

Questions to Ask Caterers

- Does the caterer specialize in certain types of food or service? (They should provide you with sample menus to look at.)
- Will the caterer arrange for a tasting of the foods you might be interested in serving prior to your hiring them? (They should.)
- What is the caterer's average price range? Are costs itemized depending on the foods you choose, or is there an all-inclusive flat rate? What would that include? Does the caterer have printed price sheets for food selections?
- How involved is the caterer in a typical reception—does he or she work like a wedding coordinator or banquet manager, cueing the band, telling the couple when to cut the cake, adjusting the schedule if guests aren't ready to sit down to dinner? (You will need to find someone to fill this role—if your site manager or caterer isn't going to do this, you may want to hire a coordinator for the day.)
- Who would be your main contact? Will the same person you work with when planning also oversee meal service on your wedding day? (You want this to be the case if at all possible.)
- Is the caterer working any other weddings on the same weekend, on the same day, or at the same time as yours?
- If your reception site can't, can the caterer provide tables, chairs, linens, and dinnerware? (Ask to see linens, serving pieces, and the like to make sure they're acceptable to you.) Will they arrange for the rentals, if required? (Try to avoid handling the rentals yourself.)
- Does the caterer set the tables? And put out place cards and favors?
- Will the caterer provide wait staff? How many would they recommend for the size of your wedding? What do wait staff wear? (Top caterers say they always use their own serving personnel, even if the site's staff is available, because they understand the caterer's expectations and way of doing business.)
- Where will food be prepared? Are there on-site facilities, or do you, the caterer, and the site need to make additional arrangements? (If the caterer has to bring in his or her own equipment, is there an additional fee?)
- Does the caterer work with fresh (not frozen) food?
- Does the caterer have a license? (This means the business has met health department standards and has liability insurance; make sure that includes a license to serve liquor if you're having a bar.)
- Can the caterer provide alcohol, or is/can the bar be your or the reception site's responsibility? (If you can provide it, is there a corkage fee? How and when do you get the alcohol to the caterer? If the caterer will provide it, do they have an inflexible wine list, or can you make special requests? How is it priced?)