

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO

Wedding Catering

Planning with Confidence

Everything you need to know about budgets, menus, logistics, guest experience and finding a caterer who truly gets your vision.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Budget planning · Style matching · Menu building

Logistics & coordination · Guest experience

Questions to ask any caterer

A complimentary resource for couples planning their wedding

Budget

Understanding your catering budget — without feeling overwhelmed.

One of the most common sticking points for couples early in their planning is catering cost. Without a clear picture of what drives pricing, it's easy to get a quote and have no idea whether it's reasonable. Here's a breakdown so you can plan with confidence.

What drives the cost of wedding catering?

Service style	Sharing/grazing menus typically cost less per head than formal plated dining due to reduced staffing needs.
Guest count	Larger guest counts usually reduce the per-head cost, but increase total spend. Staffing ratios matter.
Staffing	Labour is often the largest line item. Full table service requires more staff than buffet or food station formats.
Equipment hire	If your venue lacks a kitchen, generators, mobile kitchen units, and crockery hire add significant cost.
Menu complexity	Seasonal, locally sourced ingredients often cost the same or less — it's elaborate prep and specialist items that drive costs up.
Duration	Day-to-evening catering with multiple service moments (welcome drinks, dinner, evening snacks) adds up quickly.

A realistic starting framework (UK)

Canapés & light reception	£25–45 per head
Sharing / grazing dinner	£65–95 per head
Plated dinner (2 or 3 course)	£75–140 per head
Full day catering (all meals)	£120–200+ per head

These figures typically include food, staffing, and service but may exclude equipment hire, travel, and specialist items. Always ask what is and isn't included in any quote.

How to build your budget from scratch

- Start with your confirmed (or estimated) guest count
- Decide on your service style — this single choice has the biggest impact on cost
- List the service moments you want (welcome drinks, seated dinner, evening food etc.)
- Ask caterers to itemise their quotes so you can compare like-for-like
- Build in a 10–15% contingency for final guest count changes and late additions

ASK YOUR CATERER

Questions to ask: What is included in your per-head price? · What are your staffing ratios? · Are there any travel or hire charges not included? · What happens if my final guest count changes?

Style Matching

Making your food feel like part of your wedding

Food is the most immersive part of your wedding. Guests don't just eat it — they photograph it, talk about it, and remember it long after. Your catering style should feel like a natural extension of your venue, florals, and overall aesthetic. The best caterers start with your mood board, not their standard menu.

Matching your catering style to your wedding vibe

Intimate & romantic	Elegant sharing platters, seasonal small plates, candlelit grazing tables, refined garnishes and delicate presentation.
Rustic & outdoor	Long feasting tables, wood-fired or BBQ elements, seasonal British produce, informal generous service, unfussy plating.
Modern & minimal	Precise plated menus, sculptural canapés, monochromatic garnishes, clean lines and restrained presentation.
Bold & maximalist	Abundant spreads, vibrant flavours, statement centrepiece dishes, theatrical serving moments and layered dessert tables.
Relaxed & festival	Food stations, interactive formats (taco bars, grazing stations), relaxed self-service with plenty of variety.
Heritage & formal	Traditional British or European menu structure, silver service or formal plated dining, classic flavour combinations elevated with quality ingredients.

What to bring to your first caterer conversation

- Your venue name and any photos of the space
- Three words that describe the feeling you want guests to have
- Any Pinterest or mood board links showing your aesthetic
- Dishes or cuisines you love, or any strong preferences or dislikes
- Any cultural or dietary considerations that should shape the menu

STYLE TIP

Presentation consistency matters. Ask your caterer how their service style, crockery, and garnish choices will align with your overall look. The best caterers think visually as well as culinarily.

Guest Experience

Creating a food experience your guests will remember

Guest satisfaction isn't just about what's on the plate — it's every touchpoint from arrival to the last bite of something sweet. The food is almost always at the top of the list when couples ask what their guests still talk about months later.

The guest journey through your wedding day

Arrival & welcome drinks	The first impression. Canapés should land while energy is high — before hunger sets in. Aim for 4–6 pieces per person in the first hour.
The main meal	The centrepiece of the day. Pacing is everything — guests shouldn't wait more than 20 minutes between courses.
Dietary alternatives	Should be treated as equally considered as the main menu, not an afterthought. Every guest deserves to feel catered for.
Service style	Staff who are warm, attentive and well-briefed make a dramatic difference. This is the "hospitality" in wedding hospitality.
Evening food	Often underestimated. A late-night snack moment (loaded fries, sliders, sharing platters) brings energy back to the dance floor.
The close	Water, tea, coffee and something small to end the evening. Simple, but frequently missed.

Handling dietary requirements well

- Collect dietary information through your RSVP — not as an afterthought at the end
- Confirm the final list in writing with your caterer at least two weeks before the day
- Ensure alternatives are served simultaneously, not after the main course
- Brief front-of-house staff so they know which guests have which requirements
- Ask your caterer how they handle on-the-day surprises (a guest who forgot to mention an allergy)

GUEST EXPERIENCE CHECKLIST

Canapés served within 30 mins of arrival · All dietary requirements confirmed in writing · Service staff briefed on the day's timeline · Evening food planned for 9–10pm · Water on tables throughout dinner

Logistics & Coordination

The behind-the-scenes detail that makes your day run

Wedding catering is as much a logistical operation as a culinary one. A caterer who produces extraordinary food but can't coordinate with your venue, photographer and planner will still cause stress on your wedding day.

