

CHOOSING A WEDDING CATERER

The food that is served at your wedding reception will be something your guests will talk about and remember. One sure way to please them is to satisfy their hunger and sweet tooth with a delicious, well-planned menu.

You're going to want one that comes highly recommended and is pleasant to work with. These caterers are popular, so book them as soon as you have set a wedding date and have made the decision to hire them.

Wedding Caterers usually have photos of previous wedding receptions they've worked. This will give you an idea of how organized they are and how you may want your own serving tables arranged. Get the details in writing.

Here are a Few Things to Consider as you Prepare to hire your Wedding Caterer

- Check with your venue to find out whether an outside caterer is allowed or if you are limited to an on-site provider or a list of preferred caterers.
- As a starting point, gather references from family and friends. Been to a wedding lately where you were impressed with the food? Ask the couple about the caterer and if they were happy with their work. You can also ask for references from other wedding vendors you've already selected such as the photographer, reception venue, or your wedding consultant if you have one.
- From your references, create a list of three or four preliminary options to start narrowing down your choice. Call, email, and visit their websites to get a better "feel" for each caterer. Before you actually meet with any, find out their company history, how long they've been in business, if they have any particular specialties, and of course their availability on your wedding date.
- Once you've determined which caterers you would still like to meet with, schedule interviews to meet personally with each one. The caterer should show you a portfolio full of sample menus and photographs of past weddings they have catered.
- Ask each caterer about cost – how much is a buffet versus plated dinners? How about a cocktail hour and hors d'oeuvres or a dessert bar? Inquire about additional costs and fees for linens, tables and chairs, silverware, and other food-related items. If you are planning to serve alcohol, find out if that's something the caterer can provide and what the cost is.
- Do a taste test with each caterer you interview and sample a couple dishes you are interested in serving at the wedding. Do a similar taste test for cake if that's something the caterer will also be providing.

Where You Can Save on Catering Costs

You can save money by serving a sit-down luncheon in lieu of a fancy dinner. Order food that is in season and easy to obtain. Enlist your family and friends to help with setting up, serving and clean up. Ask the caterer if you're allowed to bring some of your own entrees, condiments or desserts to help cut costs.

- The food often represents the greatest percentile expenditure of any function. Therefore, it is to this point people often look to reduce overall costs. Obviously, cutting the guest list will reduce these costs, but if your heart is set on including your husband's cousin's nephew, I offer these guidelines:
- Go for a less ambitious function. Serving cocktails and hors d'oeuvres after the dinner hour is a much less expensive

proposition.

- Have an afternoon affair instead of an evening function. This again avoids the dinner hour when people require a full meal. (Also, liquor consumption tends to be much lower in the afternoon than in the evening).
- Present the food on beautifully appointed buffet tables instead of having a served, sit-down meal. Although the food costs for a buffet can be higher than for plate service, the service requirements are much lower; generally making the buffet a lower priced alternative.
- Serve the meal “family style”. If you want the “feel” of a sit-down meal but would like to reduce service costs, consider having the food served on large platters at the table where everyone helps themselves. As with a buffet, the food costs will be higher (due to the impossibility of predicting with any accuracy how much people will eat) but this is usually compensated by the lower service costs.
- Pay attention to food costs. As a consumer, you recognize the difference in price between grocery items. In a catered meal, the price difference between a prime rib and chicken dinner should be represented in the menu costs. However, do not expect to pay less for a dish where the preparation is extensive (as in a Chicken Wellington dish for example). The price of a labor-intensive chicken dish can far exceed the price of a simply prepared good quality cut of beef. Rule of Thumb: The base cost of a food plus the degree of difficulty in its preparation usually determine the menu price of an item. If you focus on inexpensive food items that require uncomplicated preparations, the menu cost will likely be substantially lower.
- Serve coffee and tea from one location rather than having serving personnel provide individual service. Again, this will reduce the number of service staff required. Or, have staff place individual coffee thermoses at each table so guests can help themselves