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## Chelsea Clinton: Let them eat gluten-free cake

Could vegan, gluten-free choices on her wedding menu have a trickle-down effect?

**By Lynn Bruno**

TODAYshow.com contributor

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Tongues are wagging — with some salivating and others going “yuck” — over news reports that Chelsea Clinton’s super-secret upstate New York wedding to Marc Mezvinsky this Saturday will feature a vegan menu and a gluten-free cake. The couple will throw at least one bone to meat eaters, though, by serving up some organic grass-fed beef.

While all-alternative banquet menus are still relatively rare — caterers say they account for just a small sliver of the pie, or cake, as it were — such requests are on the rise, a trend that is likely to continue in the wake of the former first daughter’s wedding.

“This will empower people to make these requests,” says Grace Clerihew, a principal at Table Tales, a New York City catering firm. “Prior to this, they might have thought it was not mainstream enough to even talk about, but now that they see it being done by such a public persona it becomes acceptable.”

Chelsea likely chose her menu based on both personal preferences and health needs — she is said to have been vegan since her teen years and to have a gluten allergy — but her

wedding menu should have a trickle-down effect nonetheless, says Clerihew.

It’s already become standard practice for most caterers and restaurants to offer vegetarian options. Clerihew predicts this event will inspire them to explore vegan and gluten-free options “in a more inspired way.”

**What vegan, gluten-free involves** At hundreds of dollars a head, Chelsea’s menu had better be inspired. But even more common folk can expect to pay a premium for such specialty menus, which until now have largely been the province of higher-end caterers in more food-conscious markets.

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Vegan dishes and a gluten-free cake reportedly will be on the menu at Chelsea Clinton's wedding reception on Saturday.

Vegan and gluten-free options can be one and the same, but not necessarily so. Vegan dishes are not simply vegetarian dishes; instead, they do not contain any ingredients derived from animals, including butter, cheese, milk and other dairy products.

Gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oat products, can trigger allergic reactions in people who suffer from celiac disease and gluten intolerance. So gluten-free foods are devoid of wheat, rye, barley or oat gluten.

The double whammy of vegan and gluten-free restrictions can certainly make planning a menu — and crafting a cake — a challenge, but chefs and caterers in the know say it can be done successfully and can be well worth the effort. In fact, they say mainstream eaters

may be surprised to discover that vegan and gluten-free food can be delicious.

“We’ve gotten very savvy about creating wonderful things with alternative ingredients,” says Paula LeDuc, owner of Paula LeDuc Fine Catering, an event firm in San Francisco. “It’s not just pasta or a big pile of veggies anymore.”

Dishes like LeDuc’s signature grilled tofu and portobello mushroom rounds shingled on fresh rosemary skewers served on a summer corn and Beaulieu Garden sungold tomato succotash can set a banquet table abuzz and have those who ordered the meat or fish asking to switch plates. The experience is so common that her firm routinely makes extra to satisfy all who ask.

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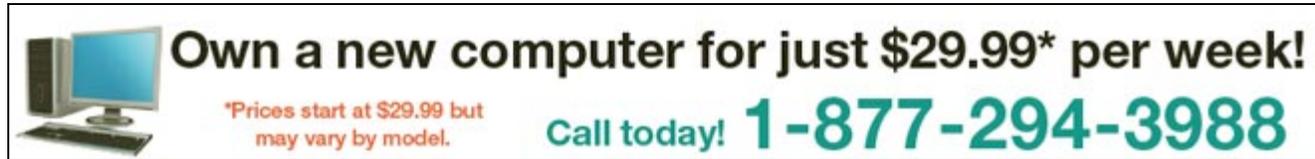
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wedding fever grips little town  
 Chelsea Clinton then and now

LeDuc says requests for vegan items are up 15 percent across all types of events since last year. Gluten-free requests have increased from roughly one a month last year to one a week this year. "Three or four years ago, gluten-free wasn't even part of the conversation," she says.

**The 'mother-in-law issue'** The trend is not just confined to foodie cities like San Francisco and New York. Jennie Scheinbach, owner of Pattycake Bakery, an exclusively vegan bakery in Columbus, Ohio, says her gluten-free business has exploded. "When we started (in 2003), it didn't seem like anyone was gluten-free. Now about 5 to 10 percent of our cake business is gluten-free," she says.

