

Congratulations on your engagement!

Assuming you have picked a date and booked a hall, you have now begun the intricate task of choosing all the perfect details to give your wedding reception that personal touch. I can only guess that you have moved on to a step that *should be* "a piece of cake" but there are a couple of tips I would like to give you to make the process less stressful and more effective. Reading through this guide may take a few minutes but will give you all the knowledge you need to make choosing a cake less overwhelming, and give you a sense of accomplishment when you've made your final decisions.

The process of ordering a cake is very complex and has a lot of small details that factor into the total cost. Prices are usually per serving and more often than not bakeries that cater their cake to each individual bride will not offer a list of prices. If you do find a bakery that offers a list like this you will usually be ordering a catalog cake; one size, one design, one price.... These bakeries usually show a book of cakes that are not decorated by their staff, but produced by the companies selling the supplies to make them. You wouldn't trust a clothing designer that shows you a pattern and claims they can make it without seeing their work! It is exactly the same here. Decorating a cake is just as complicated. Please choose someone who is exceptionally skilled at decorating and can show you their own work.

We do not make catalog cakes. Every photo & display in our store or on our website is something we have personally made. Setting up an appointment with our bridal consultant is the best way to get an accurate estimate and have all your questions and concerns addressed, it is this process that makes our cakes just the right size for your reception & a design that is unique to you!

After scheduling your appointment we often encourage you to look through our website or search the internet & magazines to find examples of cakes that you like. Finding a cake that suits your style and reception will go more smoothly if you follow a series of steps. These steps help to make sure you are looking at the right details first and not focusing on aspects that do not influence your pricing.

- 1) **Design**
 - Details of the cake's icing
 - Type of icing used
- 2) **Cake Servings to Guests**
 - At your appointment, your Wedding Cake -or- Bridal consultant will usually determine what size cake is the best for your reception. Most receptions will not require cake servings for each guest.
 - Shaped vs. Round
- 3) **Set-up**
 - Stacking Directly -or- Separating the tiers
 - Staggered
- 4) **Flowers**
 - Fresh -or- Gumpaste (pastillage)
 - Arrangement
- 5) **Flavors**
 - Traditional -or- Specialty

Step One:

Choosing the Design!

While looking at each wedding cake you should always direct your attention on the most important and major detail, what the icing looks like. The serving cost is solely determined by the time it takes your decorator to complete this element. Anything that is extremely intricate will take longer to finish versus something simple, and will increase your serving price. Many popular designs include scrolling (swirls), dots, ribbons, draping or a combination.

As you are browsing the photos please consider a few suggestions:

Stop looking at the flowers!

While the flowers are a very important aspect to the visual appearance of the cake this is the last thing that will be placed on the cake. Once you have picked out the base you can always build up. Don't worry we will get to flowers, please print these pictures too. Try to complete one mission before jumping into another. When you are pleased with the house go ahead and plan the landscaping.

That isn't the only color that cake can be done in.....

Most brides will pick a cake or pass over one because of the color of their wedding... A classic example I like to use for this: You aren't going to pick or pass up a pair of shoes based on the color. If the display had a perfect heel & toe but it was in bright yellow, you would probably ask if they came in a different color? Also if you found a pair of work boots the exact color of your bridesmaids dresses I'm sure you wouldn't encourage their purchase. You want it to have a certain style & function to fit the setting.

I can't believe it's not Fondant!

Most of the designs on our website are Buttercream or a combination of a cake iced in Buttercream and Fondant accents like draping or ribbons. Many people have a hard time distinguishing our Buttercream cakes from that of fondant. We pride ourselves on using an extremely smooth family recipe that allows the look of fondant. If you are browsing the internet or magazines you will often find Fondant iced cakes, many of these designs are easily replicated in Buttercream with a skilled decorator. Replicating a design in Buttercream will lower the cakes cost and make it much more enjoyable to your guests. If the design is one of the few that can only be made Iced in Fondant not to worry, as you may have been told Fondant has a reputation for having a "bad taste" this is not always true. Most people who have tried Fondant have tasted a pre-made or store bought version, pre-made Fondant has a lot of preservatives which give it an extremely sweet alcohol-ish taste. All Fondant used on our cakes is made by hand, by us. It is still sweet but tastes more like a marshmallow.

If you like this, but not that, don't be afraid get out the scissors or hit print

Circle or write a note as to what part of a cake *you do like*, just because the picture has a lot of different things incorporated into the design, leaving one or two elements out will not ruin the elegance of a cake.

Step Two:

How many people are going to eat cake?

