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How to plan a wedding ceremony

Months of planning is par for the course for couples about to tie the knot. Much of that planning concerns the reception, and rightfully so.

Receptions last longer than ceremonies, and couples are often involved in every reception detail, from picking the appetizers to serve during cocktail hour to choosing the final song before everyone calls it a night. But it's equally important that couples devote considerable attention to their wedding ceremonies.

A wedding ceremony might not last long, but it is the most crucial component of a couple's wedding day and can even set the tone for the rest of the festivities. From choosing readings to honoring loved ones to immersing oneself in his or her faith, these tips can help couples plan their perfect ceremony.

- Give the ceremony equal footing with the reception. Spend time trying to put a personalized spin on the proceedings, whether that entails writing your own vows or choosing moving music that means something to you. When given ample attention, seemingly minor details can make for a special, memorable ceremony.



- Choose a ceremony location that is close to the reception site. If a ceremony will take place in a house of worship, try to choose a reception venue close to the ceremony site. This keeps guests, some of whom may be out-of-towners who have already traveled extensively, from spending too much time on the road during the day of the wedding.

- Get to know the officiant. The officiant should be someone with whom you both feel comfortable. This person should know you well enough that he or she can preside over the ceremony and add sentiments that come across as authentic and personalized.

- Do your best to avoid especially lengthy ceremonies. Couples will need to meet the religious requirements if they are getting married in the faith, and there may be some aspects of the ceremony that you cannot cut short

or modify. But if you have wiggle room, try to keep the ceremony to around 30 minutes; otherwise, you run the risk of guests getting antsy, especially if children are in the audience.

- Decorate the ceremony space. While the altar and aisle are key places to draw attention, couples also can dress up the chairs/pews, ceiling, and entrance to the space to make it welcoming and romantic.

Even wedding ceremonies that likely won't run long can benefit from some pre-wedding planning.

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More couples are embracing edgy, adventurous weddings

Brides and grooms once felt compelled to conform to the trappings of traditional weddings. From uber-romantic vows to pastel colors to the penultimate white tiered cake, various wedding components were long considered must-haves. But modern couples are increasingly expressing their individuality, and even embracing more edgy and adventurous elements, when planning their weddings.

According to The Knot, a leading bridal resource and information site, today's weddings are not what they were just a few years ago. Bold colors, exotic cakes and nontraditional foliage, are just some of the elements modern couples are embracing to set their weddings apart.

Adventurous locales

Vineyards and catering halls can be great places to tie the knot, but couples who like to push the envelope are looking to more adventurous locales to impart their unique spin on their weddings. Sharing vows atop a mountain crest at the end of a favorite hiking trail or on a roller coaster at a theme park that harkens back to a first date are some adventurous places to tie the knot.



Outside-the-box menus

Couples may want to break with tradition by offering a wide selection of foods at their receptions. These foods can include items that fit with their specific ethnic cuisines, gourmet comfort foods (think cocktail franks wellington), or foods that fit with their dietary choices, such as organic or vegan options. Work with a caterer to provide a variety of tasty choices.

Bold wardrobe choices

Brides can put new spins on their gowns by adding color and texture. Sequins, bold embroidery, shorter hemlines, and whatever adventurous fashion style you want to impart can be considered. If white isn't your thing, that's okay, too. Yellow and slate gray look great

together. Gentlemen can choose to wear a black suit or any combination of color and style they want to make a dramatic impression.

Full of flavor

Cakes don't have to be white with white buttercream. In fact, couples can make things even more tasty by incorporating favorite flavor combinations into their cakes. For example, a chocolate and caramel filling reminiscent of a candy bar might be something to consider.

Modern couples are embracing bold, unique and edgy components when planning their weddings. Putting an individualized spin on the ceremony and reception can make couples even more excited to tie the knot.

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Learn about reception lighting rentals

Couples interested in adding extra lighting to their weddings can utilize these tips to make their receptions a sight to behold.

- **Illuminated letters/words:** Illuminated letters can be used as a trendy monogram in lieu of ice sculptures or framed initials. Illuminated words that describe how you feel as a couple or words that describe you both are fun, too.

- **Uplighting:** Uplighting is a popular lighting trend and a great way to transform a venue, according to the wedding resource Rent My Wedding. Uplights are

essentially small lights that are put on the floor around the perimeter of the space or underneath key design elements.

- **Gobo projector:** Many people have probably never heard of a gobo. Also known as monogram lighting, gobo, which stands for "goes before optics," is a growing, special effects-heavy trend. A gobo projector projects an image on a wall or dance floor.

