

What a Cake

Wedding cake can cost anywhere from \$3 to \$30 (!) per slice. How is this range of prices possible when we're essentially talking just sugar, flour, and eggs? Simple: While the cost of ingredients can be a factor, the final sum actually depends upon the hours of labor required. Luckily, we found a few bakers willing to reveal how to keep costs down without sacrificing the cake design you have your heart set on. **BY LAUREN MATTHEWS**

Here are some factors that can increase costs: **DESIGN:** A custom design can add about \$200 to \$300, since a baker needs to spend time coming up with and perfecting the concept. To save: Go simple, or slightly alter a previous design the baker has done (say, change the types of flowers). **ICING:** Covering a cake in rolled fondant instead of buttercream will generally add \$1 per slice. Fondant costs more to buy in bulk, and it's harder to make lie smoothly, so there's more labor involved, and consequently, more money. **COLOR:** Colored fondant can add another \$1 per serving, since getting the color even while kneading it into the doughlike icing is difficult. **SUGAR FLOWERS:** Creating realistic-looking flowers from gumpaste (a type of sugar-based dough)

is time-consuming: Each individual petal has to be cut out, molded, dried, attached to the other petals, then hand-painted. Making flowers from sculpted fondant, on the other hand, is quicker, and therefore less costly. The caveat: Fondant can't be rolled as thinly as gumpaste, so it can be used to create only simple or abstract flowers. **HAND-PAINTING:** Cake designers often paint over fondant and gumpaste decorations with pearl, luster, or gold dust to add richness and dimension. The extra cost of hand-painting is based on the additional labor, not the price of materials (though you may be charged a nominal fee for 24k edible gold leaf, depending on how much is being used). Brush embroidery is created using an advanced hand-painting technique in

which intricate designs are piped onto a cake with royal icing, then smudged with a wet brush. It's a laborious process—sometimes taking up to five hours for one cake—and requires an extremely skilled hand.

FONDANT CUT-OUTS: The price you'll pay depends on how many cut-outs there are and how difficult the shapes are to create. For example, cutting out circles is simple, but cutting out an intricate custom pattern takes much longer. **POURED SUGAR:** Poured-sugar and pressed-sugar decorations are made using molds, so they aren't too difficult to create (definitely less laborious than pulled-sugar or blown-sugar decorations). However, the process of hand-coloring then dusting poured-sugar details does take time, which adds to the total cost.

CAKES & MENUS

Diagram illustrating the cost breakdown for two wedding cakes:

- Left Cake:** \$24 per slice, Total cake cost: \$3,600
- Right Cake:** \$12 per slice, Total cake cost: \$1,800

Callouts explaining cost factors:

- A topper can add up to \$500 to the final cost.
- A custom gumpaste plaque can add \$50 to \$100.
- The more petals it has, the pricier each gumpaste flower will be. Peonies are the most time-consuming (and therefore the priciest) flowers to re-create.
- Dogwood flowers and leaves created from sculpted fondant are easy to make.
- Brush embroidery can be pricey.

Handwritten note: *For Yanko*

CAKES BY ANA PARZYCH OF ANA PARZYCH CUSTOM CAKES

Costs



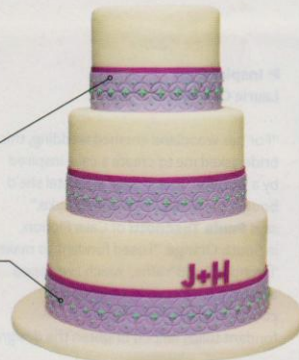
◀ \$12 per slice
Total cake cost: \$900

\$9 per slice ▶
Total cake cost: \$675

⑥ “Cutting the individual fondant petals out by hand took me about four hours, because they were thin and needed to look uniform,” says baker Liz.

⑦ However, pressing circles into bands of fondant “is much less labor-intensive—this cake took just two and a half hours to decorate.”

⑧ Simple aqua-blue piping (royal icing squeezed through the tip of a pastry bag) completes the look. A more intricate piped design would have taken longer, and incurred a higher price.



CAKES BY LIZ SHIM OF EAT CAKE BE MERRY



◀ \$18 per slice
Total cake cost: \$2,250

\$12 per slice ▶
Total cake cost: \$1,500

⑨ Embossing—creating a raised pattern with rolled fondant—is time-consuming. The less-expensive cake features an inlaid pattern cut directly into the fondant, which takes less than half the time to execute.

⑩ On the expensive cake, black “brooches” and scattered metallic “jewels” are made of poured sugar. Each component of the brooches has to be delicately hand-wired and glued together. On the less-pricey cake, simple pressed-sugar versions of the brooches glued directly onto the fondant saved time (and money).

⑪ Dragées—tiny balls of sugar painted with gold dust—are purchased pre-made, and are therefore less costly than the poured-sugar jewels.

⑫ Like sugar flowers, these gumpaste feathers had to be hand-cut, molded, and dried. In comparison, the poured-sugar leaves were much easier to create; the less-expensive cake required six fewer hours of labor.



CAKES BY LAURI DITUNNO OF CAKE ALCHEMY