

It's Cool! It's Convenient! No Cutting!

Cupcake trees take the cake.

By VANESSA SALVIA

Waiting in line for wedding cake should be a happy occasion. But the kids inevitably complain that Susie got one more icing flower petal than Bobby did. Uncle Jack in front of you visits the cocktail bar 10 times while you travel two feet in the cake line. And by the time you make it to the cake table all the lemon poppyseed is gone, and what's left is butterscotch banana because the bride wanted a "unique" flavor. You don't need a dramatization to know that the sweet subject of wedding cake can all too easily turn bitter.

A new trend is emerging to eschew wedding cake altogether and instead serve individual cupcakes, which bakers make with the same batter and frosting choices as the towering topple-prone cakes of old.

Foodie mags like *Bon Appetit* and *Gourmet* have in recent months touted cupcake trees as the natural progression of wedding cakes. Everybody loves cupcakes — they can be individually decorated and cost about the same as a batter-and-frosting Tower of Pisa. If you're planning on getting crafty and using decorated take-out containers for party favors, rack your brains no more for what to fill them with! Most guests would love to sashay out the door



with a take-home cupcake rather than a bottle of hot sauce or bar of soap.

But beware! Some wedding experts feel cupcake trees have their place, but not as a wedding centerpiece. Jo Dial, a wedding planner for seven years with Wedding Solutions in Eugene, has talked couples out of cupcake trees. The only advantage she sees is that you don't have to pay a caterer to serve the cupcakes, or pay a cutting fee if you've rented a venue that charges to cut

and serve cake. "A [cupcake tree] is not a real popular thing because it doesn't really take the place of an elegant centerpiece," said Dial. "If you were doing a dessert reception without the formal cake cutting, without the full reception food line then that would be different. As a wedding planner I push the traditional." Dial has made wedding cakes for 13 years and wouldn't even make a cupcake tree unless it was for a very small, informal gathering or dessert reception with many options aside from cake.

She also said a cupcake is larger than a slice of cake and a larger serving than many people would eat. But Catherine Reinhart, co-owner of Sweet Life Pâtisserie, thinks that's an overstatement. "We have a little bitty cupcake which is the size of a home

cupcake and then we have a jumbo size," she said. "I have a hard time eating a whole one. But the little one is perfect. It's like four bites."

In fact, Sweet Life has made five cupcake trees for weddings in the past year. "They're super cute," she said, while also acknowledging that decorating options may be a bit more limited. "Because you can only decorate what's on top of the cupcake and what color frosting you put on top of them and what color doodad you put on them," Reinhart explained. "You can go crazy with wedding cakes and we have hundreds of thousands of different designs for wedding cakes. But I would say both are versatile within their own limitations."

There's one more option for folks on small budgets who want to buck tradition altogether or are having a morning wedding: donut trees! Buy different varieties from Krispy-Kreme and stack the donuts on the stand with fresh flowers. It's the trend of the future, and only humbug people don't like donuts!

Where To Find Your Cupcake Tree

Cupcake stands are usually clear plastic or sturdy cardboard and can be decorated easily with a glue gun or double-sided tape. Consider covering the stand with foil or plastic so you can use it again *sans* decoration after the wedding is over. Pile on petit fours, brownies or any bite-size appetizer at your next dinner party. A website (www.cupcaketreestrees.com) offers the full-size stands for \$39.95 or \$24.95 for mini-cupcake stands. Their original Cupcake Tree holds up to 300 cupcakes if all five tiers are used.

Jo Dial, wedding cake baker and wedding planning consultant at Wedding Solutions, can be reached at 741-8136. Sweet Life Pâtisserie, a local bakery, can be reached at 683-5676.

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