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Take a bite out of these wedding cake options

omething sweet comes near the end of a wedding reception and that is the joy the couple experiences knowing they have their entire lives ahead of them to enjoy together. However, there is another sweet treat that is shared near the conclusion of the wedding and it is typically served with tea and coffee: the wedding cake.

Wedding cake traditions can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Cakes represented good luck and fertility for the couples tying the knot. The first wedding cakes were rather bland and breadlike, representing purity and virginity. Some were quite like the fruitcake now enjoyed during the holiday season. Eventually wedding cakes transformed into the sweet confections that are known today.

The modern wedding cake as most know it debuted at the 1882 wedding of Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany. His wedding cake was actually the first to be completely edible. Previously, some cakes featured wooden broomstick pillars covered in icing, but the Duke's cake used a hardened type of icing, according to Edible Art Bakery and Dessert Café.

Couples today have many options when picking their wedding cakes. The following are some wedding cake tidbits to chew on.

• Couples can choose among various cake styles. Many opt for a classic style, which is typically a white or ivory tiered cake with simple, elegant decorations. Rustic cakes may be much less ornate, while



modern cakes may be rectangular or square and feature clean lines and minimalist decoration. The cake should fit the overall theme and scope of the wedding as it is another complementary component of the larger celebration.

Wedding cake traditions can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans.

• Couples have many flavors to choose from. Vanilla is classic and quite popular because it appeals to a vast number of people. Lemon, chocolate, and carrot are some other popular cake flavors.

•When it comes to frosting a cake, there are various outer coatings that will encapsulate the cake to make it both beautiful and durable. Buttercream, Swiss meringue, fondant, cream cheese, and ganache all can be used in various applications. Some bakers attest that Swiss meringue, due to the addition of egg whites, makes it a more stable option over traditional buttercreams, particularly during warm weather. Of course, couples can opt for a "naked cake," which usually has a scant amount of frosting so that the cake underneath peeks through.

• Wedding cakes can be quite costly. Wedding Wire estimates the average wedding cake costs around \$500. One way for couples to save on their cake is to have a faux cake on display, with one tier that is made from cake and can be cut. Guests will then be served slices of a sheet cake that is much less expensive.

Couples and their guests look forward to indulging in wedding cake near the end of the reception. The looks and flavors of a wedding cake can be as unique as the couple saying, "I do."

Did you know?

Choosing a location to get married requires careful consideration. Some couples prefer to get married in their hometowns — citing convenience, familiarity, and support of local businesses — while others want to jet off to far-flung destinations.

According to The Knot 2025 Real Weddings Study, 60 percent of couples choose to get married where they

currently live, 23 percent opt for a hometown venue, and 18 percent select a destination wedding. The truth is there are many domestic and international spots that are prime locations for weddings. The Knot says the French Riviera; Punta Mita, Mexico; Spain; Costa Rica; Portugal; and Greece are popular picks for destination weddings.

People who want to stay closer to home often opt for the Hudson Valley and the Catskills, New York, for a farm or ranch wedding, and the Rockies in Colorado for a mountain venue. According to Google data and the travel and lifestyle firm Holidu, Chicago is the most searched urban area for wedding venues over the past year, followed by Long Island, New York and Dallas, Texas. Other popular cities for getting hitched include San Diego, Las Vegas, Atlanta, and New Orleans.

Ultimately, the wedding city location will depend on the couple's budget, the number of guests, personal preference and guests' convenience.



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Getting married? Getting engaged? Time for a ring!

BY LINDA BAKER

here will be no other celebration in your life where you will make a solemn commitment to the person you love ... a vow that symbolizes all that is incredible, loving, and exceptional in your partner. These momentous promises are often "cemented" with the exchange of engagement and wedding rings, and these rings need to withstand the test of time, lasting through the years of marriage ahead.

