted banana cake for the top tier, chocolate for the middle tier, and traditional white for the bottom tier, there would be an extra charge in some bakeries. Other bakeries mix and match the tiers freely. I have never run into a bakery which will allow different flavors per layer without significantly increasing the cost as this would mean much more labor and waste. Check with your

local bakeries for options.

**Choose Natural:** The natural color for icing is either white or ivory (depending on ingredients). If a bride wants the icing to be another color, the pastry chef will have to tint the icing by hand and that will raise the price - significantly if the color is dark.

**Choose Simplicity:** Handmade icing decorations are expensive and can easily raise the price two hundred dollars or more in labor costs alone. Instead, provide fresh flowers, fresh fruit, or even silk flowers etc. Or, spend the money on vines, medallions, or monograms of crystal wedding cake jewelry that you will be able to use both on your wedding cake and in your home decor for years to come.

**Choose Fresh:** Even wrapped expertly, cake stored in the freezer until the first anniversary will taste old and freezer burnt. Save money by using the top tier to feed the guests. The couple can always return to the original bakery and order a small six or eight inch replica cake in time for their anniversary when the budget has recovered - and it will taste much better.

**Choose Taste:** Choosing a Pastry Chef that will make a cake that your guests will enjoy actually saves brides the expense of feeling that they need to go to the expense of providing an alternate dessert as well.

\* **One last thing:** A bride planning to mount an outdoor wedding should think seriously about paying the extra money for fondant icing unless the weather is sure to stay at or under seventy degrees. Buttercream will normally hold well above room temperature if the humidity is low, but... Fondant is much more reliable in the heat, sun, and humidity.

# Chapter Six

## Wedding Favors: Something Small to Say a Big Thank You



["Lucky in Love" Dice Favor Boxes](#)

Unlike anything else in your wedding planning, wedding favors are your opportunity to provide a special surprise for your guests that says thank you for sharing your special day. Likewise, wedding favors are often a keepsake to remind the individual of the event long after the wedding day has passed. This is nice for everyone, but it can have a special significance for people within communities of faith who can use that favor as a symbol to remind them to pray for you as you build your marriage.

Fortunately, wedding favors needn't cost an arm and a leg. Rather, most wedding favors range in cost from fifty cents to a few dollars each (though you can spend more if your budget allows).

There are no rules for wedding favors. Your wedding won't be shut down if you provide chocolate at an outdoor reception in one hundred degree weather (not a good idea) and your guests won't walk out if you neglect wedding favors altogether, but why would you do that?

1. After all, you thought enough of them to invite them, and
2. They took time out of their lives to join in the celebration of your marriage.

Both reasons are good enough to justify expressing your appreciation with a token of your gratitude (wedding favor).

In choosing your wedding favors, begin by finalizing your guest list so you have a pretty good idea how many wedding favors to buy. As nice as your wedding favors are, you aren't going to want an extra seventy four golf ball bottle openers left over after your wedding has come and gone. Be sure, however, that you take into account the percentage that RSVP's late or shows up without RSVPing. Yes, that's bad etiquette, but that's the way life works sometimes.

Once you have a head count and at least a rough idea of what your budget will support, the fun begins. As we said earlier, there are no rules to giving wedding favors, so have fun! You want the wedding favors to be memorable, so look for a way to match the wedding favor to you as a couple. If you are getting married near Christmas, why not get Christmas tree placecard holder as a wedding favor? By the way, placecard holders are especially good wedding favors if you are having a formal dinner with assigned seating because then your wedding favor serves to identify the individual's seat as well.



["Seashells" Cupcake Holders](#)



["Sweetheart" Pink Heart Bottle Stopper](#)

If you and your intended met at the beach, or are famous among your circle of friends for always being at the beach, what could be a more suitable wedding favor than sailboat themed tea light holders, sea shell spreaders, or clam shaped bath fizzes? Perhaps you and your future spouse are writers, what could be more perfect wedding favors than personalized pens?

In some cases, wedding favors come in the form of an edible treat. It's a special truffle, a personalized container of coffee printed with your name and wedding date printed on the bag, or it's a specially decorated cookie, or a small jar of honey with your name and date on it, or, or, or.... Just one note when dealing with edible wedding favors; remember that food allergies can really spoil a celebration. Most people know what they are allergic to, so find a way to announce (a printed card placed in a conspicuous spot on the table works great) the type of edible wedding favors so no one discovers the truth the hard way.



[Silver Key Chain with Heart Frame](#)

Of course, the list of options in wedding favors is as endless as your imagination. If you can dream a wedding favor up and fit it into your budget chances are good that you can find someone to provide that perfect wedding favor for your wedding celebration.

