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Kane County Magazine

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a fresh take



SAYING 'I DO' TO PANDEMIC WEDDINGS

FINDING SWEETNESS IN SIMPLICITY

By Katie McCall, local food columnist

When my culinary journey began over a decade ago, I never imagined I'd end up owning a bakery. The even bigger surprise was that I'd be making wedding cakes.

Though I loved baking at home, cake decorating was its own entity. In culinary school, I remember a particular day when I'd fallen victim to what our pastry instructor called the cake decorating "death spiral": endlessly smoothing, fixing, fussing and resmoothing ... eventually, she lovingly told me to put down the spatula and back away. Cakes seemed overly tedious, and as a self-proclaimed perfectionist, I couldn't fathom having the patience to decorate them — let alone for someone's wedding day!

Fast forward a few years and ironically, it was weddings that catapulted my professional culinary career. After teaming up with my mom and catering weddings for friends and family

out of my quaint Chicago apartment, demand for our goods led to the opening of our brick-and-mortar bakery in 2016. When Two Wild Seeds (now closed) was in full swing, weddings accounted for half of our business and we were gearing up for 2020 to be our busiest season yet.

Then COVID-19 hit.

Of 50-plus booked weddings, all but three canceled. With newfound supply and staff shortages as well as ever-changing guidelines and restrictions, we were at a crossroads and unable to reschedule future dates. Needless to say, it was devastating to both wedding industry professionals and the couples.

From an insider's perspective, the most discouraging aspect was watching couples call off their weddings completely due to conflicting desires surrounding the planning of their big day. One wanted the fairy tale wedding filled with engagement parties, bridal showers, the rehearsal dinner, a 200-plus guest list at a swanky indoor venue, brunch

the next day and honeymoon; the other was happy with a courthouse ceremony or intimate backyard celebration with immediate family.

That's when it hit me: Our society had placed so much pressure on what a wedding should be that couples quickly lost sight of the actual marriage. On the flip side, microweddings began to emerge and we saw a progressive shift toward more intimate, minimalist celebrations that gave me hope for the future.

Now, as we've entered 2022 and COVID-19 rates have skyrocketed once again, it's crucial that couples embrace this new normal and reevaluate their expectations. Need a jump start?

Consider these insider tips for a bit of inspiration and clarity when planning a pandemic wedding:

- 1 KEEP PERSPECTIVE.** Strip away the bells and whistles that are more for show and less about meaning. Remember: It's a marriage, not a circus.
- 2 ADD PERSONAL TOUCHES.** Perhaps a close friend plays an instrument for the ceremony, or the flower bouquet is wrapped in an heirloom piece of fabric. Personalized details will make the celebration feel more authentic and unique, no matter how small.
- 3 DO IT YOURSELF.** From homemade treats (see this month's recipe) to thrifting for antique serving dishes, there are endless projects that will not only cut back on costs but also alleviate the stress of coordinating multiple vendors.
- 4 HIRE A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER.** While some areas of a wedding can be simplified, don't compromise on high-quality photos. Candid memories from your special day will last a lifetime, no matter the circumstances.
- 5 EMBRACE INTIMACY.** Weddings with gigantic guest lists often overwhelm couples, so rather than being pulled in a million different directions, find joy in a slower paced, more intimate setting surrounded by your closest friends and family.

Photo by Victoria C Photos



■ Katie McCall, former owner of Two Wild Seeds Baking Co., is a bona fide Midwestern girl. Raised on four acres of rural property in Yorkville, she was always taught to respect nature and all of its bounty. From foraging morel mushrooms in the woods to picking wild black raspberries for homemade jam, Katie feels most at home when in nature and preparing food for others. When she's not creating new dishes in the kitchen (and writing about them) she can be found nose-deep in cookbooks, exploring the outdoors with her family — and eating ... always eating.

MEXICAN WEDDING COOKIES

These traditional shortbread cookies laced with orange zest and pecans are not only super simple to prepare — but they can also be made in advance and frozen, which is great for any special occasion!

MAKES ABOUT 24 COOKIES

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 sticks salted butter, room temperature
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- Zest of 1 orange
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- Pinch of salt
- 2/3 cup pecans, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In a large mixing bowl or stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, combine the butter and sugar. Beat a few minutes until light and fluffy.

Add the vanilla extract and orange zest; beat again until incorporated.

Next, add the flour, salt and chopped pecans. Mix until just combined.

Chill the dough about 15 minutes. Then with a small ice cream scoop (or heaping tablespoon), scoop the dough into balls, placing them about one-half inch apart on a parchment-lined cookie sheet.

Bake until cookies are just done, about 12 minutes. Allow to cool completely, then roll in powdered sugar and store in an airtight container until ready to serve. Enjoy!

**If preparing large quantities ahead of time, layer the baked cookies with parchment or wax paper in airtight containers and freeze. Roll in powdered sugar prior to serving.*

**Cookies can be made gluten-free by substituting with your favorite gluten-free flour blend. Note that cookies may be slightly more crumbly.*