It's true. All those things you've heard about the battle with the left over cake.... Many people will over order. It's not their fault so please don't blame them. Many bakeries will put your entire guest list into the servings; it's almost as if they were getting paid by how many servings they made... Oh yeah they are! When it comes down to it most cakes in our area should be figured at 2/3 of your expected guests. Commonly receptions are buffet style, with alcohol & cookie tables. Many people will fill up on the buffet & cookies and most often men & women who are drinking will not take a piece of cake. If you have chosen to celebrate your anniversary the next year by saving your top tier you will want to add 10-15 more servings to your total servings. If you are inviting approximately 250 people to a buffet style dinner with a cookie table and alcohol you would only want your cake to serve 190. This size also allows you to keep your top tier! I know it's hard to believe that more than 60 people wouldn't want to eat cake, but it's the truth. Alright if you don't believe me go ahead and order more. I won't say I told you so, but you will have an excellent breakfast the next day. The only exception to ordering less cake than guests is if you are having a Sit-Down dinner. Unless you are serving another dessert such as ice-cream or cheesecake, you will need to have a piece for every guest. The cake is usually cut and served directly after dinner.

If you are planning a wedding reception in the Youngstown area you are probably aware of the "cookie table" tradition. These tables have a large assortment of cookies as an additional snack for guests throughout the reception.

Originally these cookies were made by family or friends, but more recently many people will order these cookies in assortments. A cookie table should have at least 4 cookies per guest (example: If you are having a reception for 250 guests you should have approximately 1000 cookies or 84 dozen).

If you are interested in ordering cookies please ask for a list we make several different kinds and offer assortments for weddings or large parties.

Cookie tables are a big influence on servings as they are available the entire night for people to take from and some people will fill their "sweet" quota here. If you are not having a cookie table (or any other mid-reception, snack-like table) or prefer a dry or non-alcoholic reception we encourage adding a bit more servings. Usually people will want to grab a bite of something between dinner and the end of your reception, without alcohol or cookies the cake will be the only thing offered.

I'm sure everyone has read the magazine suggestions or heard of secret "sheet cakes" or fake tiers, there is a time and a place for everything, especially with sheet cakes. One should always remember that magazines are being distributed all over the country, and highly concentrate their ideas to large cities and the brides planning receptions in them. Most people outside of the Youngstown area order cake for all of their guests this is for one big reason, they have never heard of a cookie table. Even as close as Columbus this customary addition is unusual. If you were ordering cake for all your guests sheet cakes are a cost effective alternative, but you have already saved that and more by cutting your servings. Moreover we require at least 150 servings in your tiers before we will make a sheet cake. If you are having a larger reception, anything from 400 people or more, we will encourage you to "cut the cake" and get a sheet or two.

Fake tiers are also a big city cost-cutter that is not as functional in the valley. Fake tiers are often the top 2 or 3 tiers or complete dummies that the bakery will rent, served cake is solely provided with the kitchen cakes. These are displays that will be re-used for many other brides and usually will be plain white to avoid color conflicts. Because your cost is determined by the time of decoration, it wouldn't make a difference if it is styrofoam we will still be working on it the same amount of time.

While perusing the designs of each cake I am sure you have noticed some cakes are round and others are square or unusual shapes. We offer eight different shapes, and can help to determine which will fit your servings the best. If you have had your eye on a square cake, please consider that your cake will look smaller than that of round or any other. A square tier will serve more than these because of its area & cutting ease. Most of the cakes on our website that look square are actually diamonds. They are very wide from the front and narrow when you walk to their side. This will make your cake look a lot larger than its 90° alternative, but still have crisp angles.

Other shapes including hearts, ovals, triangles, octagons, or emeralds will actually add more tiers to smaller cakes. Cutting these shapes are often more complicated and the angles or curves of the cake will take away servings. You may be thinking this is a good option if you want to make it taller, but keep in mind taking small servings and stretching them into more tiers will narrow each tier. In addition we will now be decorating 4 - 5 cakes for 175 servings instead of the standard 3. You will incur an extra tier fee for the extra time it takes to decorate but some find it worth the cost. If you would like to add height please consider placing your cake on a plateau(base) or adding a separation between your tiers.

How many round tiers will I have?
100-190 to 3 tiers
190-250 to 4 tiers
250-275 to 5 tiers
275-300 to 6 tiers

Step Three:

I don't like those plastic thingies between the cakes?

Those plastic thingies do have a correct term, we cakers refer to them as pillars, or separators. Many brides express concern over the look of separated tiers, but used in moderation or with the appropriate flowers these will only enhance your cake. If you have taken a minute and glanced at our cakes quite a few have separations and they are typically un-noticed by you or your guests, this happens when they are used correctly and when you fill the empty or negative space with flowers.

Often people will ask about tiers that are on individual stands of different heights, this is referred to as a staggered set-up. This will make a cake of an average size look a little larger on the cake table but may be a bit more expensive in the long run. Consider the increase in flowers being used to fill the top of each cake. These staggered set-ups can be arranged in different ways, Traditional, Cascading (in a curved line), or even in the shape of a heart. If you have a smaller cake we suggest keeping your cakes tiered or stacked. Three small cakes staggered can often look smaller than if they are all together.

If you have a smaller cake adding a separation or two can make it appear a lot larger! Separations will also split up monotonous designs, if you have the same very simple design on 4 tiers without breaking it up, the esthetics of the design will be diminished. This problem can also be elevated with a few small clusters of flowers here and there, I guess I should start Step four now, being I have said Flowers at least 3 times and I told you not to look at them yet.....

