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Foreword

Many people think cake decorating as 'a piece of cake' - and so it is when you know the tricks of the trade. However, how often have you thought, 'If only someone was here to help me?' Well here I am - at your fingertips. For the past 25 years, I have been teaching sugarcraft skills, cookery and patisserie, in both local authority and private classes. Apart from writing two books on cake decorating, I have medals for sugarcraft models, exhibited at Hotel Olympia in London.

One question students often ask is, 'Can you help me write on cakes?' The thought of even piping Happy Birthday filled them with horror. I know just how they feel. Years ago, I decorated a birthday cake for a famous actor. My heart sank when told a 'message' was needed on the cake. Knowing the actor specialised in Shakespearian roles, I imagined having to pipe a long speech. You can guess how relieved I was to discover the dreaded message turned out to be

– 'Happy Birthday Trev.'

Cake decorating books are a great help, but often do not have room to explain how to avoid, or correct, mistakes. However, the web, with its unlimited space, allows me to give you over 1,000 hints and problem solving solutions, which will answer queries and give your work a professional finish.
Cake Decorating Videos’
AIRBRUSH
Comprises of a hose, small cup to hold liquid colour, fine nozzle, and either a compressor or a canister of air. This piece of equipment requires some practise.

The more expensive models use compressors to push air through a hose. The cheaper version has a canister of air.

When using a canister there is always the possibility that the air will run out before the work is finished - so have a spare can to hand. This cannot happen when using a compressor. Holding the nozzle close to the surface of the work makes fine lines. Holding it further away sprays the colour over a wider area.

When applying colour through a stencil, it should be on a level surface. Otherwise, spray from the airbrush could leak under the stencil.

Masking is one technique used with an airbrush. It may sound puzzling, but all it means is placing a piece of paper over an area that you don’t want the spray to touch. It is used to good effect on buildings where sharp edges are needed. For instance, bushes surrounding a house could be made by placing a template of the house on the cake. The sky could then be airbrushed blue and the bushes green without any of the colour touching the house.

Many of the marzipan fruits in the shops are coloured with an airbrush. And novelty cakes feature colourful scenes, which have been made with an airbrush.

They are useful for making quick, effective pictures, and lettering on plaques or cakes, but probably a luxury unless a lot of cakes are decorated.

LINKS:

Stencils | Colours | Marzipan Fruits | Plaques
**ALBUMEN**

Royal icing made from dried egg whites is whiter than when made from fresh whites. There are two types of dried egg whites on the market. Both work equally well for the majority of work. The more expensive, made from pure hen albumen, is a deep cream colour.

This powder forms lumps when added to water, so patience is needed until it dissolves. There have been instances of decorators, (thinking something has gone wrong) throwing the solution away – when all it needed was tender loving care. The easiest way to dissolve the powder is to sift it over the surface of the water. Then allow it to stand for an hour until completely dissolved. As an extra precaution, sift again before use. Royal icing made from pure albumen can be used for days before losing its strength, and is ideal for runouts, piping, lacework, and coating. The less expensive albumen is fortified, and a pale cream colour. It dissolves easily in water and works well for most types of icing.

Dried egg white is convenient, as you are not left with a guilt complex at having to throw away surplus egg yolks. However, these can always be used to enrich puddings, used as a glaze, beaten into mashed potatoes, or used to enrich the ingredients in a quiche.

To make a small amount of royal icing with either type of dried egg white, use one rounded teaspoon of powder to one tablespoon of water.

Some types of icing sugar already contain the correct proportion of dried egg white.

Instructions for use are on the packet. Useful when only a small amount of icing is needed. Sometimes recipes for making royal icing include the words 'separate eggs a few hours before use'.

The reason for this instruction is that egg whites begin to evaporate when exposed to air, leaving the remaining solution stronger.

Whether making royal icing from fresh whites, dried whites or the combined icing sugar/dried whites, it always requires a lot of beating not stirring. Dried egg white can also be used for making meringues.

Wooden spoons can become impregnated with grease if used for stirring sauces. And grease will prevent egg whites expanding properly, so keep a wooden spoon specially for beating royal icing.

**LINKS:**

Royal Icing
AMERICAN FROSTING
This type of icing is quick to make and easy to apply. The sugar grains are completely dissolved in the making, which is why the icing is so smooth and delicious. Two people working together make the process simpler - one makes the syrup and the other beats the whites.

Sugar boiling rules are as follows:

Use a small, strong saucepan. Add the sugar to water (not the other way around) and dissolve over low heat.

At the above stage, the liquid can be gently stirred, if necessary. Bring to a quick boil. Do not stir, otherwise the liquid can crystallize, or in other words, revert into sugar crystals.

If possible, use a sugar thermometer. Don’t allow it to rest on the base of the saucepan or it will give a false reading!

If any sugar crystals appear on the sides of the saucepan they should be dissolved by gently brushed away with a slightly wet pastry brush. Unless the crystals are dispersed, they could drop back into the solution and turn the liquid into a solid lump of sugar.

Warm the blades of the whisk in hot water, dry them quickly and have ready to use once the liquid reaches the correct temperature.

When the right temperature is reached, dip the base of the saucepan into cold water. This action stops the solution boiling.

Just before the above happens - and only then, otherwise they will collapse - beat the egg whites until they form peaks and pour the hot liquid onto the beaten whites.

As the hot liquid is being poured onto the whites, keep it well away from the blades of whisk – if be chance the blades were cold, and the hot liquid touched them, it could turn into toffee.

After use, fill the saucepan with cold water and leave for a few hours. Any sticky liquid left in the pan will then dissolve.
**BAS RELIEF**

A skill used by generations of artists, which adapts well to cake decorating. Figures made in this manner are particularly successful.

Numbering each section of the design makes the whole technique much easier. Although it may seem impossible, it is easy, when engrossed, to make part of the body in the wrong order. However, by numbering each area of the picture, for instance 1 the neck, 2 the face, three the hair, each step will be clear. Give parts that are the same depth, the same number.

One popular picture is of a girl in a full skirt. Think of her as a human figure that needs dressing. She stands sideways so the back leg is made before the front, the frill of the petticoat before the skirt. On top of the skirt the pinafore, and finally, the arm.

Cut the basic shape of the figure from thinly rolled sugarpaste and stick to the cake surface with a thin film of water. Study the picture and pad any upraised sections with paste.

Cover the figure with thin layers of sugarpaste. Because it is easier to drape, make clothes from a mixture of sugarpaste and flower paste. Use cooled boiled water for sticking sections together.

Turn in the 'raw' edges of the clothes, either with a modelling tool (or with the curved handle of a teaspoon).

Avoid black when painting detail on faces - it is too stark. And keep the iris of the eye light in colour or else it will be 'eye-catching'. Take a hint from artists who paint on china. For a pleasant expression only paint in the top lid. Light always hits the lower lip, so remove a tiny amount of colour with kitchen paper or a cotton wool bud.

Use a pale paste to make hair. Push through a clay gun or garlic press (rather coarse) or a fine metal sieve.

Do not use a plastic sieve - the paste will stick on it.

After the hair is dry, paint with food colouring. Start with pale colours, and gradually deepen but not all over. Hair should have lighter and darker tones.

**LINKS:**

Sugarpaste | Colours
BOOK CAKE INSTRUCTIONS

Book cakes are not difficult to decorate, and are ideal for many celebrations. For instance, with a spray of orchids on top, they make an eye-catching wedding cake, and the basic shape cuts easily into individual portions.

