



PLANNING THE WEDDING

Most Greek Orthodox weddings in the United States combine Greek and American customs. Use an American wedding etiquette book as a basic planning guide. Such books are available for purchase or may be checked out of a local library. Add the Greek customs included here — *bonbonnières*, *stéphana*, *bouzoúki*, and *baklavá* — for a unique and joyous Greek-American wedding!

SETTING THE DATE

Marriages cannot be performed on certain church feast days and during some periods of Lent. For example, do not plan to marry during Great Lent and Holy Week. (See “Guidelines for Marriage in the Greek Orthodox Church” below)

SELECTING THE *KOUMBÁROS(A)* AND OTHER ATTENDANTS

The *koumbáros* (male) or *koumbára* (female), the official sponsor of the marriage, must be Orthodox and in good standing with the church. Generally there is only one *koumbáros(a)*, but some priests permit couples (*koumbári*). (In formal Greek the word *paránymphos* is used for *koumbáros(a)*.)

Traditionally the groom’s godparent is asked to serve first and then the godparent of the bride. If neither of them participate, ask a close friend or family member. Remember, this is an important relationship lasting a lifetime. *Koumbári* become almost like family. Consider also the suitability of the *koumbáros(a)* as a godparent, since he or she usually baptizes the first child.

The *koumbáros(a)* can be the best man or maid of honor, but this does not have to be the case. No other attendants, except the *koumbáros(a)*, are required to be Orthodox.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE *KOUMBÁROS(A)*

The *koumbáros(a)* *stephanóni* the couple. *Stephánoma* is the act of exchanging the wedding crowns three times above the heads of the bride and groom during the service.



Marriage

The *koumbáros(a)* should provide the following for the marriage ceremony (see explanations below):

- Proof of good standing in an Orthodox church (a letter from the parish priest)
- Marriage crowns (*stéphana*)
- Wedding tray layered with *koufêta* and rice
- Two candles
- Wedding rings (purchased by the couple)
- Gratuities to the priest, chanter, and sexton
- *Optional*: Wine goblet

Marriage Crowns (*Stéphana*)



The crowning of the bride and groom during the church ceremony is a highlight of the Orthodox service.

In most instances, the *koumbáros(a)* provides the *stéphana*. Selection of the *stéphana* is a matter of personal choice. Some *koumbári* buy the crowns without consulting the bride and groom. Others may go with the bride to the specialty shop and make the selection together.

Crown styles change frequently. The church requires only that they be round and joined together by ribbon. Traditional crowns are delicate and simple, a weaving of white wax flowers with beading and white leaves, linked together with a white satin ribbon (see *illustration*). They may be purchased through a Greek specialty store, a catalog, in Greece, or from an individual who makes them. Elaborate crowns are becoming more common, featuring intricate beading or metal work with designs that match the bride's gown. These can be quite expensive, however, and are not necessary. Some couples use their parents' *stéphana*, but most have their own for permanent display at home.

Wedding Tray

Put the *stéphana* on top of a tray covered with a single layer of *koufêta* and rice. The priest places the tray on a small table at the