- **String lights:** Christmas-inspired lights are not exclusive to the holiday season. When strung around tree boughs, ceiling rafters

or other architectural elements of a reception hall, these lights can be breathtaking. It Girl Weddings suggests hanging them against an exposed brick wall to light up the space and add drama.

- **Hanging candles:** The warming glow from candles can be used to transform spaces instantly and create great photo opportunities. Candles can be hung as makeshift chandeliers over banquet table.

Lighting can transform a reception venue and has become a focal point for many couples.

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Wedding flowers becoming larger than life

Move over bouquets and centerpieces. Flowers are taking over weddings in a big way. While wedding trends come and go, flowers will always have a place at the wedding table.

The blooms brides and grooms choose and how they decide to display them can say much about the couple's style. Many modern couples are opting for statement pieces with their flowers to rival the big and bold ideas they're incorporating elsewhere into their occasions, such as in cakes and clothing.

In fact, floral designer Tom Uberuaga says traditional hurricane vase centerpieces are outdated and only focus the eye on the middle of the table. He prefers guests enter the wedding and have their senses stimulated by flowers from all angles. Large flower installations, as well as blooms popping up



in unexpected places, are some of the hot trends for couples to keep their eyes on.

Floral chandeliers

There's no need to worry about seeing over table centerpieces or flowers getting in



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the way of photo moments. Thanks to hanging flowers and floral chandeliers, flowers are quite literally moving up in the world. Hanging floral pieces can add instant drama and make a large visual impact.

Florists can hang flowers from beams over tabletops to increase visual impact, whether as individual baskets, single stems or floral swags. Hanging floral chandeliers are dramatic but naturally expensive. Think about a large installation that forces guests to look up into a sea of greenery and flowers. The smell and the sight can be breathtaking.

Welcome wreaths

Why should wreaths only be reserved for front doors and holiday decor? A welcome floral wreath can be placed by the entryway to a chapel or reception hall with a heartfelt sentiment that shows guests how much they're appreciated.

Fairy-tale flowers

A floral curtain of hanging flowers can

line a chuppah or drape the altar in beautiful blooms.

Couples who would like a fairy-tale entrance also can make their debut as a couple by coming through a flower curtain at the reception. Martha Stewart Weddings says a cascade of flowers and greens can be romantic and elegant.

Dance floor blooms

Who says flowers have to be overhead or on a table? With a plexiglass dance floor, or one made from some other transparent material, flowers can be underfoot, creating a magical floral carpet.

Floral necklaces

Brides needn't carry their bouquets, they can wear ethereal and whimsical floral pieces around their necks or on their waists instead.

Couples are urged to speak with their florists about the innovative ways they can make flowers an even more awe-inspiring component of their weddings.

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Make a statement with your cake

Brides and grooms may pour over every detail of their weddings, but few components of the festivities may be as fun, especially for foodies, as deciding what the wedding cake will look like. Couples who want to deliver show-stopping visuals often express some measure of their creativity and personalities through statement wedding cakes.

Many couples now eschew the classic three-tiered white cake in favor of a dessert that garners instant attention. Whether the cake is brightly colored or hand-painted, a towering architectural marvel or shimmering in metallics, couples are opting to make a statement with their confections. Apart from clever cake-toppers, here are ways to stand apart when dessert is served.

- According to the Perfect Wedding Guide, a rising trend in cakes is to cover a white or naked cake with translucent glaze tinted in the couple's wedding colors. This artistic expression can be especially stunning in boho-chic weddings.

- Statement tiers also are popular. The cake may be traditional in nearly every way, but couples then set the cake apart by featuring an elaborate design or a different hue in one tier.



- Martha Stewart Weddings advises that more than just color can be used to make a statement. Lifelike sugar flowers can really set cakes apart. Guests may not be sure if they can consume all aspects of some cakes. But delicate sugar flowers taste as good as they look.

- Sometimes a statement comes by way of texture. Even an all-white cake can be dressed up with interesting textural effects. Ruffles, lace, embossing, and 3-D rosettes are different textural components that can be incorporated in cake designs.

- Couples also may want

to tell their unique stories with cake. Individual tiers designed to reflect various milestone moments from the couple's relationship can be quite engaging.

- Capitalizing on the trend of edgier weddings, couples may opt for darker hues on their cakes - even a black tier - or nontraditional geometric shapes to the cake itself or its design elements.

Statement cakes can really say something about the couple getting married. Much like other wedding elements, cakes provide a window into the minds of happy couples.

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