It is always tempting to be the first to have something new and untested, something no one else has ... but this is also a time to have something that will not fade into obscurity or wear poorly. Quality does not always equate to being more expensive ... the true inherent value for engagement and wedding bands are that you are still wearing them for your 5th, 10th, or 20th anniversary. So here are some quick tips:

Try to purchase metals that are noble — those especially resistant to corrosion and oxidation, hard but malleable, able to be formed into jewelry. Ideally, choose 14k gold (white or yellow), platinum (along with any of the platinum family of metals), and somewhat less desirable sterling silver. (My parents were married over 55 years and I inherited my mom's plain gold band which I still wear on occasion today.)

It would be far better to choose a lighter weight gold band than a large chunky steel, silver, or even wooden band. Most alternate metals such as steel cannot be sized or repaired, where noble metals can usually be repaired or sized and retain inherent value that increases over the



years. As for prongs on engagement rings and wedding bands, they should be 14k gold, 18k gold or platinum.

In the world of diamonds and gemstones, Princess Diana got engaged with a stunning blue sapphire, so don't always feel limited to diamonds. Additionally, today there are diamonds being created in laboratories which sell at a small fraction of the cost of mined from the earth natural diamonds.

Wedding and engagement rings should say to your partner, 'I love you and want to spend my life with you.'

Most importantly in this market, you must know what you are purchasing and pay accordingly. All stones chosen for bridal jewelry should be hard and durable, as well as beautiful. Diamond, sapphire (in all colors: pink, green, orange, etc.), ruby, aguamarine, and other colored gems are all suitable. Regrettably, turquoise, coral, pearl, jade, quartz, peridot, tourmaline and garnet may not be suitable for lifetime wear. However, if you have a dream color or gem in mind, there is usually a durable substitute just ask your jeweler for guidance.

This should be a joyful experience, but sometimes focusing on minute details will undermine the joy of the shopping process. Have fun, and always remember the rings are a symbol of your love for each other. When shopping or discussing a purchase, ask questions. Issues such as setting the center stone too high off the finger will have a negative impact on the wearability of the ring. Having a ring that is too large a size for your finger will also affect its wearability and eventually will lead to major issues with the ring, requiring repair or re-design.

Wedding and engagement rings should say to your partner, "I love you and want to spend my life with you." You chose your partner wisely ... do the same with your

Author Linda Baker is manager of Ecolin Jewelers in Stony Brook Village.

What to know before a wedding gown shopping trip

eddings mark a turning point from one stage in life to another. The significance of that transition is perhaps one reason why couples and their guests dress so nicely for a wedding ceremony and reception.

Formal garb is a wedding tradition, and guests anxiously await seeing which type of gown a bride will wear. In western cultures, white wedding gowns have been the standard since the nineteenth century and are believed to symbolize purity and grace. In eastern cultures, wedding gowns often have been elaborate, colorful creations that have their own symbolic meanings unique to various areas of the world.

Shopping for a wedding gown can spark mixed emotions. While it is exciting to try on some remarkable garments. there also is the pressure of knowing all eyes will be on you while wearing this couture creation. Narrowing down wedding gown prospects can take vision, time and patience. The following pointers can help when it comes time to visit bridal shops.



Make an appointment

Many bridal shops operate by appointment only. That's because the staff wants to devote complete attention to a client, and having people simply walk in from the street can draw their few weeks for alterations. KWH Bridal notes attention away and/or lead to long wait times. Identify the stores you want to visit, and then call to secure your time slot. Arrive to an appointment well-rested, fed and comfortable.

Narrow down styles

Think about what your personal style might be and how you want to look on your wedding day. If you're not sure about the vocabulary surrounding dress silhouettes, visit Pinterest or Instagram and save images of dresses that you love. Then you can show the sales staff what you are thinking instead of going in empty-handed.

Keep an open mind

Try on a few different styles even if you have a particular dress in mind. You never know if something might be a better fit for your body type or the scope and style of your wedding unless you give it a go.