Pre-wedding logistics checklist

- **Venue site visit completed** — your caterer should visit (or video call about) the kitchen, power supply, access routes and service areas.
- **Run-of-day timeline agreed** — a shared timeline sent to your venue, planner and photographer with all key catering moments noted.
- **Final dietary list confirmed in writing** — no later than 14 days before the wedding, with a named record of requirements.
- **Staffing levels confirmed** — named senior point-of-contact on-site for the day, with a clear briefing schedule.
- **Equipment and hire list finalised** — everything from plates and cutlery to generators should be confirmed in writing.
- **Contingency plan in place** — what happens if it rains? If the van breaks down? If a key member of staff is ill?

Working with your venue

Kitchen access	What time can your caterer access the kitchen? Is there exclusive use or are other caterers sharing it?
Supplier corkage & fees	Many venues charge corkage for external drinks and some charge an external caterer fee. Confirm both upfront.
Clear-down time	When does catering need to be fully cleared? Do they handle waste removal or does the venue?
Fire & safety	Confirm any restrictions on open flames, gas, or outdoor cooking with your venue in writing.
Preferred supplier lists	Some venues restrict you to an approved list. Others prefer it but don't mandate it. Always check.

RED FLAGS

Red flags to watch for: No site visit offered · Vague or verbal-only timelines · No contingency plan mentioned · Reluctance to share staffing numbers · No written dietary confirmation process

Menu Planning

Building a menu your guests will actually love

The best wedding menus tell a story — about who you are, the season you're marrying in, and what you love. But they're also practical: they need to work for 80 or 200 people, flow smoothly through the day, and leave every guest feeling genuinely satisfied.

The principles of a great wedding menu

Season first	Ingredients at their peak taste better and cost less. A spring menu feels completely different to an autumn one of squash, game and root vegetables.
One bold choice	Anchor the menu with one genuinely memorable element — a signature dish, a show-stopping centrepiece, or a theatrical serving moment.
Design for the table	Sharing formats create warmth and conversation. Plated menus create occasion and elegance. Both are valid — match the choice to your atmosphere.
Build in flexibility	Dietary alternatives should be as considered as the main menu. Design them in from the start rather than adapting the main dish at the end.
End on a high	Dessert is the final flavour memory your guests take home. Whether it's a show-stopping cake or perfectly timed individual plated puddings — plan it with care.

Menu planning by season

Spring (Mar–May)	Asparagus, peas, broad beans, spring lamb, Jersey Royals, morel mushrooms, radishes, rhubarb.
Summer (Jun–Aug)	Courgettes, tomatoes, sweetcorn, heritage carrots, salmon, lobster, strawberries, elderflower, peaches.
Autumn (Sep–Nov)	Squash, celeriac, wild mushrooms, game, venison, pears, figs, blackberries, walnuts.
Winter (Dec–Feb)	Root vegetables, cavolo nero, leeks, beef, duck, citrus, clementines, dark chocolate, chestnuts.

Questions to ask when reviewing a menu proposal

- Are these ingredients in season on our wedding date?
- Can any elements be personalised to reflect our story or background?
- How will the dietary alternative be presented? Will it arrive at the same time?
- What does the service of each course look like in practice?
- Have you catered this menu before? Can we do a tasting?
- What evening food would you recommend to complement the main menu?



20 Questions to Ask Every Caterer

Use this list as your brief for initial consultations. A great caterer will welcome every question on it.

Budget & Pricing

- What does your per-head price include and exclude?
- Are there travel or accommodation costs for your team?
- What is your payment schedule and cancellation policy?
- How do you handle final guest number changes?

Menu & Style

- Can we see sample menus for weddings at a similar time of year?
- Do you offer food tastings, and what does that involve?
- How do you handle complex dietary requirements?
- Are you able to incorporate personal or cultural food elements?

Logistics & Coordination

- Will you do a site visit before the day?
- Who will be our named point of contact on the wedding day?
- How do you coordinate with our venue and wedding planner?
- What equipment do you bring, and what do we need to provide?
- How do you handle waste and clear-down?

Experience & Reassurance

- How many weddings have you catered at our venue (or similar)?
- Can we see photos from recent weddings you've catered?
- Do you have testimonials or references we can speak to?
- Are you fully insured for food hygiene and public liability?
- What contingency plans do you have for staff illness or vehicle issues?
- Have you ever worked alongside a live band or in a marquee setting?
- What do you wish more couples asked you before booking?

You're ready.

Most couples arrive at their first caterer conversation feeling unsure. You're arriving prepared — and that makes all the difference.



Ready to talk about your wedding?

Get in touch for a free, no-obligation conversation about your date, your vision, and how we can make your wedding food something your guests will be talking about for years.

Hamish & Rosie

From the Woods · Bespoke Seasonal Catering

WEB	from-the-woods.co.uk
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AREA	Salisbury & the South West

"Seasonal British produce · Exceptional service · Unforgettable food"

FROM THE WOODS

This guide is a complimentary resource. Please share it with any couple who might find it useful.