### **Children:**

A good way to make your wedding favors serve a dual purpose is to be sure to have special favors for the children that will be at your wedding reception. Below are a few suggestions:

- Coloring books and small pack of crayons (remember there are no rules here so coloring books could be excellent wedding favors). These wedding favors might work to keep peace at your reception in the same way they do at restaurants.
- Hand held game or small puzzle.
- Cookies – Order [cookie wedding favors](#), have your bakery make special cookies for your wedding, or have Aunt Margie make them. Either way, cookies tend to be a great way to keep the hands of the little ones occupied.
- Wedding Bubbles – If you have a place outdoors where the children can go to use the bubbles this can be a great way to keep the children happy. Just be certain to use bubbles formulated specifically for weddings so junior doesn't spill on himself and stain the new suit his parents just bought for him.
- Playing Card Favors – Have a lot of older children coming to your wedding reception? Provide them with playing card wedding favors to keep them happy.



[Flip Flop Playing Cards](#)

If your budget is tight but you still want to give a wedding favor as a token of your love and appreciation, consider buying fewer wedding favors than anticipated guests and putting them in a basket on a table for people to pick up on their way out. This way, those that don't care to take a wedding favor can leave the wedding favor behind

gracefully without any danger of anyone's feelings being hurt. Another option, which will cut your cost nearly in half is to provide one wedding favor per couple (it is still in good form to provide one wedding favor each for people who come by themselves). A third option is to make wedding favors yourself. This can be a fun project for the bridesmaids (but not the night before the wedding) to do with the bride. For example, a few bags of candy coated chocolates, a length of tulle, and some ribbon will produce fun little treats that you can give as a wedding favor. It really doesn't matter what you do, ultimately it's the gesture that makes the difference not the wedding favor itself.

Finally, wedding favors can serve as the finishing touches of your decorating scheme that ties everything else together. For example, your wedding is in the spring, you've got flowers everywhere, what could be better than a wedding favor of a small vase with a flower for each person (or couple)? Or maybe spring colored tiny pails with pastel candies in them would be the wedding favor for you. It really doesn't matter. Use wedding favors to show your appreciation and love to those who took the time to come to celebrate your wedding while at the same time making your wedding favors work for you!

### What are you paying for?

In most cases the largest part of your cost in wedding favors is going to be labor. This is especially true if you purchase wedding favors that you have personalized with your names and wedding date. It can be special to have a souvenir that anyone can identify with your wedding, but someone has to do the work of printing, or engraving. Of course many wedding favors, especially the edible kind, can be purchased and assembled by the wedding party, in which case your cost is greatly reduced.



[Silver-Plated, Heart-Shaped Unity-Candle Holder](#)

# Chapter Seven

## Getting the Most from Your Wedding Budget

Depending on the expert you read, recent estimates tell us that the average North American couple's wedding budget is more than \$22,000 (and many estimates place the total north of \$26,000!) on the wedding ceremony and reception whether they realize it or not. If they have the money to spend on such an event without putting themselves in financial jeopardy, more power to them. With that kind of wedding budget they could do so very much. They could build a wedding event that is much more than most brides ever achieve. However, if the money is not there...

Or if they have the money for that kind of wedding budget but could make better use of it some other way... To buy that first house... to start a college fund for the children... to pay off their own college loans... to have a more memorable honeymoon... to start a business... whatever the reason!

Can you have a memorable, striking wedding for less money?

Of course.

All that is needed is a little research of the wedding industry, some prioritizing on the wedding budget, and a commitment to planning rather than simply gathering for a dream wedding to come together that is truly as unique as the people involved.

This works because most brides make the mistake of panicking themselves into simply gathering the decorative touches they have seen in other weddings rather than planning. As a result they end up purchasing elements that do not really fit the wedding they are trying to put together.

A second reason this approach to wedding planning works is simply that by not understanding how the wedding industry works they end up blowing their wedding budget as a result. This takes a little time when time is precious, but it is worth it to understand what is reasonable to expect of each wedding professional and what is not. If you work with the wedding professional you will normally end up getting more for your money than if you put yourself in an adversarial role with them.

So take the time to plan out the wedding of your dreams. Think through the different options to make it happen. Some methods will be more expensive than others. Choose carefully. Not all options are equal. Often the less expensive method can work as well.

In the meantime, here are ten simple, yet practical suggestions that can help save a lot of money when planning a wedding:

- 1) Borrow or rent that wedding dress that will only be worn once
- 2) Have attendants bring their digital cameras to the hair salon rather than paying a photographer to follow you around all day
- 3) Reduce the number of guests
- 4) Limit the number of attendants
- 5) Hold the wedding and reception on a family member's property to save the cost of venue rental
- 6) Use locally grown flowers that are in season
- 7) Resist the pressure to commission both an ice sculpture and a wedding cake - both are designed to be a design focal point for the reception and two focal points do not work in any decor. Choose.
- 8) Use grazing stations filled with favorite delicacies instead of a sit-down dinner
- 9) Have an alcohol-free receptions. If you have to have bar, have a cash bar, or close the bar during dinner
- 10) Consider an off-season wedding (November through April) to reduce venue costs

There is nothing wrong with wanting to mount a wedding that all will look back on with fondness. Plan. Dream. Shoot for the grandest wedding celebration you can manage. But always remember that there is everything right with being wise in the use of your wedding budget.

