

# BRIDE & GROOM™

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# Pretty and Sophisticated

*How to Work the Plant-Based Trend into Your Menu*

*by Connie Jeske Crane*



If you're looking to create a wedding menu that's deliciously sophisticated and in vogue, plant-based is the hottest food trend for 2018, according to New York restaurant consultancy group Baum + Whiteman.

In Somerville, Kristen Campbell, director of event sales and planning at Forklift Catering, confirms a shift here as well. "We are seeing more demand for vegetarian and vegan catering."

In Boston, Emma Roberts, the owner of Capers Catering, says, "I think you're always going to have that stodgy New England person who is a meat-and-potato person, but I think that's getting less and less prevalent, and more people are open to new things and creativity."

The huge popularity of plant-based dishes is definitely something to keep in mind as you're working out your wedding menu. Whether you and your partner embrace this dietary choice yourselves or just want to include beautiful vegetable dishes alongside meat proteins, it's an exciting era. Across New England today, savvy caterers and chefs are elevating plant-based cuisine to a whole new level of dazzle.

### **New Mindset**

Do you want to get onboard with this trend? If the answer is yes, then the first thing to note is that there's a whole new mindset emerging. We used to think of vegetarians and vegans as on the fringe, and catering was mostly geared towards covering the bases. As Campbell says, "For a long time it was, 'That's okay if

that's what you want to do, and we'll make sure there's something you can have. But you know, Mom wants to serve beef and it's her wedding too.'"

Today, besides considering what guests and parents want, Campbell says more couples are crafting menus that reflect their preferences as well. "People have begun to include food as part of the personalization of their wedding." The other big change is the food quality. Rather than adding a pallid vegetarian lasagne to your menu as an afterthought, Campbell says, plant-based dishes have become sophisticated, chef-driven fare.

### **Choosing a Caterer**

Obviously, choosing the right caterer is pretty important here. Roberts advises looking for caterers who customize their menus versus those who offer set packages. "You really need people who are very interested in vegetables, interested in farm-to-table, interested in the cutting-edge...I think if you pick the right partner, then it's easy to come up with something that's fun and interesting."

How far you take the plant-based thing depends on you. While most weddings continue to include both plant- and meat-based dishes, it's not uncommon today, says Campbell, to see all-vegetarian or all-vegan wedding menus. "We've found that with couples who are vegetarian or vegan, where both members are making that dietary choice, they tend to lean towards making the choice for the whole group."

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If you go meatless, buffets work really well versus plated meals, adds Campbell. "For couples who choose to do a fully vegetarian or vegan wedding, I find they're leaning towards buffets because they want to offer guests those choices."

### Serving Suggestions

As for how to wow your guests with vegetables, legumes, and grains, you'll want to have lots of discussions with your caterer. The caterers we talked to did, however, have some great guidelines.

Campbell, for example, suggests designing your buffet to include both familiar dishes and some that invite guests to explore. "Both of the vegan weddings we did last year had some sort of pasta component, and I think that's a really accessible vegan entrée for people... But maybe also give them the opportunity to try something that they haven't had before like lentils or curried cauliflower."

Interesting flavors also help woo a crowd, she adds. "People have a much more diverse palate than they used to, so things like samosas and Indian dishes lend themselves really easily to vegetarian flavors." Finally, Campbell says opting for a late summer or early fall wedding, when there's lots of gorgeous local produce, really helps you deliver pizzazz. "When you look at a beautiful tomato bar or peaches or beets or anything like that, you don't think about missing that meat, because there's so much amazing fresh food."

And ultimately, whether there's meat or not is really not the point. As Roberts says, "I think the goal is to try to make beautiful things so that people don't even realize that they're vegan, because they're so good and so hearty and so filling and so pretty that no one is missing the meat!" **B&G**

*Connie Jeske Crane is a full-time freelance writer and reports frequently on weddings, parenting, sustainability, and social media. You can visit her at [www.conniejeskecrane.com](http://www.conniejeskecrane.com).*