MATERIALS

18cm (7") square fruit cake  
750g (1¾lb) Marzipan  
1kg (2lb 2oz) Sugarpaste  
Icing Sugar  
Boiled and Sieved Apricot Jam  
Green Colouring

EQUIPMENT

9" Square Cake Drum  
Crimpers  
Ribbon
**METHOD**

Make the cake into a rectangle by cutting a one-inch strip from one side and sticking it (with boiled, sieved apricot jam) to the bottom end of the cake, and cut away surplus. The cake then measures 6" inches wide x 8" long.

Level the top of cake and upturn, so the base becomes the top surface. Roll out marzipan to a depth of approximately 1cm (¼”). Brush the top of the cake with apricot jam and upturn the cake onto the marzipan, then cut away surplus marzipan. Place cake in centre of cake board - marzipan side uppermost. Measure the depth, and the combined length of three sides of the cake, allowing a little extra tuck to tuck around the fourth side. Make a template of the measurement, and cut out from marzipan. Brush three sides of the cake with apricot jam and place the marzipan in position. Leave to dry for 24 hours.

Roll out white sugar paste for the ‘pages’ of the book. Moisten the marzipan with sherry etc., and cover with sugar paste. Mark the pages with a suitable tool - a thin knitting needle is ideal. Leave to dry for 24 hours. Take measurements for the cover, allowing a slightly overlap at top, bottom and right hand side of book, plus enough paste to curve slightly on the left side, to create the ‘spine’ of the book.

Colour sugarpaste for the cover and roll out. Lightly moisten the marzipan, place the Ribbon Bookmark in position then place cover on the . Mark a groove on the left of the cover and crimp the edges. Moisten the base of the cake, and place a strip of sugar paste in position then wqcrimp the edges. Leave for 24 hours then decorate the top of the book to your design. Instructions for WRITING ON CAKES and RUN OUTS (Colourflow) can be found on the website.
BRUSH EMBROIDERY
This technique creates a beautiful effect. By making an outline with royal icing and blending it with water, an attractive design can be created.
The design can be marked on the cake in different ways:
- Use tracing paper for making templates, it is strong and can be reused.
- Or make your own embosser on a piece of glass or Perspex, by placing your design under the glass and using royal icing and a fine tube to outline the drawing. Once dry, the outline can be used to emboss the design onto soft sugarpaste.

Keep the piped lines as even as possible and the joins neat.
Remove any unnecessary points or ends of icing, as these will mark the sugarpaste.

This method is useful to create designs on a soft sugarpaste. The design can be embossing quite a few times before the royal icing begins to disintegrate.

Work on brush embroidery, should always start on the outline and proceed towards the centre of the pattern. And always begin the design at the top and work downwards.

Buy a good quality paintbrush, preferably from an art shop. Remember that old saying 'a workman is only as good as his tools', well it certainly applies in this case. Thin, pointed brushes won't work with brush embroidery. And always begin the design at the top and work downwards.

A brush with a softly rounded top (a square-topped brush is also useful) made of either sable or a mix of sable and synthetic is best. They will be quite expensive, but useful for other cake decorating techniques.

Use the brush with a sweeping movement, not in short jerky strokes.
The icing must be the right consistency; too soft and it will flood out of control, too stiff and it will not brush down.

Instead of piping the design in coloured royal icing, pipe it in white. Then dilute the colours in gin or vodka, both of which dries quickly, but water works well.

Use this coloured liquid to moisten the brush and pull the icing down until a thin transparent film covers the area within the outline. Don’t have the brush too wet. It’s a good idea to dip it in the water and then dab the end of the brush on kitchen paper before using. This technique creates an attractive colour scheme and saves a lot of work.

To achieve a three-dimensional quality to the work, keep the background colours lighter than the foreground.
You may like to try this technique. Paint delicate sprays of leaves and rose buds onto the surface of a cake. After this, using the brush embroidery technique, make a group of open roses, and lastly, place a spray of roses in the foreground. This makes the same design in three different ways and helps to create a threedimensional impression.

LINKS:

Sugarpaste | Colours
**BUTTERCREAM (BUTTER ICING)**

Easy to apply and pipe. Buttercream is best made with unsalted butter; which has a creamy flavour and keeps its shape when piped.

Warm bowl and cut butter into small pieces before beating. Buttercream made by machine is easy to spot, being light in colour and texture. Hand beating can give the same result, but it is harder work!

When soft margarine is used to make buttercream it can often make it too soft for piping.

Boiled buttercream (Crème au Beurre) is delicious. As the sugar is melted first, the icing literally melts in the mouth.

Occasionally the above icing curdles while being made. This happens when the fat in the egg yolks reacts against the butter. Gently mix together over a saucepan of warm water and the two will get together again.

This type of icing can be coloured with food colouring. Melted chocolate can also be used to give both colour and flavour. However, unless both the buttercream and chocolate are the same temperature, there is a risk of the chocolate hardening.

Some recipes for coating a cake with buttercream can be too stiff, especially if the weather is cold. It will be difficult to work with and probably start pulling the surface off the cake as it is applied. One way of combating this is to use slightly more fat than usually recommended. Or, soften the buttercream with warm milk or flavour with fruit juice. Another alternative is to soften the buttercream over warm water.

Adding cocoa powder will give a chocolate flavour, but instead of adding cocoa powder to the buttercream, dissolve it into a creamy paste with hot water. This brings out the colour and chocolate taste.

Stiff buttercream may be suitable for piping, but not for coating.

One way to ensure a smooth surface is to cover a cake with two thin coats of buttercream. Leave the first layer to set in the fridge, before applying the second coat.

Dip a palette knife and hot water, dry it quickly and use to smooth a buttercreamed cake.

If you find it difficult to obtain a smooth coating of buttercream texture the surface with the blade of a knife, a fork or a serrated scraper.
Another simple decoration is to cover the buttercreamed surface with sieved cocoa or coloured desiccated coconut. Then draw the flat blade of a knife across the cake in lines to uncover the buttercream below.

To guard against warm hands softening the buttercream in a piping bag, make the bag from two layers of paper.

When piping make sure the paper is away from the end of the tube. If it gets caught in the prongs the design will become blurred.

Use the back of a long knife – keep the blade clean by continually wiping - to mark a gateau into twelve portions. First divide into four, then mark two lines in each quarter to divide into three.

A quick and attractive design for a buttercream gateau is coat all over with buttercream. Cover sides with a decoration of your choice, i.e. chopped nuts, flaked almonds, dried coconut etc. Pipe buttercream stars closely together around the top and bottom edges of the cake. Warm and sift half a jar of jam. Pour the jam into the centre of the cake, and use the back of a spoon to guide the jam over the surface. The jam sets into a firm jelly-like topping.

Cakes decorated with buttercream freeze well. When semi-frozen they cut into individual slices.

Frosted grapes make an attractive decoration for a buttercream gateau. Select grapes that are of an equal size, and not too big. It is easier to dip the grapes while they are in small sprigs, still attached to stalks – rather than dipping them individually. Prepare two saucers; one thickly sprinkled with caster sugar, and the second given a light sprinkling.

Beat an egg white until frothy and dip in small sprigs of grapes, allowing any excess liquid to drip off. Place the grapes in the first saucer and sprinkle evenly with sugar. Now leave them to dry in the second saucer. Place in position on the gateau just before serving.

