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# GUIDE TO WEDDING FOOD & BEVERAGE PLANNING

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# Complete Guide to Wedding Food & Beverage Planning

Planning your wedding menu is one of the most important (and enjoyable!) aspects of wedding planning. This comprehensive guide will help you navigate all the decisions involved in creating a memorable dining experience for you and your guests.

## Initial Planning

### Budget Considerations

- ☐ Determine total food & beverage budget (typically 25-30% of overall wedding budget)
- ☐ Decide allocation between food, alcohol, and specialty items
- ☐ Account for service charges and gratuities (typically 18-25%)
- ☐ Consider tax implications (varies by location)
- ☐ Build in a 5-10% buffer for unexpected costs
- ☐

### Venue & Catering Options

- ☐ Full-service venue with in-house catering
- ☐ Venue allowing outside caterers
- ☐ Restaurant venue
- ☐ Food truck options
- ☐ DIY catering (for very small weddings)

### Guest Considerations

- ☐ Finalize guest count (crucial for accurate quotes)
- ☐ Collect dietary restrictions and allergies:
  - ☐ Vegetarian/vegan
  - ☐ Gluten-free
  - ☐ Dairy-free
  - ☐ Nut allergies
  - ☐ Shellfish allergies
  - ☐ Religious restrictions
  - ☐ Other specific allergies
- ☐ Consider children's meals (typically 50-70% of adult meal price)
- ☐ Plan vendor meals (photographers, band, etc.)

## Selecting Your Caterer

### Research Phase

- ☐ Read online reviews and testimonials
- ☐ Check social media for food presentation photos
- ☐ Ask for recommendations from venue and other vendors
- ☐ Create shortlist of potential caterers

## **Questions for Potential Caterers**

- ☐ Experience with your specific venue
- ☐ Availability for your date
- ☐ Full range of services offered
- ☐ Staffing ratios for your guest count
- ☐ Backup plans for emergencies
- ☐ Insurance coverage
- ☐ Licensing for alcohol service (if applicable)
- ☐ Sustainability practices
- ☐ Sample menus and pricing structures
- ☐ References from recent clients

## **Tasting Sessions**

- ☐ Schedule tastings with top 2-3 choices
- ☐ Bring key decision-makers to tasting
- ☐ Sample potential appetizers, entrees, and desserts
- ☐ Evaluate presentation, portion size, and quality
- ☐ Discuss customization options
- ☐ Take notes and photos during tasting

## **Menu Planning**

### **Service Style Options**

- ☐ Plated dinner (most formal, typically most expensive)
- ☐ Buffet (offers variety, mid-range cost)
- ☐ Family-style (encourages interaction, mid-range cost)
- ☐ Food stations (interactive, allows variety)
- ☐ Cocktail-style reception (heavy appetizers, no formal seating)
- ☐ Hybrid approach (combination of styles)

### **Cocktail Hour**

- ☐ Number of passed appetizers (typically 3-5 options)
- ☐ Stationary appetizer displays

- ☐ Special stations (raw bar, charcuterie, etc.)
- ☐ Signature cocktails
- ☐ Passed beverages

## **Main Meal Components**

- ☐ Salad course
- ☐ Soup course (optional)
- ☐ Bread service
- ☐ Entrée options (typically 2-3 choices):
- ☐ Meat option
- ☐ Fish/seafood option
- ☐ Vegetarian/vegan option
- ☐ Side dishes
- ☐ Sauces and accompaniments

## **Dessert Options**

- ☐ Wedding cake
- ☐ Alternative desserts (cupcakes, pies, etc.)
- ☐ Dessert station or buffet
- ☐ Chocolate fountain
- ☐ Ice cream bar
- ☐ Coffee and tea service
- ☐ After-dinner cordials

## **Late Night Snacks**

- ☐ Consider adding late-night food (usually 2-3 hours after dinner)
- ☐ Comfort food options (sliders, fries, pizza)
- ☐ Sweet treats (cookies, donuts, s'mores)
- ☐ Breakfast-inspired items for late receptions
- ☐ To-go boxes for departing guests

## **Beverage Planning**

### **Bar Service Options**

- ☐ Full open bar (all drinks covered)
- ☐ Limited open bar (beer, wine, signature cocktails)
- ☐ Consumption bar (pay for what's consumed)
- ☐ Cash bar (guests pay for drinks)

- ☐ Hybrid approach (open bar for cocktail hour, then limited)

