



WEDDING CAKE *design & taste*

BY ANNA DELOACH | THE CAKE SHOP OF SAN JOSE

Next to your dress, your cake will be the most talked about thing at your wedding. That's a big reason to spend a little time thinking about the design and taste of something that will be a focal point of your reception. Your guests are coming to help you celebrate a very special day—why not reward them with a delicious confection that really gives them something to talk about.

Think about the elements of your wedding such as dress style or reception décor and what you want to say with your choice, then go from there. Your cake can be elegant and understated, whimsical and outrageous, all white, or very colorful.



*Express yourself
and have fun
with your design.*



Today's cakes are flavorful with moist, fluffy fillings and frostings made with real butter and natural flavorings. Popular flavors include:

Lemon sponge with Lemon Curd filling, Vanilla cake with Fresh Strawberry filling and Hazelnut cake with Praline filling and mocha buttercream.

Some couples choose different flavors for each tier, but beware; some guests may want to try some of each!

On a tight budget? Order a smaller wedding cake for your reception and supplement with "kitchen cakes". These are undecorated cakes, of the same flavor as your wedding cake that are cut in the kitchen then served after you have cut your smaller wedding cake. Most of the cost of a wedding cake is the labor of assembling and decorating, which includes constructing a cake so it doesn't lean or fall. The cost per serving for these supplemental cakes should be much lower than that of a towering creation. Another option for a smaller cake is using a lovely pedestal or silver cake plateau to enhance the presentation. Your cake designer may include the use of a stand with your cake or you may consider renting one.



Can't decide? The Groom's cake offers something completely different.

Chocolate cake with a fruit such as chocolate dipped berries is a favorite. Sculpted cakes, shaped and decorated to look like a favorite school mascot, hobby, career theme or sports icon are gaining in popularity and can be a lot of fun for your guests. Groom's cakes can be served at the rehearsal dinner or at the wedding reception.



Centerpiece Cakes (one for each table at the reception) are very popular. Each one or two tiered cake is usually placed on a small pedestal or plate to create an edible centerpiece at each table. The bride and groom may opt for the same design or a slightly larger cake for their table.

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Over the last few years, cupcakes arranged on tiers of platters to look like one large cake have been a fun alternative to a single, large cake. Couples are taking the concept a step further and stacking other desserts such as petit fours, key lime and fruit tartlets.



Another popular concept is the *Sweets Table* or *Pastry Table*: A smaller version of a wedding cake is surrounded by assorted pedestals and platters of miniature desserts, or petit fours, such as bite-sized cheesecakes, tartlets, decorated cookies, chocolate dipped berries and candies. This is a nice alternative for couples who love desserts and it is definitely a crowd pleaser.

Monograms are a growing trend. Your monogram may be incorporated into the cake design as a plaque on the side of one of your tiers or as a freestanding cake topper. Made of sugar, these become hand-made works of art.



Another popular trend is the use of hand made sugar bouquets, complete with sugar ribbons, as cake toppers. They have replaced the more traditional floral toppers.

Cake design has really become an art. Embellishment, in the form of scrollwork, hand colored sugar flowers or pearls is very popular. Elements from your dress or a favorite piece of jewelry can be carried over to your cake design.

Before meeting with your baker, it may be helpful to understand some of the basics:

Cake construction starts with the *tiers*, also called layers. Tiers can be *stacked*, which means they are placed directly on top of each other, or separated by columns. The columns are usually made of clear or white plastic, something that is definitely “out” this year. If you are choosing columns to add height to your cake, try to choose a design that hides or places less emphasis on them.

Rolled fondant, pliable sugar dough, has become more popular in the past few years. Rolled out thinly and draped over each tier, it gives cakes a smooth, porcelain-like look. It is very white, but can be tinted beautifully with any color. Fondant is sweet like marshmallow cream with an almost chewy texture. Those who work regularly with fondant have found ways to flavor it and make it quite tasty. Most bakers frost their cakes with regular buttercream before covering them with fondant, so you can really get the best of both worlds. Fondant is ideal for outdoor weddings where regular buttercream may become too sticky or attract unwanted visitors.

There are several types of frostings to consider. The name *Buttercream* encompasses several different types. The traditional buttercream in the pastry world is made with an egg white and sugar meringue into which beaten butter is incorporated. This results in a deliciously rich and fluffy frosting, which can be flavored with liqueur, fruit or white chocolate. This buttercream does not hold up as well as other frostings in Florida heat and humidity, but works well with simple designs that don’t require a lot of piping. Another popular buttercream is made with confectioners sugar and butter. This holds up better and makes beautiful piped flowers and swags. The rolled fondant discussed earlier can be applied over buttercream but may increase the price of your cake slightly as it is more expensive and time consuming to make. *Cream Cheese* frosting, used most often on carrot or red velvet cake, must be refrigerated, or reserved for a cool winter wedding.

Decorations such as flowers, bows, and ribbons can be piped out of buttercream, or hand formed from fondant, which stays pliable and chewy. *Gumpaste* or *pastillage*, made of sugar, glucose and gum, makes lovely, realistic decorations, which dry hard. Though technically edible, gumpaste is not very tasty. It is popular because it can be hand-shaped into virtually any design. *Fresh Flowers* are stunning on cakes, but care must be taken to choose nontoxic varieties that are pesticide-free. This is something you would want to discuss with your florist, as most chefs are hesitant to place anything on an edible cake that isn’t itself edible. *Marzipan*, a paste of ground almonds and sugar is used to mold flowers but can be quite expensive. *Royal Icing*, made from confectioner’s sugar and egg white makes beautiful, intricate decorations that dry crunchy hard but melt in your mouth when eaten.

A Final Note: When choosing a baker for your wedding cake, take into account professionalism and experience. Ask to see previous designs and take a look around the business. The state of Florida requires not just a business license but also an inspection certificate for a commercially licensed kitchen. Any good professional cake designer, baker or chef will emphasize taste over design and may specialize in one particular type of cake over another. If you already have something in mind, finding the right person may just be a matter of whether or not they can make your chosen cake. Even if you are undecided about what kind of cake you want, prepared with a little knowledge, you can breeze through a cake selection. **WR**

Anna DeLoach, Grace Smith and Gail Wilson are pastry chefs and owners of The Cake Shop of San Jose in Jacksonville, Florida. They specialize in custom wedding and other special occasion cakes and work extensively with fondant and pastillage. They also sell wholesale pastries, cakes and desserts to local restaurants and caterers. They may be reached by calling (904) 306-0303 or through their website at www.jaxcakeshop.com.

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