**LINKS:**

- [Cream au beuree](#)
CAKE BOARDS
Use thick cake boards (drums) for rich fruitcakes. If the board is not firm enough, the icing on a cake may crack.

For lightweight cakes, boards known as double thickness boards can be used.
For stacked cakes i.e. one on top of another, sit each cake on a thin board of the same size.

Cake boards that are covered with icing, always make cakes look bigger. Covering the board can be done in various ways. Royal icing, flooded onto a cakeboard, dries with a sheen, making an attractive contrast to the matt surface of a iced cake.

By rolling the sugarpaste out larger than the size of the cake, the board can be covered at the same time as the cake.

Or cover the board with a separate strip of paste. To make sure the sugarpaste sticks, moisten the board with a thin film of water.

Another method is to cover the whole board with a layer of sugarpaste and then cut away the area where the cake is to stand. This method needs careful planning to ensure there aren't any gaps left between cake and paste. First make a template the same size as the cake. Place in the centre of the board and brush the remaining board with a thin film of water. Remove the template and cover the board with sugarpaste. Replace template, cut and remove the centre section then position cake.

Covering the board with material is a fashion adopted from flower arrangers. Pleat a length of fabric and staple to the board. Use fine fabrics that fold evenly. A shiny fabric covered in net looks attractive.

An iced cake placed on a board that is only 5cm (2") larger, can looked cramped. Cake boards that are 7cm (3") wider than a cake give a more balanced look, particularly if the cake is deep.

Any extra space on a wide board can be either flooded with royal icing or covered in sugarpaste. And because the eye runs smoothly over the cake and board at the same time, a covered board always makes the cake looks bigger.

LINKS:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing
CAKE RECIPE
If you are a beginner (or even if you’re not) you may like to try this cake. It is easy to make; attractive enough for a party cake, and yet takes no time at all to decorate.

I find that by getting everything ready, before starting to mix the cake, the whole procedure goes smoothly. First heat the oven to gas mark 3, 325 F (170 C).

Grease and line the base of two 7 inch (18cm) tins that have straight sides 2 inch (5 cm) deep. Make a medium sized, piping bag from two layers of paper – the extra thickness stops the warmth of your hands from melting the buttercream. Now make another, smaller bag, with a sharp point at the end.

CAKE INGREDIENTS
6 oz self-raising flour (175g)
1.1/2 teaspoons baking powder
6 oz soft margarine (175g)
- it must be room temperature, and not just taken from the refrigerator
- 6 oz castor sugar (175g)
3 large eggs
Packet of mixed, chopped nuts
Half a jar of red jam (the seeds in raspberry jam add interest to the decoration) Buttercream - 4 oz (110g)
unsalted butter/
5 oz (150g) sifted icing sugar

Mix the flour and baking powder together in a large bowl. Now sift these two ingredients together, holding the sieve high above the bowl - so that as much air as possible is incorporated. Whisk the eggs, and then add the flour, together with the margarine and sugar. Use an electric whisk to mix the ingredients together until they form a smooth batter. This will only take a minute or two. The mixture should be soft enough to drop from the whisk if it is shaken. Divide the mixture between the two tins and smooth over the top.

Bake for about 30-40 minutes.

While the cakes are baking, make the buttercream. First, soften the butter until it is creamy. Gradually add the icing sugar and beat until light in colour.
Once the cakes are cooked, place them on a wire tray and leave to cool before decorating. If the cakes are rounded at the top, cut a small amount off until they are level.

Turn one of the cakes upside down (this will be the top surface) and stick the cakes together with a layer of jam. Place the nuts in a shallow dish. Position the cake on the palm of your hand and, using a palette (or table) knife, spread the buttercream around the sides of the cake – all areas must have a thick enough layer on to make the nuts stick to it. Leave the cake on your hand, and holding it close to the bowl of nuts, pick up handfuls of nuts and press them against the side of the cake until it is covered.

Carefully lower the cake onto the board. Place a buttercream tube in the medium sized bag and pipe stars around the top edge of the cake. To do this, hold the bag vertically, quite close to the surface of the cake. Press until a star is formed, then stop pressing, and remove the bag. Pipe stars around the base of the cake.

Warm the jam, then sieve – unless you are using raspberry jam. Pour it into the centre of the cake and using the back of a spoon spread the jam over the surface of the cake.

Colour a small amount of the remaining buttercream green, and place in a small icing bag. Push the icing right to the tip of the bag, and then flatten the end of the bag between finger and thumb.

Make two small cuts, the shape of an arrow-head, at the tip of the bag. Pipe leaves at intervals amongst the stars by positioning the tip of the bag close to the star.

Then press out the icing until the leaf is the required size. Stop pressing on the bag and slowly draw the tip of the bag away – a point will form on the leaf.
CAKES

Before slicing a cake into layers make sure they are replaced in the correct position by cutting a small V right down the side of the cake. Use this V as a guide when replacing the layers.

When cutting cut a cake into layers, place the palm of the hand flat on top. Turn the cake slowly, gradually cutting around the edge of the cake until a complete circle has been completed. Then finally, cut across the attached centre of the cake.

When a cake sinks badly in the middle, don’t despair. Cut out the middle and pretend it is part of the design. One celebration cake features a cake with a champagne bottle placed in the centre.

If you wish to make a deliberate hole, wrap greaseproof paper around a tin (the same size as a bottle of wine) and position it in the centre of a cake tin, now place the cake mixture around it.
CAKES – BAKING

Although they may have been altered in some ways, many of today's recipes were devised hundreds of years ago. One of the most important differences between modern kitchens and those of 'the good old days' is the heat. Then the kitchen range was working night and day and the kitchen was always warm - as were the baking ingredients.

In such a kitchen great-grandma would be found, seated near the fire – beating butter and sugar together in preparation for a cake. Heat radiating from the fire (and her body) helped to soften the butter and melt the sugar.

Kitchens today are much cooler than they were in the past; containing insulated ovens, and refrigerators – not to mention air conditioning. It is a recipe for disaster, when making cakes, to take eggs and butter straight from the fridge. Even eggs not stored in this manner are often cold inside. So it’s a good idea to place eggs – still in their shells – in a bowl of warm water before using.

Use the size of eggs stated in the recipe, otherwise the balance of the batter will be altered.

If fruit needs washing, do this the day before needed and lay out to dry. Otherwise, if the fruit is damp it will sink, and if stored could go mouldy.

Soften the butter first, then add the sugar and beat until light in colour and fluffy. If the ingredients are cold this is difficult (even by machine) so warm the bowl and beaters in hot water.

When sufficiently beaten, the mixture should be pale cream colour, and a soft enough consistency to drop from a spoon. If not, place the bowl over a saucepan of hot water for a minute or two to soften. But make sure the fat does not melt.

If, when adding beaten egg to creamed ingredients, the mixture begins to look curdled, don’t worry. This happens when the egg is not added slowly enough - causing the fat in the yolk to react against the butter. The egg should be dribbled in slowly as the mixture is being beaten. The taste of the cake will not be affected by the curdling, but it will probably affect how much it rises.

When measuring syrup on a scale, weigh the tin of syrup, and mentally deduct the weight of syrup required. For instance, tin weighs 1 kilo, recipe states 200 grammes. So remove syrup until scale registers 800 grammes.

Always sift the flour just before it is added. It’s amazing how the much air is incorporated with this simple act and how it will help the to cake rise.

Before placing a fruit cake in the oven, use the back of a tablespoon, repeatedly
dipped in water to level the surface. This also prevents a hard crust forming on the cake.