## **Alcohol Selection**

- ☐ Beer selections (domestic, imported, craft)
- ☐ Wine selections (red, white, rosé, sparkling)
- ☐ Liquor selections (premium vs. standard)
- ☐ Signature cocktails (meaningful to couple)
- ☐ Non-alcoholic options

## **Bar Logistics**

- ☐ Number of bars needed (1 per 75-100 guests recommended)
- ☐ Bar placement in venue
- ☐ Bar opening/closing times
- ☐ Bartender staffing (1 per 50 guests for full bar)
- ☐ Glassware requirements
- ☐ Ice requirements

## **Non-Alcoholic Options**

- ☐ Specialty mocktails
- ☐ Infused water stations
- ☐ Soda/soft drinks
- ☐ Juice options
- ☐ Coffee bar
- ☐ Tea service

## **Special Touches**

### **Cultural & Personal Elements**

- ☐ Family recipes
- ☐ Cultural food traditions
- ☐ Regional specialties
- ☐ Dishes meaningful to your relationship
- ☐ Seasonal ingredients highlighting wedding date

### **Food Presentation**

- ☐ Menu cards
- ☐ Food labeling (especially for buffets/stations)
- ☐ Special servingware

- ☐ Food display design
- ☐ Edible decorations
- ☐ Color coordination with wedding palette

## **Interactive Elements**

- ☐ Chef-attended stations
- ☐ Tableside preparations
- ☐ DIY bars (tacos, pasta, etc.)
- ☐ Food & wine pairings
- ☐ Cooking demonstrations

## **Timeline & Logistics**

### **Planning Timeline**

- ☐ 9-12 months before: Research and book caterer
- ☐ 6-8 months before: Initial menu planning
- ☐ 4-6 months before: Tasting and menu refinement
- ☐ 2-3 months before: Finalize menu details
- ☐ 1 month before: Confirm final guest count
- ☐ 2 weeks before: Final walkthrough with caterer

### **Day-of Details**

- ☐ Schedule for food service
- ☐ Meal timing within reception
- ☐ Staff arrival and setup times
- ☐ Special meal deliveries (bride/groom getting ready)
- ☐ Vendor meal schedule
- ☐ Cake cutting time
- ☐ Leftover food plan (donation or packaging)

### **Communication Checklist**

- ☐ Share final menu with venue coordinator
- ☐ Provide timeline to DJ/band for announcements
- ☐ Inform photographer of special food moments
- ☐ Brief wedding party on any special food traditions
- ☐ Communicate dietary restrictions to catering staff

## **Food Safety & Special Considerations**

## Weather Considerations

- ☐ Heat-resistant foods for summer weddings
- ☐ Warming options for winter weddings
- ☐ Covered areas for outdoor food service
- ☐ Temperature-controlled storage

## Allergen Management

- ☐ Clear labeling of allergens
- ☐ Separate preparation areas for allergenic foods
- ☐ Staff training on cross-contamination
- ☐ Emergency response plan for allergic reactions

## Sustainability Options

- ☐ Local and seasonal ingredients
- ☐ Sustainable seafood choices
- ☐ Organic options
- ☐ Reduced food waste strategies
- ☐ Compostable serviceware
- ☐ Donation program for leftover food

## Final Contracts & Payments

### Contract Details to Review

- ☐ Menu specifics with pricing
- ☐ Staffing details and ratios
- ☐ Setup and breakdown responsibilities
- ☐ Rental items included
- ☐ Cancellation policy
- ☐ Weather contingency plans
- ☐ Payment schedule
- ☐ Gratuity policy

### Final Payments

- ☐ Deposit schedule
- ☐ Final payment deadline
- ☐ Method of payment accepted
- ☐ Gratuity distribution plan

☐ Emergency contact for day-of issues

## Food Tasting Notes Template

**Dish    Presentation (1-10)    Flavor (1-10)    Portion Size    Special Considerations    Keep/Modify/Remove**

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## Beverage Tasting Notes Template

**Drink    Presentation    Taste    Potential Pairing    Special Considerations    Keep/Modify/Remove**

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## Recommended Questions for Caterer Interviews

1. What is your experience with our venue?
2. How do you handle dietary restrictions and food allergies?
3. What is your cancellation/postponement policy?
4. Do you provide staffing, and what is the ratio of staff to guests?
5. What happens to leftover food?
6. Can we provide any special family recipes?
7. What are your specialty dishes or styles?
8. How do you handle timing and food quality for large groups?
9. Can we see photos of your previous events?
10. What makes your catering service unique?

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