



The backyard wedding: a special location with some unique challenges

The backyard wedding is one of the most sentimental and unique of all the locations available to a bride. A private sanctuary of sorts, that place where you have experienced so many great moments in life, it is only fitting that you may wish to consider this option when planning for your new life together. That said, if one aspect of your decision-making is that this would be a great way to save money, you might be in for a surprise.

An off-premise event (one held anywhere other than a hotel, special event venue or a restaurant) should not be confused with an inexpensive event. Depending on your vision, it may not end up costing more than a similar event held in a ballroom, but it will rarely cost less. Why? Because all the things the facility has built into their pricing have to be considered and then arranged for in your backyard. This is similar to going to a restaurant and ordering ala carte. The final bill usually ends up costing more, but you get exactly what you wanted – and that is what makes it so special.

It should also be pointed out that outdoor events are not for everyone. If you are the type of person who loves surprises, who has a spirit for adventure, who can make that great cup of lemonade when life gives you the occasional lemon – than you are the perfect candidate for a backyard wedding. If not, stop right now and return to the venue location books. Outdoor events by definition are subject to elements and situations that cannot be totally controlled. I see this as another feature that will keep your event special and most certainly guarantee that guests will remember your wedding as one of their favorites.

But how do you achieve all this while maintaining an acceptable level of anxiety? On any wedding day, there are two very important words that come into play, and for the caterer it is not “I Do” it’s “What if?”

The “what if game” gets you mentally prepared for as many of the different scenarios that may occur and how they would be handled. It’s the opportunity to reduce the element of chance and discuss the solutions. The following are a few of the larger issues you will want to discuss.

TENTING

Although rain isn’t as big an issue in Southern California as in other areas of our country, to ignore the discussion would border on being negligent. A plan should be in place (and can be fine-tuned as the event gets closer and weather reports become more accurate) where one phone call gets the rental company started. But just as important as this “Plan B” is how you are going to react. Your guests will feed off your emotions – if you can have a great time regardless, if you see this as nothing more than an inconvenience, your guests will follow your lead and make sure you have a great time.

UNINVITED VISITORS

While planning for the layout of your backyard event, the caterer will suggest locations for cake tables, bars, guest seating, coffee or food stations – whatever is desired, based on traffic flow, wind and sun expectations, etc. All of this is happening months and weeks prior to your event. An experienced



caterer will want to revisit the site often but especially during the week of the event to assure that none of Mother Nature’s less popular friends have moved into your neighborhood. If the cake table was to be located where a new colony of ants has moved in, changes will need to be made. Look for signs of bee or wasp nests and remember that dog that likes to bark three doors down, maybe we can write a nice letter to the homeowner asking for assistance on your special day.

Arrange canopies and umbrellas where necessary and, if the food tables will be set on the ground, not on a deck or a floored surface, consider spraying the table legs (and only the legs!) with bug spray. At one recent event in a backyard that abutted a parkland area, a professional team was needed to spray the periphery of the property. This, and citronella candles, helped keep a large swarm of summer bugs in control for the day.

CROWD FLOW

Creating movement or flow is always a consideration in a backyard event. We have some tricks we can use to help solve this issue. Bars become strategic magnets that can easily pull people from one area to another. Sometimes it is a good idea to have a bar set away from the main entrance then utilize beverage stations or servers with trays offering champagne or specialty drinks as guests arrive. Obviously, the same is true of tray passed hors d’oeuvres or food stations. Guests seem to follow the following rule – if there is a beverage, something to eat or a view, they will find it. Your caterer should use this to your advantage.

Utilizing this concept at a recent wedding in a rather small, but multi-decked backyard, we held the ceremony on one deck, and then used our appetizers and an elaborate martini bar located on another deck as a way to move the group following the ceremony. While guests enjoyed the cocktail party, we reset the ceremony area for dinner. (The tables and chairs had been hidden behind a decorative lattice screen we installed in what otherwise would have been plain view, because there was no other storage area.) Once the formal pictures had been taken and the newlyweds had a chance to mingle with their guests, the flow naturally pulled them back to where to food stations had “magically appeared.”

While guests enjoyed their feast, the cocktail area was transformed to accommodate a wonderful dessert display and get ready for the dancing and festivities that were planned to take this party into the night. These types of logistics are the norm for backyard events. Making them happen in a seamless and almost mystical way is the sign of someone who is really good at playing the “what if game.”

Choosing a backyard wedding is a wonderful option but one that should be entered into with total understanding of what it will take. Risks exist at any event, regardless of the location. However, if you have done your homework and hired the right team to assist in making your dream become reality, the rewards will be great. An at-home wedding is special because it reflects who you are. It is unique, and, if approached with the right attitude, a fantastic memory awaits you at the end of the day.

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