If shallow cake tins are used, the cake mixture could be too near the top. When this happens the cake crusts over before it is properly cooked.

At this stage – if making fruit cake - bang the tin on the working top a few times; an action which helps eliminate any air pockets that may have formed in the mixture.

You may have heard of experienced cooks who know when a cake is cooked by the smell wafting from the oven. But have you heard of a cake ‘singing’? This is the sound a cake makes towards the end of cooking. A loud sizzle means they are not ready to leave the oven. Very often fruit cakes are cooked, even though a slight sound can still be heard. So the best way to test is by sticking a thin metal skewer through the centre

Some stores sell 'Sponge Flour' especially for making sponge cakes. This type of flour is extra finely milled and absorbs more than the normal amount of liquid. The usual recipe for a two-egg sponge has equal quantities of butter, sugar and flour. But the recipe on the Sponge Flour packet has slightly more sugar and a small amount of water. The result is - a lighter sponge.

Always turn baked cakes out onto a wire tray, as moisture could collect at the base of the cake and turn it mouldy.

Mould can also grow when cakes have been under-baked. Due to the extra moisture in the ingredients, both carrot and banana cake can go mouldy when stored for more than a few days. One way to counteract this is to freeze slices of the cakes and use as required.

Sprinkle alcohol over the surface of a cake while it is still warm and it will penetrate the surface much easier.

Store cakes when completely cold. Rich fruitcakes should be wrapped in greaseproof paper never foil.

If two cakes are being baked at the same time, they will take longer to cook than one cake.

Remember a square cake tin holds more mixture than a round tin.

If a tin used is smaller than the recipe recommends, the cake mixture will be deeper and need a longer cooking time - at a slightly lower temperature.

Grease tins before lining with paper, or the weight of the cake mixture will pull the paper away from the sides of the tin, and distort the shape of the cake.
When making sponge cakes, first grease the tins, and then sprinkle them with flour. Spread the flour evenly over the surface, by knocking the sides of the tin. To prevent a wire tray marking the top of a sponge cake, place a folded tea towel on the tray.

A cake made by the all-in-one method will stale quicker than those made in the traditional way. This is due to the extra baking powder that has been added to make the cake rise. Because they are weighted with syrup, cherries often end up in a layer at the base of the cake. To prevent this, wash, dry and quarter the cherries. Adding a proportion of ground almonds to the flour will also help. It makes a firmer mixture and one in which the cherries are not so likely to sink.

Take syrup out of a tin with a heated spoon and check to make sure unwanted syrup is not sticking to the base of the spoon.

Always allow sponge cakes to cool in the tin for at least five minutes. Rich fruit cakes are cooked for long periods, so use a piece of string to tie a strip of brown paper - about 2” higher than tin - around the sides of the tin. Cover with large a sheet of greaseproof paper (like a cap) and tuck into the string around the tin. The cake will then cook in steam, making a softer surface and giving a better rise.

Towards the end of cooking remove the paper. When necessary, rich fruit cakes can be left (covered) overnight before baking. But other types of cake should be baked immediately.

Unusual shaped tins, for novelty cakes, can present problems. To check the quantity of mix required, take a tin normally used i.e. an eight-inch tin. Fill with water to the level the cake mix normally reaches. Tip the water into the shaped tin. Now work out the quantity of mix needed. For instance, if two tins of water are needed to fill the shaped tin and an eight-inch tin takes a four-egg recipe, double the recipe.

Before using angelica for decoration, soak in warm water to make it pliable. When using split almonds to decorate the top of an unbaked cake, first dip them in milk and when the cake is baked, the almonds will have turned an attractive golden colour.

**LINKS:**

*Novelty Cakes*
CAKES – CHRISTMAS
At one of the busiest times of the year, cake decorators are also expected to turn out wonderful Christmas cakes! So here, hopefully, are some ideas to make the festive season less stressful.

Sugarpaste has more or less replaced royal icing as a covering. However, many still prefer the taste of the firmer icing and use it on their Christmas cakes. But obtaining a flat coat of icing requires quite a lot of practise, and tempers get frayed when, after repeated attempts, the surface of the cake is still not smooth.
Don’t worry. Leave the smooth area as a focal point for any decoration and texture the remainder by moving the flat surface of a knife up and down on the icing to create small peaks – there’s nothing children love more than the good old-fashioned snow scene.

Many shops now sell marzipan and sugarpaste ready-rolled to fit a 20cm (8") cake. Of course, buying the paste this way costs slightly more than in a block, but the paste is even and the correct thickness, so you may think it well worth the extra expense.

Very often the sugarpaste from a cake is left uneaten on the side of a plate. So if you are busy only decorate the top of the cake. The sides either can be covered in a wide band of ribbon or embossed gold – or silver – paper.

If the family likes marzipan, apply it to the top of a cake and decorate the edge with crimpers, or even pinch it, between the finger and thumb. Create a colourful ring of marzipan fruits on the top of the cake and tie a wide band of red satin ribbon, topped with a narrow band of dark green ribbon, around the sides.

Give a white or pink Christmas cake a sophisticated look by decorating with the poinsettias of the same colour. Brush the flowers with Satin Lustre powder and sprinkle edible glitter over the top of the cake.

Another easy decoration is to brush the top of the cake with apricot glaze and decorate with rows of glace fruits. To finish off and make the fruits shine, brush them with hot apricot glaze.

Fir cones can be made from cone-shaped piece of marzipan. Colour with brown paste – or cocoa – and snip all over with scissors. Gently round off the points with your fingers and dust with icing sugar.

Mark the top of a sugarpasted cake into squares with the back of a knife. Decorate by placing a small item such as: cracker, candle, poinsettia, Christmas rose, a log or Christmas pudding in each square. Don’t have too many different decorations or shapes.
Crackers – a sausage shape of paste, hollow the ends out with a modelling tool or the end of a small paintbrush. Use a cocktail stick to make the indentations towards each end of the cracker.

Candle – another sausage shape, this time with one end cut at an angle. Or, twist two differently coloured rolls together. To make the candle entirely edible, use a flaked almond as a wick. Nuts contain oil, so surprise everyone by lighting the wick, which will burn for a few moments.

Poinsettia – use a calyx cutter to cut three shapes from red flowerpaste. Place on a sponge (if not available, use a folded tea towel) and depress the centres with a modelling tool or the rounded end of a paintbrush. Stick one on top of another, positioning the points at different angles.

Christmas rose – use a blossom cutter to cut shapes from white flowerpaste, and indent the centres as above.

Make centres for flowers from coloured sugar. Place a small amount of granulated sugar in a plastic bag, add some yellow paste, powder (or saffron) and rub the outside of the bag until the sugar is yellow.

Bright colours need a contrast, such as a brown Christmas pudding. Make the pudding from a truffle mix and top with royal icing – or softened sugarpaste. Miniature logs are made from thin layers of green and brown marzipan. Roll them together, like a Swiss roll and cut the ends at an angle.

Royal icing shells around the top of a cake can have a Christmas look with a hanging icicle decoration. The shells should slightly overlap the edge of the cake. Use a number one writing tube to pipe lines of different lengths, hanging down from the shells.

Glitter and Christmas go together. Edible glitter can be made from gum Arabic. Silver dragees are another form of glitter. Use tweezers if they are too small for your fingers. But remember the shiny coating dissolves if the dragees are exposed to moisture.

