

Turn the Creative Heat Up at Summer Weddings



Weddings have become year-round. Neither the cold of winter nor the heat of summer can deter today's brides. In fact, when the weather turns extreme, the creativity at weddings heats up. And in summer months, adding a few cool ideas can make even the most traditional wedding hotter.

Made in the Shade

This idea is perfect for a small afternoon wedding reception, or even a rehearsal dinner or engagement party. Consider the picnic. Now, wipe away every pre-conceived notion you have of a picnic. There are no three-legged races, no fried chicken and definitely no ants! There is only pampering at the highest level.

To set the scene, imagine a sultry summer day. You are either in a backyard or park, or by a pool, a lake or at the ocean. (It should be noted that anything outside of a backyard will require permits, but you can let the professionals take care of that.) Guests arrive to find a number of individual canopies framed with bamboo legs and topped with jewel-toned silk fabrics. Instead of a table number, your friends and family are given a colored card with a corresponding "jewel" affixed to it.

Groups of six and eight head out in search of their own private canopy and once there, are greeted by a waiter whose only desire is to serve just them. While this event really has no "theme" but sunlight and jewels, the more adventuresome bride might opt to dress the waiters in keeping with the colors – in beautiful sari-like dresses or Nehru jackets and pants in rich colors.

While your guests recline on pillows and rugs, waiters bring them an eclectic menu of exotic dishes that again, are global, yet not specific to any region. Glasses of champagne, brightly colored specialty cocktails and mocktails are served as the afternoon stretches out before you and your guests.

Your menu might begin with Tapas, small plates of Spanish delicacies, or perhaps a French charcuterie with crunchy breads, savory cheeses and smoked meats. The main course might be lemon chicken cooked Moroccan style in a tagine that everyone eats with their hands. And dessert could be baklava or an assortment of fruits, sorbets and butter cookies and sweet mint tea.

At the end, guests are given small mosaic jewel boxes filled with any number of items. If this is a wedding, it might be filled with rose petals with which to shower the happy couple. If it is an engagement party, or even a wedding shower, the boxes could contain small trinkets such as cuff links for the men, bracelets for the ladies, or any type of token of your love for your guests.

The entire day is a meshing of cultures, flavors and styles. What better way to start any union than by embracing other cultures?

Summer School

School is out for summer, but "educational" rehearsal dinners are getting

straight A's from many brides. Before you ditch school, think again, because this particular class is accompanied by fine wines and gourmet cuisine. There are two schools of thought on this theme.

First, there is the event at which guests actually put on aprons and cook. There is no better way to get members from both the bride's and the groom's families talking and laughing within minutes. And those who choose not to be chefs will be the happy recipients. During cocktail hour, guests enter a room with several stations set up with a chef, cookware and ingredients to make a variety of easy-to-prepare yet delicious items. Sushi is always very popular as everyone loves learning the technique and using the bamboo rollers to combine a variety of unique items.

The second type of educational event is one for couples who really love food and wine and want to share it with friends and family. This is the wine and food pairing dinner with multiple courses, each served with a different wine or sparkling wine. It's an elegant presentation and coupled with a lecturer who speaks a little at the beginning of each course about the food and how the wine was chosen for it, makes a memorable evening.

An added aside, this trend is extending to honeymoons as well – more couples are taking honeymoons in Italy and France at cooking schools, or visiting those countries' wine regions to further their knowledge of wine.

Cool Off Buffet Lines with This Hot Idea

Buffets are very popular and usually, very user-friendly. However, at large events, the first thing that happens at buffets is the formation of a line. There are ways to avoid lines by changing the way people think of buffets.

Instead of a "buffet," think "action station." Instead of being a long table, these stations are set in a circular or triangular configuration. Now, guests can approach it from any angle. Once there, they talk to one of several chefs who are manning it and he or she physically makes them up a plate of whatever items are there – carved meat, a side dish and a salad – and the guest leaves with a perfectly portioned, plated presentation. This cuts down on lines, and your food costs, as guests won't be able to load up on the more expensive items.

This format is also in keeping with the trend of small plates started by the Tapas movement and restaurants like A.O.C. Small plates are here for awhile. They are perfect for how we eat in Southern California and go well with any type of cuisine.

This, and the other ideas outlined here are just a few ways to add spice to your wedding reception or any of the parties related to your wedding. With so many hot, new ways to create unique themes and delicious wedding menus, we can safely say, summer is no time to play it cool!

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