## Chapter Eight

### Your Wedding Accessories Checklist

The art of planning a wedding goes deeper than choosing your location, flowers, photography, and cake. As we all know, there are a ton of details to be attended to. Of course, there is no way that this chapter could cover every possible detail – And remember there is no rule that says any given wedding has to have everything that has ever been created for weddings - nor does this list try to cover every possible detail, but it does at least give you a good starting point in making certain that all of the most common details are attended to. Simply print these pages out and place a check mark in the box next to each item as you have it taken care of.

Fortunately, with the internet it is easy to shop for most items without wasting gas or the time it takes to run all over town. Click on either the blue links or the pictures (some pictures do not have links) to browse the selection from the comfort of your computer chair.



○ **Invitations -** From [invitations in bottles](#) to traditional [wedding invitation kits](#) these offer newly engaged couples the opportunity to announce their wedding in the personalized style they desire.



○ **Save the Date Cards** - An essential tool for weddings with guests coming from out of town and for weddings scheduled for holidays. Mail [Save the Date cards](#) approximately five months before your wedding unless cross or international travel is required. In such circumstances eight to nine months prior to the wedding is not unreasonable.

Often made of a magnetized material so that your intended guest can keep it on their refrigerator, Save the Date cards are intended to be sent to those who are actually on your guest list. This tells them that they will, indeed, be receiving an invitation.



○ **Unity Candles** - Most wedding ceremonies make use a [unity candle](#), a sand ceremony, or some other kind of unity ceremony to symbolize the new union of the young couple.



○ **Toasting Flutes** - [Toasting flutes](#) are more than a pair of glasses you drink from at your wedding. They are a keepsake to be used as you cherish the romance of your relationship through the years. Fortunately, they come in styles designed to fit every décor.



- Guest Book & Pen Set - Keep a formal record of who attended your wedding with [wedding guest book and pen sets](#) that match the style of your wedding!



- Single Use Cameras - Your wedding photographer can't be everywhere at once. By providing your guests with disposable single use cameras you not only give your guests something fun to do, but you raise your chances of getting at least one picture of everyone at your wedding celebration – and, of catching that one, unforgettable moment on film.



- Wedding Cake Toppers - From elegant [crystal wedding cake jewelry](#) (shown) to a humorous [wedding cake topper](#), wedding cake toppers go a long way toward both finishing the reception décor and providing a keepsake that can be cherished for life – and in the case of much of the crystal wedding cake jewelry, can be used as accent pieces in floral or green displays in the home for years to come.



## ○ Cake Knife & Serving Sets -

Keepsake quality serving [cake serving sets](#) for use in the cutting of the cake ceremony (think photographs) and as a reminder of your big day for years to come.



○ Garter Belts - Wahoo! The [wedding garter](#) ceremony is always one of the most fun events of any wedding celebration.

○ Wedding Shoes — In order to make your wedding shoes match your gown you have to either;

1. Get very lucky, or
2. Purchase a pair of [dyeable wedding shoes](#) and have them professionally dyed. It is not cheap, but then this is a once in a lifetime event. You don't want to have to worry about your shoes.



○ Barefoot Sandals - Any and every bride is on her feet most all day at a wedding. [Barefoot sandals](#) give her the option of taking off her shoes without looking too casual. Of course, *barefoot sandals are a must have for beach weddings!*

## ○ Wedding Day Survival Kits -



Survival Kit for Brides



Survival Kit for Grooms

- [Wedding day survival kits](#) are kits that contain the essentials for every bride or groom. That means all those little things that drive every one crazy when they go wrong. Things like stain remover, toothpaste, clippers, feminine hygiene necessities, straight pins. Yes, it's largely items we all have, but the wedding day survival kit has it all in one discreet case that makes a great basis for a first aid kit in your new home. Makes a great pre wedding gift for your future spouse!



## ○ Flower Girl Supplies -

- Where the bride is the belle of the ball, the [flower girl](#) provides the cuteness factor. Typically, you need both:

- Flower Basket
- Gift for your flower girl



- [Ring Bearer Supplies](#) - Complete the couple with a dapper young man as your ring bearer.
  - Ring bearer's pillow
  - Gift for your ring bearer



- [Gifts for Bridesmaids](#) - Enough said.



- [Gifts for Groomsmen](#) - Ditto.



- [Wedding Rice](#) - Created to solve the environmental problems that normal rice and bird seed pose and it will not stain guest's formal wear like the toy store bubbles people often use.



○ **Wedding Bubbles -** - If you choose to use [wedding bubbles](#) as a part of your festivities, be sure to buy bubbles that are specifically formulated to protect your guest's formal wear.



○ **Battery Operated Tea Lights -** There is nothing like the flickering of candle light to create a romantic ambiance. Now, when your circumstances prohibit the use of actual candles you have a reliable option with [battery operated tea light candles](#).