Start the process early

Unlike off-the-rack clothing, most wedding shops will have to order your dress and have it shipped. Then comes a

eight to 12 months before a wedding is a good time to choose and order a dress. Brides magazine says most made-to-order wedding gowns take about six to nine months to create. There also are three separate fittings to ensure the gown will fit like a glove.

Invite a handful of confidantes

It's best not to arrive at the shopping appointment with an entire entourage. Pick, at the most, four people whose opinions you trust; otherwise, it could be a case of too many cooks in the kitchen. As a bride-to-be you'll already be anxious, and you'll want soothing, supportive people with you.

Plan your budget

Know well in advance what you can afford to spend. According to data from The Knot, wedding attire accounts for 7 percent of the average couple's budget. Most wedding gowns are in the range of \$2,000. Don't forget about additional costs, such as veil, shoes, alterations, undergarments, and any add-ons.



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Songs to consider for a first dance



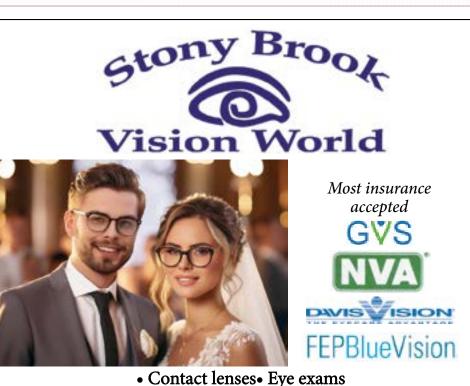
Traditions abound during weddings, from wearing something blue to a couple not seeing each other the night before the nuptials to a bride tossing the bouquet to eager singletons in the crowd.

A couple's first dance is another enduring and popular tradition. The first dance harkens back to centuries ago when royalty or prestigious families would hold balls and it was customary for the guest of honor to engage in a first dance to start the festivities with a grand opening. Today,

lavish balls have all but disappeared, but with weddings are still important events, and the first dance lives on during many of these parties.

Choosing a song for a first dance is among the decisions couples make when planning their weddings. All genres and eras can be considered. Here are some of the more popular first dance songs this year to consider for your big day:

All of Me by John Legend All My Life by WILD Somebody Like You by Keith Urban **Perfect** by Ed Sheeran Joy of My Life by Chris Stapleton Ho Hey by The Lumineers Rewrite the Stars by Zac Efron/Zendaya Beautiful Things by Benson Boone Birds of a Feather by Billie Eilish Until I Found You by Stephen Sanchez For the First Time by Kenny Loggins I Don't Want to Miss A Thing by Aerosmith Amazed by Lonestar **Yours** by Russell Dickerson 10,000 hours by Dan + Shay Marry Me by Train Can't Help Falling in Love by Elvis Presley



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Your wedding invitations: Tips, timelines and trends

BY MELINDA CANTOR

he invitation is your love story in ink and the first formal piece of artwork your guests will receive that represents your big day! It can be challenging and overwhelming to find the right invitation designer that understands your style and at the same time exceeds your expectations.

TIPS

Find the perfect local invitation Pro

Your invitation pro should be a master at typography, creatively package information, understand printing processes, and properly word a formal wedding invitation. You should have a line of communication at all stages of your order so your vision will be guaranteed to come to life in a stunning invitation ensemble. Bridal shows, reviews and referrals are great ways to find local professionals.

Define your vision

Be specific: Clearly specify the style, color palette, and design elements you envision. Consider the formality, ambiance, season, venue, and tone of the event.

Gather inspiration: Share images or examples of invitations that you love, to give the pro a clear understanding of your aesthetic. Request to see different paper types, colors, and embellishments.

Set a budget: A good designer can assist in determining your budget, which helps in selecting a suite within your financial means. The process begins with identifying the ensemble pieces and quantity required, followed by understanding the different printing styles and processes (digital printing, foil, letterpress) along with their associated costs.

Pro tip: Consider inquiring about including your welcome and rehearsal invites with your ensemble to save on postage costs. Additionally, ask about an all-in-one QR code response/detail card.