Make a glittering, frosty scene by sprinkling castor sugar over an iced cake. Christmas trees aren’t difficult to make. Cut a shape from green marzipan, rolled about 3mm (1/4”) thick and mark with vertical lines, with either a rib roller or the back of a knife. Alternatively, use scissors to snip points at staggered intervals on the tree. Alternatively, once the trees are firm, dip sideways into melted chocolate until half the tree is covered in chocolate.

Three-dimensional trees are made from a cone of marzipan, or sugarpaste. Start at the top of the tree and make small snips with scissors all round. Stars are a traditional Christmas decoration. Make templates and scribe the outline onto an iced cake.
The decoration can be as simple, or complicated, as time and expertise allow – from an outline of silver dragees to filling the centre of the star with piped trellis. When choosing the size of a star, remember to allow sufficient room around it for a border around the edge of the cake. To prevent damaging the border, make the star first.

Sugar bells make an attractive display. Those made with castor sugar have a smoother surface than bells made with granulated sugar – but the latter have more sparkle.

Making sugar bells is like playing sand pies. Bell moulds are often on sale in sugarcraft shops, but it is sometimes difficult to track down small bells. An alternative is to look amongst the Christmas decorations.

To make sugar bells, moisten a small amount of sugar with water – about half a cup of sugar is plenty.

Add the water very gradually, about half a teaspoon at a time. To test if you have the right consistency for making bells, squeeze some of the sugar in your hand. It should just show some finger marks. Pack it into the bell and level the top with a knife. Now tip the bell upside down on a flat surface, and it should pop out. Sometimes the sugar sticks. This can happen when the inside of the bell is damp from the last impression. So it’s a wise precaution to wipe the inside of the bell whenever it is used.

Once the outside surface has crusted over (and this depends on the temperature of the room) gently place the bell back into the mould and scrape some of the moist sugar away from the inside. Do this in stages, rather than all at once. The handle of a teaspoon makes a good tool. With patience, it is possible to end up with a delicate bell – but if all this is too complicated, leave the bell whole. Bells can also be made from flowerpaste.

Make a ski run by cutting a square cake diagonally across, from one corner to the opposite corner.

Stick the two triangular shapes together with apricot jam and cover with marzipan. There is no need to coat the cake in sugarpaste – unless you want to. Smooth the surface with royal icing. It doesn’t matter if it’s not all level.

An igloo can be made from a cake baked in a pudding basin. A metal basin will give better heat penetration than a glass bowl. And remember, because of the depth of the cake, it will take longer to cook than normal.
Lower the heat of the oven about three-quarters the way through the cooking time to make sure the cake does not overcook.

A quick decoration for the top of a Christmas cake is to have Father Christmas’s legs poking out of a chimney. Model the chimney from a block of marzipan or sugarpaste.

Make it about 5cm (2") square, depending on the size of the cake. Indent the top slightly and paint the block light brown (using diluted cocoa or coffee, if necessary) then score ‘bricks’ with the back of a knife.

Make two red legs (with boots on) and a sack with parcels sticking out. Stick the legs to come out of the chimney and place the sack beside it.

For those who would like an alternative to rich fruit cake at Christmas, how about a house made from gingerbread. There are also recipes for houses made from shortbread, but this is a softer substance and will not bake as hard as gingerbread.

If it is the first time you have made a house, choose a model with a roof, which reaches the ground, as designs that include separate sidewalls are difficult to assemble.

If the paste is cut on the working surface, it could distort when transferred to a baking tray. To prevent this happening, lay the rolled out paste onto the tray and then cut out the pieces.

Place strips of thick card on either side of the paste, and allow the rolling pin rest on the card as the paste is rolled. This technique makes sure that the paste is rolled to an even thickness.
Cut the paste out in one movement, preferably with a long, sharp knife. Cut any curved areas with a small knife. Before baking the gingerbread, let it rest in the refrigerator for about 20 minutes. Glazing the gingerbread (egg yolk mixed with two teaspoons of water) before it is baked will make it shine.

Make sure the entire surface is covered with the glaze, otherwise patches will remain dull.

After baking, the edges of the gingerbread may need shaving a little (try gently grating the edges) to make all the parts fit well together.

Melted chocolate makes an ideal ‘glue’. But expensive chocolate contains a high percentage of cocoa solids, making it slow to melt and set. Buy a kind known as chocolate flavoured cake covering’, which is not only cheaper, but more importantly, sets quickly.

Authentic looking windows can be made from sheet gelatine. Once assembled, the house can be decorated in various ways – from a roof covered in coloured sweets for children, to a more sophisticated adult design with tiles made from chocolate.

These can be made with lots of chocolate buttons. Start with a line of buttons at the base of the roof, and overlap each row as they are stuck in place. Alternatively, pipe a thick line of chocolate onto greaseproof paper. Then, using the tip of a small palette or table knife, go along the line gently pulling the chocolate down, making a continuous row of tiles. Once the ‘tiles’ are firm, stick them in rows onto the roof.

A simpler way of making tiles is to mark the gingerbread before it is baked. Do this with the rounded end of a piping tube. Mark a row of half circles along the base of the roof. Continue up the roof, staggering the ‘tiles’ above the previous row.

A square or rectangular cake can be made into a box of crackers. Cut the top surface into rounded shapes that imitate crackers and cover in sugarpaste. Give a display of marzipan fruits a Christmas look by dusting them with edible glitter.

LINKS:

Marzipan | Sugarpaste | Royal Icing | Templates | Models | Gelatine | Gum Arabic
CAKES BIRTHDAY

INSTRUCTIONS FOR HAPPY BIRTHDAY CAKE

YOU WILL NEED

8” (20 cm) round rich fruit, or Maderia cake l ½ lb (700g) Marzipan
2 lb (900g) White, or pink Sugarpaste Sieved icing sugar for rolling out Apricot glaze
Clear alcohol (vodka, gin etc) or cooled, boiled water
Small amount Instant Mix royal icing
3 oz (75g) Flowerpaste
12” (30 cm) cake board (a large board prevents the frills being knocked) Length of ribbon
Pink and green colouring Deep pink edible dust Cling film
**EQUIPMENT**

Long rolling pin Sugarpaste
smoother Dressmaker’s wheel
Baking parchment or greaseproof paper
Small piping bag
Small freezer bag
1.5 piping nozzle leaf cutter
leaf veiner
Paint brush (a small, sable/synthetic brush is a great asset to cake decorators) Cocktail sticks

**METHOD**

Colour the sugarpaste pale pink - making sure the colour is evenly blended in, then wrap in cling film and a plastic bag.

Make sure the top of the cake is flat, if not level with a long knife, then upturn and use the base of the cake as the top surface. Place cake in the centre of the cake board and brush with apricot glaze. Roll out marzipan (spacers placed either side of the marzipan will ensure it is rolled to an equal depth) and apply, using method described in SUGARPASTE section. Leave to dry for one day.

Brush a thin layer of clear alcohol over the surface of the marzipan and cover with sugarpaste. Apply a cake smoother to the surface, or polish with the palm of the hand. Try to keep fingers away from the surface – if need be, wear a pair of thin rubber gloves. Leave surface to dry for one day.

Wrap the ribbon around the base of the cake and secure with stiff royal icing.

**Making Roses and Leaves**

Knead the flowerpaste into 8oz (225g) sugarpaste until well blended. Tie tightly in a freezer bag and leave 24 hours.

