

With a little advance planning, elegant wedding tents simultaneously incorporate the beauty of the outdoors into wedding revelry and buffer against the elements on that special day.



# The Perfect Day, The Perfect Tent

Helpful how-to's for outdoor weddings that wow.

**on a beach** with panoramic ocean views. In a field with vintage touches. At an inn, surrounded by gardens and village charm. The possibilities are endless, and armed with a vision, engaged couples can use wedding tents to build a venue with emotional resonance. A tented wedding is a creative, personalized approach to a memorable day.

The versatility of tents allows for outdoor spaces that are part of nature, but protected from its whims.

But along with this freedom comes the challenge of ensuring that events proceed smoothly and comfortably for all involved. From leveling issues to power to catering to rain, there are many factors to consider when tenting an outdoor space, which is why brides, grooms, and their families rely on the experience of a tent rental company to guide them.

For over 20 years, Sperry Tents has provided tents and other rentals for outdoor weddings and special occasions. Sperry is best known for its elegant sailcloth tents, which are designed by the Fabric Architecture division of sister company Sperry Sails. In recent years, Sperry Tents has grown from the original location to a family of 15 privately owned providers.

Whether it's destined for Wisconsin or the Hamptons, the crew of Sperry Sails handcrafts each Sperry Tent in an energy-efficient, post-and-beam facility in the historic village of Rochester, Massachusetts. With brothers Matt and Tim Sperry leading Sperry Sails and Sperry Tents, respectively, the two companies are family run and place a premium on traditional craftsmanship.

Sperry Tents come in various sizes, from small rounds to large, graceful ovals. They are also available in two color styles: classic ivory or the signature blue star design. Other telltale features of a Sperry Tent include geometric support patches with stainless steel grommets; pennant flags atop each peak; and solid wood support poles, most of which are milled at a historic 1930s sawmill operated by Tim and Matt's father and Sperry Sails founder, Steve Sperry.

"Selecting a wedding tent goes beyond size and guest count," explains Tim. "Choosing the style and quality of a tent is just as important as selecting an indoor venue. It needs to be a visually appealing backdrop, particularly for photography. The detailed craftsmanship of our canopies is purposeful and reflects the importance of such a well-documented day."

Allison Wildes Liset, a Cape-based event planner and owner of Elegant Engagements, agrees that the styling and details of a tent are paramount. "Sperry's wooden poles are unique and, unlike metal poles, do not require 'decorative camouflage,'" she explains. "Also, the ivory color of their canopies is softer than the stark white of other tents and oftentimes more complementary to the environment and most wedding palettes. My favorite aspect is how the pattern of the seams creates drama as the canopy stretches up towards the peaks."

For a newly engaged couple about to host their first sizable outdoor event, the following advice from Sperry and Wildes Liset will help keep the planning on track and smooth out any bumps along the way.

## wedding tents



Before choosing a tent, be sure to account for any slopes in the area where it is pitched as well as the number, size, and shapes of the tables and other structures to be placed underneath.

### positioning

No matter whether an outdoor wedding requires one tent or several, it is important to schedule a site check with an experienced crew chief or sales manager to assure that the desired tents fit properly in the desired location. This in-person meeting is also an ideal time to discuss any leveling issues. The goal might be to site a tent near a home or orient it towards a certain view, but its ultimate placement might need adjusting due to any interfering slopes.

Positioning a tent on uneven ground requires the installation of a full floor with leveling. A more expensive item, full flooring provides

superior comfort and weather protection as well as level footing.

### the more, the merrier

Arranging a variety of tent canopies on one property for different uses is a creative way to entertain guests throughout the stages of a wedding day.

“In my experience, it’s all about the flow of guests and how many times you can ‘wow’ them,” says Wildes Liset. “I believe you have up to four opportunities to create a feeling, an energy within a space: ceremony, cocktail hour, dinner and dancing, and, in many cases, the after-party.”

Her multi-tent arrangements have included a medium oval for an outdoor ceremony, a smaller blue star round for cocktails, and a roomy oval for dinner and dancing. Other inventive tent uses include cigar lounges, bridal prep, lounge seating, and kids’ play areas.

### catering

Catering should be accounted for if an event site does not provide suitable interior space. Usually measuring about 400 square feet or more, a cook tent can be encased in solid sides to shield the working interior from guests. In case of bad weather, it’s a good idea to plan for covered

walkways, which can be fully sided, between the main and cook tents.

Overall, caterers are familiar with tented events and will offer suggestions as to their ideal cook tent size. Involve them in the process to make sure their needs are met.

### cloudy with a chance of rain

No one wants to envision bad weather on a wedding day. However, a gloomy forecast is much more manageable and much less worrisome if contingency plans have been arranged in advance.

“We offer what is commonly called a rain plan for rain-only rental equipment,” explains Sperry.

“Items typically include ceremony and cocktail tents as well as covered walkways to connect tents or even a tent to a building. As opposed to the main plan that will be executed no matter what,” he continues, “a rain plan can be cancelled before the scheduled setup day and reserved with a lesser deposit.”

Tent sides are a standard item on rental equipment lists and should not be removed, advises Sperry. “You never know when the temperature will drop or a breeze will pick up,” he says, adding that sides can be installed but rolled up, leaving the tent open to the landscape until the sides are needed. “We also

offer onsite event coverage, which consists of a crew member on-hand to deal with side management and lighting adjustments. This coverage offers great peace of mind.”

### layout

Dance floor, band stage, buffet and gift tables, and the number of bars all factor in to a layout. Even dining table shape affects the final reception tent size. Round 60-inch tables fit very efficiently inside tents and can seat eight to 10 guests—they are a good choice for budget-conscious couples looking to maximize square footage. Long rectangular tables take up more room, particularly if



wedding tents

IRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

arranged as individual tables with eight to 10 guests each. As plans solidify, couples should update their tent company if their chosen table is different than the shape shown in spatial diagrams.

### innovative tent options

In 2011, the Fabric Architecture division of Sperry Sails unveiled a brand new tent design: the Sperry Pavilion. A frame tent like no other, the Pavilion offers a clear (pole-free) span. Comprised of an ivory sailcloth top and a natural wood frame, this style of tent measures 26 by 46 feet and can be paired with traditional Sperry pole tents or stand alone as a statement piece. It can accommodate a modest seated reception or act as an impressive retreat for drinks and dancing.

When all of the elements come together, an outdoor wedding showcases originality and personality. "Couples these days seem less concerned about formality and more concerned with creating a fun, comfortable environment for guests," observes Wildes Liset. "Sperry Tents complement this trend by creating relaxed, natural settings. They speak to everything Cape and Islands."

For information, go to [sperrytents.com](http://sperrytents.com)



CHARLOTTE JENKS LEWIS



Using an array of tents with different canopy shapes can signal the transitions throughout the wedding, from the ceremony through the after-party—and create new environments to entertain your guests.

BREA McDONALD

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