Start your invitation journey six to eight months before your wedding date or two seasons ahead. Make sure you have all your inspiration and notes gathered and you know the quantity of ensembles you

This timeframe gives you and your designer two to three months to; gather materials, finalize wording, perfect the design, and get your approval on a live printed sample prior to printing. This is the recipe for success!

Your invitations should be mailed approximately 3 months before your



wedding date, allowing your guests one month to respond and time for you to call guests that did not respond to your rsvp date.

Leaving you with at least six weeks before the wedding, you are now ready to create your seating arrangements, menus and all the printed details needed for the wedding day.

Based on your date and time of year there are certain exceptions.

If you are getting married around a major holiday and/or need an "A" and "B" list, add an extra month to the mailing time frame. Destination wedding invitations should go out at least nine months ahead and a save the date one year in advance is a must for guests to book reservations.

Quick overview:

Winter weddings – order in the Summer Spring weddings -order in the Fall Summer weddings – order in the Winter Fall weddings – order in the Spring

TRENDS

In 2025, couples can choose personalized wedding invitation designs that match their themes. Here are some trending concepts:

Custom Art: Personalized illustrations, maps, and monograms.

Typography: Handwritten script, contemporary formal, and minimalist clean designs are popular.

Vintage & Romantic: Antique lace, floral motifs, wax seals, and embossing; Vellum wraps for elegance.

Eco-friendly: Recycled paper, eco-inks, plantable, and biodegradable options are preferred.

Colors: Blues, earth tones, pastels, and vibrant combinations; watercolor floral designs remain popular.

The author is the owner of Melinda Cantor Designs, Custom Invitations in Port Jefferson.

Unique elements to include at your wedding reception

ouples who are currently planning their wedding undoubtedly hope the day will one they remember forever. Weddings will be memorialized in people's minds and on film and video, and setting an occasion apart from other weddings and big events may come down to some creative touches that truly make it unique. Here are some interesting elements that merit consideration, many of which involve interactive entertainment.

Make a grand entrance.

Couples need not feel beholden to taking a limousine to and from their weddings. Fans of the movie "Batman" can rent a Batmobile replica. Those who couldn't get enough of "Breaking Bad" may want to roll up in an RV. There's also the option of a horse-drawn carriage or a sports car.

Photo booth

There is a reason why photo booths complete with entertaining props and various backdrops are so popular. A photo booth is a great way for guests to capture the day and take home a memento. Couples can review the photo booth images and enjoy snippets of unscripted and unposed moments from the party.



Live painter

Hiring an artist to capture the festivities can be a truly unique feature. While photography packages and wedding albums come with some turn-around time, a painting will be done at the end of the reception and can give couples a glimpse of the evening right away.

Interesting sweets display

Couples can elevate their wedding receptions by offering guests something that's a cut above a piece of wedding cake. A "Viennese Hour," also known as a "Venetian Hour," is a popular wedding tradition. This hour features a lavish dessert buffet presented after the cake cutting.

Couples need not have a traditional Venetian Hour, however. They can offer a table filled with various candies, cordials, doughnuts, cupcakes, or whatever special sweet they want to showcase. Serve with monogrammed napkins.

Entertaining performance

Performers can run the gamut from cultural dancers celebrating a couple's heritage to magicians to even a specialized singer. In addition to a band or DJ, this performer can engage the audience and provide them with a bona fide show.

Cigar Bar

For a more sophisticated touch, offer a cigar bar with a selection of premium cigars.

Signature cocktails

Whether a couple chooses an entire open bar or has select alcoholic offerings for quests, a signature cocktail can make the reception even more special. Tie the drink's ingredients or theme into something that pertains to the couple's interests or history. For example, if the couple sipped Moscow Mules on their first date, serve a First Date Mule at the wedding reception.

Couples can embrace various extra special touches to make their wedding receptions more memorable.



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~Marianne D'

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