**Leaves**

Colour some of the paste green. Roll out thinly and cut out leaf shapes, some smaller than others. Mark the veins, and leave to dry on crumpled foil. Curl some of the leaves so they dry in interesting shapes. If necessary, paint the leaves a deeper colour when dry by diluting a small amount of paste in a drop or two of water.
Roses

Make a few buds and two different sizes of rose, using the method described in FLOWERS-MARZIPAN section. Also make six small roses. If your hands are warm, you may find it helpful to press out the petals inside a freezer bag.

DECORATING THE CAKE

Frills

Cut length of baking parchment, the circumference and depth of the cake. Then follow the instructions in the GARRET FRILL section on the website. The edges of the roses and frills can be dusted a deep pink with edible dust.

Colour the royal icing deep pink. Place icing nozzle in small bag, filling the bag about three-quarters full. Following the WRITING ON CAKES instructions on website, pipe your message. Leave to dry. A deeper pink can be brushed over the piping by holding the brush flat and smoothing colour over the top of the lettering.

Pipe a design above the top edge of the frills, and position the small roses as shown in the photograph.

Place the larger roses on the top of the cake, pointing some in different directions. This can be done be cutting the base of the rose at an angle. When satisfied with the design, secure with royal icing, and tuck leaves amongst the flowers.

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CAKES - PRICING
This is often one of the most worrying aspects of cake decorating—especially as the cakes are often made for friends or relatives.

One way of pricing them is by weight. But this method has disadvantages, as decoration varies from one cake to the next.

One line of thought is that homemade wedding cakes should be less expensive than those on sale in a shop. But this reasoning can be deceptive. Richer ingredients may have been used, and the decoration is often much more delicate and detailed.

Customers often assume that a cake with a sponge or Madeira base should cost a great deal less than made from a rich fruit mixture. But although a fruit cake is cooked for longer, planning the design and decorating a sponge cake can take just as long as a fruit cake.

When unusual shaped cakes are ordered, it often means hiring and collecting tins. Very often, a more expensive type of cake board will also be needed. Decorators, who underestimate their talents and charge low prices, are often swamped with orders.

This can lead to overwork and perhaps a lowering of standards. Higher prices may not result in so many orders, but the financial outcome is the same—less pressure.

Customers often have no idea of the price of items, such as cake boards. And they would probably be horrified to hear (for instance) the amount of marzipan needed for a three-tier wedding cake—and the cost.

One way you can be sure of at least, covering your expenses, is to produce a list. There is no need to price each ingredient separately. But expensive items, such as marzipan, butter and fruit, could be listed. Tins may have to be hired, and items such as boards, pillars, and ribbons bought. Chocolate wedding cakes are popular and buying sufficient good-quality chocolate to make and coat a cake is expensive.

The total amount of such a list is surprising. And this is before adding the many hours of work involved.
CAKES - TRANSPORT

Cakes are now taken all over the world. The bearer may suffer an attack of nerves, but the cakes usually arrive in one piece. Below are a few hints, which may come in useful.

Contrary to an often-express opinion, cakes iced with sugarpaste and royal icing will not melt on a hot day. However, as the sugar in the icing attracts moisture, they can be affected by damp weather. Even a tiny drop of water can mark the surface of a cake.

Be careful when handling cake boxes, they do not take kindly to being lifted by the sides. It is better to take the weight of the cake on the hands. Do this by placing the palms under the box.

Cars are the usual form of travel and the reaction of many people is to want to sit with the cake on their knee. But this is not a good idea, neither is the back seat suitable. The car may stop suddenly, causing the cake to slip. The best place for a cake is either on floor in the front of the car, or in the baggage compartment at the back. Remove any items that could fall on the cake. Sheets of foam or plastic wrap will help absorb any bumps in the road.

Air travel is yet another hazard when transporting cakes. As distances shrink, intrepid travellers find themselves conveying cakes across the globe. A few days prior to travelling, it is a wise precaution to alert the airline of your intention to carry cakes.

On no account allow staff to place cake boxes in the overhead lockers. Firstly, the lockers slope, and secondly, the luggage of other passengers may crush the cake. Although space is at a premium on aircraft, staff can usually find a safe cubbyhole for a cake.

When placing a cake in a box, place a folded cloth or paper on the base of the box to raise the cake board up slightly. This makes it easier to grip the board when lifting the cake from the box. Make sure the cake does not slide by having the board the same size as the box.

To ensure a cake travels safely, place the – already boxed – cake into one of the wide, shallow boxes obtainable at supermarkets. Cut both front corners down, slide the cake box in, and tape the corners together again. Cakes on hexagonal boards require large boxes than cakes on square boards. To check the correct size, measure the board across its widest angle.

Specialist boxes for weddings cakes are deep and have separate lids. The front of the box can be lowered, so instead of struggling to place the cake in the box, it can be gently slide in and out. And a final tip – remember to take some icing and equipment, just in case of breakages.
CAKES - WEDDING

Making and decorating a wedding cake is one of the biggest challenges in cake decoration.

First there is the planning. How long before the wedding should the cake be baked? And when will you begin decorating? The answer to the first question depends on the ingredients in the cake. Rich fruit cakes can be made anything from two to 6 months before the wedding date. Chocolate and sponge cakes can also be made well ahead – and then frozen.

A good idea when planning to decorate wedding cakes is to work backwards from the date of the wedding. No one wants to be decorating right up to the last minute – although it does happen – so estimate on finishing two or three days before the deadline.

A rough plan of action would be something like this:

- Making templates, deciding on the size of cake boards and boxes needed, selecting ribbons, checking the necessary icing equipment and decorations are to hand = 1 day
- A day to apply marzipan and two or three days for it to dry = 3 days
- Applying a coat of sugarpaste = 1 day
- When cakes are coated in royal icing they require three separate coats, each coat needs to be dry before the next is applied = 3 days
- Making decorations: bells, birds, butterflies, plaques, runouts and piped flowers = 3 days
- Piping decorations on cakes can take anything from one to three days

This makes a total of 14 days. So shall we say that decorating a three-tier wedding cake can take (apart from experienced decorators) anything from eight to fifteen days - not taking into account wired sugar flowers, which can take weeks to make.

Not everyone likes fruit cake, and confectioners are often asked to provide one sponge cake. A true sponge – without fat – would be too soft to decorate. A Victoria sandwich contains fat, but is also rather soft for a wedding cake, so we are left with a Madeira mix. The ingredients are the same as for a Victoria sandwich, only a Madeira cake contains more flour, providing a firm foundation on which to decorate.

Round cakes are generally cut into wedges, but this is not an economical way to cut a wedding cake. So slice in the same way as a square cake. Any cake left over after a wedding can be frozen. Even cakes decorated in royal icing or sugarpaste.
It’s useful to have some idea of how much cake is required. A slice of rich fruit wedding cake is usually about 2.5cm (1”) square. One way of estimating (if the cake is square or hexagonal) how much is needed, is to multiply the size of two sides together. Using this calculation theoretically, a 25cm (10”) cake should cut into 100 portions. But as the marzipan and icing are part of this measurement, some of the slices will be larger than others.

Apart from this, some cake may crumble as it is being cut. So calculate on cutting about 80 slices from this size cake.

The above estimate is based on fruit cake.

Of course cakes made from soft mixes, such as chocolate and sponge cakes, will normally be cut into bigger pieces.

A large, sharp knife is required to cut through wedding cakes. Continually wiping the knife with a damp cloth will prevent it becoming sticky.

