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Weddings are getting back on track in Italy, Europe's main market for wedding parties. Italian florists are selling more bridal arrangements, but couples seem to be buying slightly fewer flowers than before COVID-19, mainly because ornamentals have become more expensive.

Charles Lansdorp of Flower Academy finds that there has been a catch-up in weddings in Italy: Wedding planners sometimes have three or four weddings per weekend, and a number of popular wedding venues has been fully booked for the year. Together with the Dutch Embassy, Lansdorp attended the international Myplant & Garden horticultural fair in Milan last February, where they hosted a bridal show and presented novelties in bridal arrangements.

According to Lansdorp, the mood among visitors was positive at the first edition since the COVID pandemic. Finally, after two years, events could take place again. At the same time, the fair also served as a signal: weddings can be held again.

A good start

Grower Gianluca Colonna has noticed that the number of weddings has been picking up since the second half of 2021, and this year was off to a good start too, he told us on the phone. He grows 1.2 ha of phalaenopses in the province of Naples, 80% of which concern the white variety. He sells his products through two wholesalers, and 70% of his production goes to weddings. During COVID, he was forced to throw away his products.



People sense that they can get married again



Currently, demand for his products is high compared to the previous two years, as are the prices he receives for them. "This season is looking good for cut flowers," he says. "People sense that they can get married again, and wedding planners tell me that some wedding venues have been booked a year ahead, including weekdays and the end of the season."

Simona Polli of Italian bridal magazine *White Sposa* has noted that florists are selling more bridal arrangements. Two years ago, the country was facing strict COVID measures.

No more COVID measures

As of 1 May, however, visitors from abroad no longer need to present documented proof of vaccination or recovery, and the obligation to wear face masks indoors has been lifted. Both developments are beneficial to the organisation of weddings, given that the wedding season starts mid-May and Italian weddings chiefly take place outdoors. Though wearing face masks was already unnecessary outdoors, "a lot is changing, and the number of COVID infections is still high," warns Polli.

Last February, Garden was organised for the first time since the COVID pandemic. For the 2022-2023 edition, Lansdorp is looking for Dutch as well as foreign growers of bridal flowers.

Wedding couples in Italy spend an average EUR 5,000 on bridal arrangements. Large wedding parties often have no maximum budget, says Polli. These are parties that seek to achieve the 'wow effect', and care is taken to match the flowers with the setting as well as the theme of the party. Couples with smaller budgets tend to opt for a mix of real and artificial flowers. Artificial flowers are usually rented by the wedding planner, which makes them cheaper.

Artificial flowers

Wedding couples are spending the same amounts on bridal arrangements as before COVID but are getting fewer flowers for their money, says Lansdorp, further stating that "if prices get out of hand, there is a risk that couples from the lower segments will increasingly switch to artificial flowers at the expense of fresh flowers".

Since last year, wholesaler Sorriso Verde has been receiving orders from the wedding market again, says its owner Klaas Noort. The Dutch company specialises in supplying weddings and other events in the Italian market. The higher prices lead customers to make different choices. Their customer base includes florists, freelance designers and other wholesalers. Noort: "They need to stay within budget. If a particular flower is too expensive, they will opt for a cheaper variety."

In the year before COVID-19, the entire sector was valued at EUR 65 billion, equalling 2.5% of the country's GDP. In 2020, its value dropped dramatically by EUR 56.5 billion. No official figures are available yet for 2020 and 2021 due to delays caused by COVID. Polli estimates that this year will see around 150,000 weddings, up from 50,000 in 2021.

