



# The Sky's the Limit



As event pros know too well, the risks are high with outdoor events—but so are the rewards

**BY SARA PEREZ WEBBER**

There's something about the open air that energizes an event, giving it an intangible quality that can't be matched in an indoor setting. Yet outdoor events come fraught with logistical challenges, not least of which is the weather. Nevertheless, caterers and event planners take these challenges in stride, staging unforgettable events under sunny and starry skies—and even cloudy and rainy ones. Following are five examples of outdoor parties that went off without a hitch, thanks to expert planning and a little help from Mother Nature—with tips from the pros who made them possible.



## Harvested With Love

Catering by Seasons, based in College Park, Md., specializes in farm-to-table catering and events. One such wedding was a particular labor of love for Dave Evans, owner of Catering by Seasons' parent company, La Prima Food Group. Not only did the wedding take place at his daughter's farm, it was his daughter getting married.

Evans' daughter Margaret Brown and her husband Kevin own Groundworks Farm in Pittsville, Md., a CSA model farm that supplies produce, eggs and meat to its members, a local restaurant and La Prima Food Group. When the couple decided they wanted to be married on their farm, a number of logistical challenges needed to be solved—primarily where to hold and stage the event. Determining an existing greenhouse wouldn't suffice, "we decided to put up a new one, which they needed anyway," says Evans.

After the outdoor ceremony and a cocktail hour accompanied by a bonfire, the 150 guests entered the new greenhouse, which featured draping for a homier feel, a window hung at the entrance, a table lined with family photos, plywood covering the dirt floor, and lights strung from all the supporting structures. The kitchen was set up in a tractor barn adjacent to the greenhouse.

Despite the lack of heat in the barn and the need for many extension cords to provide lighting, Executive Chef Kyle Vermeulen created a meal on site from what was grown and raised on the surrounding fields. "That's kind of status quo for us," says Evans. "We often find ourselves in cold or not-such-great environments, and we just have to deal with it and be prepared for it." The dinner buffet's roast pork and braised chicken came from the farm's pasture-raised pigs and chickens, while the farm also yielded the produce for the beet salad with arugula and roasted root vegetables. Only the grilled polenta parmesan and wheat berry salad featured ingredients not from the farm. A local orchard that's part of Groundworks' CSA provided the apples for the apple pie dessert, based on a family recipe beloved by the bride.

"For the centerpieces on the buffet, someone went out in the field and pulled root vegetables," says Evans. "The service staff was extremely creative. We brought along cylinder vases, and sent them out to see what they could gather and utilize. Everything came from right out of the ground." ●●● cateringbyseasons.com



### TIPS:

- You always hope for the best but plan for the worst—that means not only rain, but high heat and humidity, bees buzzing all over the bars, wind. You've got to be prepared, and you've got to have a plan.

- Start communicating the risks involved with an outdoor event from the very beginning. In the initial phone call, you don't want to be the voice of gloom and doom, but when the bride tells you about the wonderful outdoor venue where she wants to have her wedding, you say, "That's great; it's beautiful there. However, what do we do if it's raining?" It's better that I, as the educator, rain on their parade, then the rain comes and ruins their event.

- Find out who you are going to speak to at the event when you have to make a last-minute decision because of the weather. The bride doesn't need to be bothered when she's getting ready. Is it the best man? The maid of honor? Get their cell phone number.

- I always tell people that tent companies would not be in business if they only provided tents to people in bad weather. A lot of people think they can call a tent company a couple of days out, but it doesn't work like that. They're not going to get what they need at a price they can afford.

—Dina Silnicky, director of special events, Catering by Seasons/La Prima Food Group