Slicing a wedding cake into numerous pieces can be made easier by positioning the cake directly in front of you. Now cut across, and remove, on third of the cake from the board. The remaining cake can now cut the into 2.3cm (1”) slices. As each slice is cut, lay it on the cake board (supporting it with your hand) and slice it across into pieces.

Royal icing sometimes shatters when a cake is cut. Take a tip from the professionals and cut from the base. This works well as, although the icing on the surface of the cake is firm, the bottom layer, next to the marzipan, is softer. To turn the cake upside down, place a cake board (the same size as the base board) on top of the cake. Grasp both boards firmly and quickly revert the cake. Gently ease the baseboard away.

Using this technique on a sugarpasted cake will prevent the paste curving under the knife’s pressure. Chocolate wedding cakes are popular and should be completed within a day or two of the wedding.
Another popular wedding cake is the French ‘Le Croquembouche’ described in the dictionary as a pyramid of cream-filled pastry buns. This type of wedding cake serves three purposes. Being tall and unusual, it attracts attention; it does not take as long to make as a conventional wedding cake, and it can be used a dessert.

Professional confectioners take orders for croquembouche; this is not a task for the faint-hearted.

Depending on the size of the choux buns, each wedding guest would have 3-4 buns. Total that up by the average number of guests attending a wedding – say fifty – and the result is a lot of buns. But for anyone still interested, here are some hints that could be of help. The buns are made from choux pastry (like éclairs), which is quite easy to make.

First the flour should be finely sifted – do this by lifting the sieve high. This procedure allows air to penetrate the flour as it falls.

The flour must be added immediately the butter and water have reached boiling point. Crease a piece of greaseproof paper down the centre. The crease enables the paper to be used as a slide when adding the flour to the water. Place the flour on the paper and as soon as the water is boiling shoot the flour into the water. The heat of the water cooks and stiffens the flour.

Keep to the size of eggs stated in the recipe, otherwise too much, or too little liquid, will affect the mixture. Strong flour is used in most recipes for choux pastry. This is the type of flour in bread making.

Although it doesn’t look different than any other flour, it is grown in a country, such as Canada, where the summers are hot and the winters cold – making the flour stronger! This strength gives choux pastry its crispness.

The pastry can be made in batches, and piped, before being frozen. According to the number of guests, anything from 100 odd buns will be needed, so being able to freeze batches of pastry is a great help.

Make about a quarter of the balls smaller than the rest. These will be placed towards the top of the cake. Sprinkling water onto a greased baking tray will create steam in a hot oven and help the choux pastry rise.

Cook in a hot oven, increasing the temperature slightly after 10 minutes. Do not remove until the pastry is a deep, golden brown and quite firm – or the balls will collapse.

Often the reason choux pastry collapses is because steam is trapped inside. Prevent this happening by making a slit in each bun once it is cooked. Then replace it in the oven until the inside is completely dry.
Make sure the heat of the oven has not dropped before cooking a second batch of pastry. Serve the croquembouche as soon as possible after filling, or the pastry will begin to soften.

Whipped cream makes a delicious filling, but will quickly soften the pastry. As an alternative use crème pâtissière (pastry cream) made from eggs, sugar, flour and milk.

The buns are stuck together with a ‘glue’ of boiling sugar, which rather like superglue, sets immediately. Make a small amount of boiled sugar at a time, as the solution can become unworkable if a large amount is made.

A spray of sugar flowers (positioned at the last minute) finishes off a croquembouche. Croquembouche can also be made from piled-up meringues, and stuck together with the same solution as above.

Stacked wedding cakes are popular. But without pillars to give extra height, can tend to look rather squat, lacking the impact of taller cakes.

This can be avoided by adding height in various ways. For instance, rather than placing the bottom cake on one board, have it on two, or even three boards, each one graduating in size. More than one base board is also a precaution against the cakes being too heavy for a normal cake board. Boards made from chipboard will give extra strength.

A way of giving a spacious look to stacked cakes is to position each cake on a two thick cake boards. One board should be slightly smaller than the cake (so that it cannot be seen) the other a few inches larger.

Stacked cakes can be difficult to box and transport, but designing the cakes as above means they can be transported separately. Even stacked fruit cakes need some support. Depending on the weight of the cakes, thin cake boards, may not be sufficient protection against the cakes sinking or leaning.

One way of making a firm foundation (once the cake is iced) is to push pieces of plastic dowelling into the cake. Three pieces, with an equal space between are usually sufficient.

Before placing the dowels in position, check they will be within the area covered by the cake board that will rest on top of the dowels. A small wedding party will often only have a single cake. But this can be given more impact by raising the board slightly from the stand.

A round wedding cake (with a hole in the centre) containing a bottle of champagne makes an ideal cake for a small reception. A design in the novelty cake section features open-book cakes. Such a cake would be suitable for an intimate wedding party.
Tiered wedding cakes should taper gradually towards the top. A traditional cake is made from 15cm, 20cm (6", 8", and 10") cakes. Boards that are only 5cm (2") larger than the size of the cake are often used. However, after the cake has been iced and decorated this size board can make the cake look cramped. Use bigger boards, especially if the cakes are deeper than normal.

So much thought and work is entailed in making wedding cakes and then all too often, in the excitement of the occasion, they are ignored. After a wedding, it is not unusual to hear wedding guests declare, ‘but I didn’t see the cake’.

One reason for this is the siting of the cake. In the past the wedding cakes always stood on the table directly in front of the bride and groom – so when the ceremony of cutting the cake arrived, all they had to do was stand. But this system had its drawbacks. The guests could all see the cake, but could they see the bride and groom?

Another area for cakes, which ensures they are not knocked, is in the corner of a room or in an alcove.

However, when guests enter they are usually too busy finding their seats to notice the cake. And once seated, they rarely move till the speeches have been made – and the cake been cut.

It may seem an unconventional approach, but the reception area – where the bride and groom first greet their guests – is the ideal place for a wedding cake. Everyone can see and view the cake before sitting down for a meal. And although traditionally, a wedding cake is cut at the end of a meal, if this is done before the meal, it makes it easier for guests to gather round and see the ceremony. The caterers would also appreciate this approach, for they could dismantle and cut the cake at their leisure.

One area, which is often overlooked when displaying a wedding cake, is the condition of the tablecloth. So often photographs show an exquisite wedding cake, displayed on a badly creased tablecloth!

As a note of interest, a piece of Queen Victoria’s wedding cake still exists in a London museum. The Queen married in 1840, so as you can imagine, the cake now resembles a piece of rock!

LINKS:  
Marzipan | Sugarpaste | Stencilling | Embossers | Runouts | Royal Icing  
Paintings | Embossers | Novelty | Flowerpaste | Cream | Piping Bags
CHOCOLATE
Knowing that cocoa is one of the vital elements of chocolate makes it easier to work with.

The amount of cocoa butter in chocolate will determine its taste and how it melts and sets. The quantity of cocoa solids is recorded on the packaging. Expensive chocolate includes a high ratio of cocoa solids. It has a delicious taste, snap and high gloss.

Most dessert chocolate contains a high proportion of cocoa solids. This type of chocolate, known as couverture, contains fats that melt at different temperatures. Unless 'tempered' couverture will not set properly.

Tempering chocolate is normally done by a patisserie chef. Being skilled in this field some can even test the temperature of chocolate by placing a drop of it on their lip.

The chocolate is melted until it reaches a certain temperature. It is then poured onto a marble slab to cool to a known temperature. Once this point is reached, the chocolate is reheated until the various fats it contains all reach the same melting point.