Vegan and organic can still be a hard sell in Columbus. "There aren't a lot of vegans in Columbus, and your typical Ohioan doesn't get why they should pay more for better ingredients," says Scheinbach. Still, Pattycake has found a loyal following among people interested in food made with organic, sustainably farmed, fair-trade ingredients.

Pattycake uses such ingredients wherever possible, even though with some things costing two or three times as much as conventional ones, it's not as profitable. "It's dirt cheap to use crap," she says. "It's incredibly expensive to use not crap. We can't charge the standard markup. It's just part

of the nature of this business." A wedding cake from Pattycake only costs about 10 percent more than one from competing Columbus bakeries.

And then there's the "mother-in-law issue." Brides typically seek out vegan or gluten-free because of personal preference or because someone in the wedding party has allergies, but others involved in planning the event sometimes need convincing that an alternative menu is really a good idea.

Doron Petersan, who offers free bridal cupcake tastings of confections made with tofu, potato and tapioca starches at her all-vegan Sticky Fingers Bakery in Washington, D.C., says the taste is what ultimately convinces people. "Once people come in for a tasting, about 95 percent of them sign up," she says.

That may be because no one thinks wedding

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cakes will taste good, says Petersan, whose best-selling vanilla cake with toasted vanilla almond icing wins rave reviews. “Lots of places just focus on the decoration of the cake,” she says. “Our cakes are nice looking, but we really focus on the flavor. We constantly get people saying nobody knew this was vegan.”

**‘Wasn’t even a crumb left’** It’s the same story at Pattycake. “There’s a bakery in town that makes cakes that are incredibly beautiful to look at,” says Scheinbach. “We had a couple who ordered one cake from us, and one from them to appease the mom. All the non-vegans ended up eating our cake. Now I tell people, if you’re going to do that, you need to hide our cake in the back or there won’t be any left for the vegans.”

That may sound surprising, but Amy Bradley, a longtime vegan and Pattycake devotee, knew that’s exactly what would happen at her wedding in Columbus last July. Despite the fact that “we get a ton of pushback at holidays from people that don’t ‘get’ vegan and think skipping meat for even one meal is a big deal,” she ordered a small vegan pistachio rosewater cake with whipped frosting topped with pistachio nuts, and 10 dozen assorted vegan cupcakes (including a dozen gluten-free) even though she and her husband Chris only invited 100 guests. “There wasn’t even a crumb left,” she says, “and our friends and relatives said it was the best wedding cake they’d ever had.”

As more people are exposed to tasty

alternative foods, demand is likely to continue to climb. “We get people now who pick a vegetarian menu not because they’re vegetarian, but just because they liked it the best after the tasting,” says caterer LeDuc. Although she has no plans to abandon more traditional dishes, offering alternatives, she says, has opened the door to new conversations about food, a sentiment echoed by Table Tales’ Clerihew. Chelsea’s wedding menu, she says, “is just one more unfolding of the public consciousness around food.”

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## Recipe: Gluten-free cupcakes

*Candace Nelson*

### Ingredients

1 cup of butter

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- 1 1/2 cups of sugar
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2 1/2 cups of gluten-free flour blend
- 4 tablespoons of cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon of baking soda
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 1/4 cups of milk
- 1 teaspoon of white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons of red food coloring
- 2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

#### Cream cheese frosting

- 8 ounces of cream cheese, softened
- 4 ounces (1 stick) of butter, softened
- 3 3/4 cups of powdered sugar, sifted
- 1/8 teaspoon of salt
- 1/2 teaspoon of vanilla

#### Preparation

For the cupcakes:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Stir together dry ingredients (flour, cocoa, baking soda, salt).

Mix together wet ingredients (milk, vinegar, food coloring, vanilla).

Add creamed butter and sugar, mix in eggs.

Alternately mix in dry, wet, then dry ingredients.

Fill 1 dozen cupcake cups and bake for 18-22 minutes or until tops are just dry on top.

For the frosting:

Mix cream cheese and butter.

Add salt and vanilla.

Slowly add in powdered sugar.

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