One more thing before I move on, tiered separations will not make a difference in the actual cost of your cake, Even if all your tiers are stacked or staggered, the only thing that will change is your refundable security deposits. As long as you return the plates and pillars this deposit will be returned to you. Stacked tiers will always have these pillars in the cakes below them, just because you can't see them doesn't mean they aren't there. If anyone tells you "you don't need pillars in a stacked cake" run in the other direction. Too many people have fallen victim to the un-supported tiers and find a leaning or fallen cake when they arrive at the hall. Using these supports is what has allowed us to sleep soundly each Saturday night.

Step Four:

I really want to talk about flowers now!

Ok, let's talk. There are so many decisions to make!

When it comes to adding a splash of color or texture to your cake, flowers can make a significant difference. They will also coordinate the cake to the centerpieces and bouquets. Styles of flower arranging can be elaborate with full filled separations using up to a hundred roses, cascades starting at the top and ending on your table, or simple using small clusters or even petals that wrap around your tiers. Whatever you choose be sure to pick something that is going to enhance not take away from the cake itself.

Fresh flowers are most commonly used because of cost. Flowers can be provided by your florist or ordered through us. All flowers should be loose/unarranged. If arrangements are made by florists sometimes they will be too large, too small, or will sit off the top of your cake from the base that is used to make the arrangement. When we place the flowers on your tiers we follow all food safety guidelines by wrapping each stem and thoroughly rinsing them before hand. Not a single bare stem of a flower will be placed into your cake.

If a florist provides the flowers they must be delivered to our store the day before your reception. We are very firm on this point. We are the only people that will touch the cake from the time it is made to the time that the both of you cut the first slice. All flowers are placed on the cake in our store before each cake is delivered. There are two BIG reasons for this; One we have all the tools at hand to arrange the flowers and fix any flaws made by leaves, stems, or a slipped hand & Two with the amount of weddings that we do in a weekend our time is better spent having one person arrange the flowers in our store and one delivering a cake. It usually takes one as much time to arrange the flowers on the cake as it takes the other to deliver. This is why we will not meet your florist at the hall. If we were to spend that time in a hall we would not be able to take as many cakes per weekend which would make many brides upset & the price of our cakes increase. We maintain the idea that doing 7 lower priced cakes verses 1-2 over priced cakes not only makes the customer happy, & gives us the opportunity to see 7 beautifully decorated halls. It's like opening a new bridal magazine every weekend.

An alternative to using fresh flowers are **Gumpaste or pastillage flowers**. These flowers are handmade, extremely realistic, and edible. If stored properly you will be able to save them for many years to come and some brides will even return with them and ask to have them used for their anniversaries. Gumpaste flowers also give brides a way to use more un-natural colors like greens and blues. When these flowers are ordered for your cake they will come in white or sometimes ivory, we will pearlize or hand paint and match any color swatch provided. If you are looking to use a flower that is out of season for that time of year these are also wonderful since they are available year round. **Silk flowers** are a frequently discussed option. While they are being used more often in bouquets and arrangements I persuade you to leave them off of your cake. Silks are very unsanitary, people will after all be eating this! From the time that they are made, packed, stored, displayed, purchased and put onto your cake they may be handled as much as the money in your purse or wallet.

Step Five:

As long as it looks good I don't care.... Should I?

This is the final step and the most important, although the appearance is all you, the flavors and presentation to guests is just as important if not more! If it looks amazing but has an inedible appeal all anyone will say after the wedding is "did you try that cake, eeehh it was horrible!". They will have forgotten all the hours you put into the fine details and move right along to how Uncle Paul fell on the dance floor.

DO NOT let the downfall of your reception be the dessert, leave that to your uncle.

Flavors will only make a difference in cost if they are a specialty or nontraditional flavor. You may have as many different flavors as you have tiers for no additional charge. We suggest sticking to 2 or 3 flavors especially at larger receptions and try to keep them as even as possible. Serving 25 chocolate and 125 White is a little uneven and people might ask why you ran out of one flavor. We offer over 55 flavors to choose from and it can be hard at times, but take into consideration these few things and it should go quickly.

Order flavors that are season appropriate, pumpkin in June may not be as appealing as pumpkin in October, as well as Key Lime in February just might taste like summer but if it's 10 degrees outside people will want something that will warm them up like Chocolate Cherry, or Italian Rum.

Tasting or sampling the cake before making your final decision is extremely important. When you come in for your estimate you will receive a sample of cream, one of our traditional flavors & a swirled specialty to try. When you place a deposit to hold your date you are able to try 4 more samples of your choice. Cake flavors are discussed at your final appointment, most people have changed their mind 3 or 4 times by then and we may have made new flavors! There is no rush.



I hope this has helped you just a little bit in making your decisions, If you have any other questions please call or write them down to discuss at your appointment. We are always willing to help make your planning a little easier.

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