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Let 'em eat cake

Make it unique — bake it yourself

WHY NOT actually serve the cake as dessert at the wedding? Cake baker and author Rose Levy Beranbaum, who wrote "The Cake Bible," knows perfectly well why wedding cakes may be the least appreciated portion of the wedding feast. Most are not nearly as tasty as they look.

She says that the tradition of the tasteless wedding cake can be banished by baking your own; she includes a section on how to bake and decorate wedding cakes in her book.

Beranbaum, who once made wedding cakes professionally as well as teaching others how to do it, has put away her cake pans now that her book is out.

But she says that with two days to spare and a certain amount of patience, the bride, a doing relative or friend can bake a cake to serve 150 in the ordinary home oven.

THE PRESENTS formulas for a variety of cakes and icings and shows how to decorate and how to calculate quantities for virtually any size cake. Though the labor is one of love, not economics, a homemade wedding cake is almost sure to cost substantially less than a bakery cake — "even if you blow \$100 on white chocolate for the icing."

The reason most people undertake such a project is to have a unique cake, which may be white, golden, carrot, chocolate or cheese. The only requirements are time and icing.

Beranbaum says that while baking a large cake is not necessarily harder than baking lots of small cakes, the methods vary. For example, large cakes actually take proportionately less baking powder than small cakes do.

THE LARGER CAKES also have a tendency to get too brown at the edges before the centers are done. Aluminum



This "dotted swiss dream" wedding cake can be baked at home a couple of days before the ceremony.

strips can be used to retard browning the sides so the center can be cooked through.

Some tips: Use cake flour, not all-purpose or self-rising flour. Make sure

that the butter is softened before it's added to the batter. If it isn't, the cake mixture won't be aerated properly and the cake will be tough and flat.

Oven temperature is critical in baking

a large cake. She advises that before baking a large cake, bake a small one and see if it takes longer than the recipe. "A cake that bakes fast might be a little humped, but a cake that bakes slowly will never be tender, so raise the temperature in a slow-cooking oven," she says.

A tiered cake needs support. In commercial bakeries, the supports are wood dowels. Plastic straws work fine at home, she says.

THE SIMPLEST wedding cake to make is a white or yellow butter cake with butter-cream icing. "Give it two full days — one day to make the components and one day to put them together and decorate the cake," she says.

You can make some decorations ahead of time. For example, marzipan roses can be stored for years. Most cakes don't have to be refrigerated overnight, she says.

As for transporting the cake, she says that there are only two people fit for the job: "the person who made the cake or the person who is paying for it."

The safe method is to place the cake in a box whose sides are rigid and keep the largest bottom layer from touching the sides. Provided there are not too many bumps on the ride, the cake should survive without a blemish.

The cake that launched Beranbaum's reputation was a four-tiered creation covered in what looked like dotted swiss fabric with a trim of roses. She developed it for Bon Appetit magazine as an example of what could be done at home.

"That cake changed my life," she says. "I got so many calls I decided to teach intensive classes in special occasion cake-baking."

The information she compiled for the classes and the experiences she had baking the wedding cakes led her to develop the formulas and expertise that are found in her book.

Champagne toast is special part of ceremony

"The champagne toast is one of the low times during the reception when someone other than the bride and groom has center stage," says Michel La Croix, chef de cave at Piper-Heidsieck. Traditionally, the

best man offers the first toast to the couple, but others may do so. Whoever gives the toast should agree on the message with the groom ahead of time.

LaCroix's tips for a toast:

The toast takes place after the bride and groom have been received and the guests have taken their seats.

The person giving the toast stands to the right of the couple while the

newlyweds remain seated.

The groom rises after the toast and offers another to his bride and her family. The bride may respond by welcoming the groom into her family. Guests usually stand for the toast.

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