When couverture chocolate is used in cakes, mousses, sauces etc., it does not need tempering. Chocolate flavoured cake covering is another name seen on packages. This is not a true chocolate as vegetable fat has replaced cocoa butter. Although free flowing and easy to work, the product doesn't have the same taste as good quality chocolate.

Specialist cake decorating shops sell a chocolate that is the best of both worlds. Containing both cocoa solids and vegetable fat, it has a good flavour, and melts and sets well.

Chocolate can be melted in a microwave, but needs care or it will burn – or in extreme cases, even catch fire.
If melting in a bowl over hot water, do make sure the saucepan is away from the heat. If overheated chocolate can 'turn' (granulate) and will not re-melt – although it can still be eaten. Chocolate will often hold its shape, even when melted. So don't be tempted to place it over heat. Just give it a gentle stir and you will probably find it will collapse.

Water also stiffens chocolate. It is sometimes added deliberately when needed for piping. But when melting chocolate keep it away from water.
One way of doing this is to make sure the base of the bowl is not touching the water and that it fits neatly on top of the saucepan. It is not necessary to stir chocolate while it is melting.
Many children prefer white chocolate, which melts at a lower heat.

Chocolates, which have a whitish film on top, are still edible. The 'bloom' is either from fat or sugar crystals, which, due to the temperature, have risen to the surface and reformed.

Flicked chocolate makes an attractive design on a cake. Place the cake on large sheet of greaseproof paper. Half fill a small icing bag with melted chocolate and cut a hole approximately the size of a number one tube. Quickly flick lines of chocolate across the surface of the cake. This design is useful on either a cake covered in cream or buttercream.

When making chocolate shapes, make sure the chocolate is poured onto smooth paper - or the chocolate will dry into the shape of any creases.

When a large area of melted chocolate is poured out, secure the corners of the paper down, otherwise as the chocolate sets, the paper will curl, affecting the shape of the chocolate.

Level melted chocolate by holding one corner of the paper firmly down, lift up the opposite corner and gently flap up and down. Wait until melted chocolate has lost its sheen before cutting out chocolate shapes.

Chocolate, for chocolate curls should be at room temperature not too hard, otherwise it will flake. The best implement for making curls is a square-ended paint scraper. They come in different sizes, so buy one the same width as you want the curls.

Level melted chocolate to a thickness of about 3mm (1/8"), preferably on a marble slab. Cut the chocolate into strips the same width as the scraper, then holding the scraper at a slight angle push gently until the chocolate curls.
Left over chocolate can be re-used. Store it in a cool, dry area. Ganache (sometimes given other names) is a delicious coating for a cake. It can also be piped, used for truffles, or the interior of chocolates.

Made from melted chocolate and cream, when flooded over cakes it sets with a high gloss. The more expensive the chocolate used, the higher the gloss. Recipes vary but double the amount of chocolate to cream is the usual amount mentioned.

If using to coat a cake, apply a thin layer of hot sieved apricot jam under the chocolate coating. Leave until firm. This technique sets the crumbs, and makes a smooth base for the chocolate to glide on.

Place cake on a wire tray with a layer of greaseproof beneath. Pour all the icing into the centre of the cake, allowing it to run down the sides. Shake the tray to help the icing flow.

Ganache can be made from double, whipping or single cream. Double and whipping have a higher fat level than single cream and ganache made from these will have more gloss.

Ganache can be refrigerated and, when semi-firm, beaten to piping consistency. Beating the icing makes it a lighter colour - attractive contrast to flooded chocolate.

Ganache roses can be piped with a large petal nozzle. A cake covered in ganache can be frozen for up to two months.

Condensation forms on a chocolate covered cake once it is taken from the freezer. Remove the cake the day before it is needed and place in the refrigerator.

Any surplus ganache can be frozen and reused.

Make small chocolate cases for petit four by coating a small paper case with chocolate. Extra stability can be given to the paper case (while being coated with chocolate) by using two cases together.
Then, using the back of a spoon spread melted chocolate up the inside of the case. Make sure sufficient chocolate is around the top edge. Leave to set then repeat. When firm, gently peel away the paper and pipe a rosette of ganache into the case.

Or make truffles by rolling ganache between the palms of the hands. The warmth of the hands softens the top layer of the truffle, which can then be dropped into a small bag to be coated.

Coatings on truffles can be made from a mixture of icing sugar and cocoa, desiccated coconut, grated chocolate and chocolate vermicelli. Alternatively, they can be left until firm and then dipped in melted chocolate.

Whether using a professional dipping fork or a household fork, always remove excess chocolate by gently tapping the handle of the fork on the edge of the bowl.

Chocolate leaves are made by spreading melted chocolate onto the back of clean, well-formed leaves. Do not allow the chocolate to creep onto the front of the leaf, or it will be difficult to remove.

Leaving a small amount of stalk on the leaf, helps when peeling it away from the chocolate.

Realistic chocolate roses can be made by mixing equal amounts of chocolate and liquid glucose together. Prevent the paste becoming sticky by placing small pieces in a plastic bag and modelling the petals through the plastic. Freezer bags are stronger and less likely to crease than the cheaper plastic bags.

Make coloured chocolate flowers from white chocolate and liquid glucose. Use powdered food colours not liquid, which would stiffen the paste.

Novelty Easter eggs, make a welcome gift. Plastic moulds are easy to use. Polish plastic moulds with a ball of cotton wool. The higher the gloss on the plastic, the more shine on the chocolate.
Use a dessertspoon - a brush does not give a thick enough coating – to half fill the mould with melted chocolate. Twirl the mould around until the chocolate reaches the top edge. Upright on greaseproof paper. When firm, but not completely set, remove any surplus with a sharp knife and repeat the operation.

When chocolate hardens on a matt surface i.e. paper, it dries with a matt finish. But on a shiny surface, such as a plastic mould, it dries with a high sheen. The temperature of the room dictates how long chocolate takes to dry - the cooler, the quicker.

Chocolate shrinks as it sets, and as the chocolate moulds are clear, a small space will appear between the mould and chocolate. Eggs can be placed for a short time in a refrigerator, but the gloss will disappear if the temperature is too cold. Better to leave in a cool area. Check the mould is well covered with chocolate by holding it up to the light, to detect any weak areas that need strengthening.

Turn the egg upside down to release. Gentle pressure can be applied on the top of the mould. Stick two halves of egg together with melted chocolate.

Another method is to place one half of an egg on a hot surface, such as a heated baking tray and immediately it begins to melt, clamp it against the other half of the egg. Especially convenient if the edges of the eggs are uneven.

When making novelty Easter eggs, it is sometimes necessary to cut the eggs. Do this by heating a sharp, narrow-bladed knife in boiling water. Wipe the blade before use, apply gentle pressure, and the heat will do the rest.

If you haven’t the time or inclination for making Easter eggs, here is a simple idea that children love – they can even join in the fun. Add sufficient melted chocolate into Shredded Wheat, or crushed cornflakes, until they can be moulded into a nest shape. Leave to firm on greaseproof paper. Miniature eggs nestling inside look authentic, especially those with a mottled surface. Piped chocolate shapes give a professional touch to cakes. Leaving melted chocolate until it starts to thicken makes it easier to pipe.

Alternatively, A few drops of water or glycerine will stiffen melted chocolate. Glycerine gives a longer working time than water.

Chocolate shapes are usually piped in one continuous flow – not stopping and starting, which would be difficult.

Continuous loops are an effective design. Start at the base with a small loop and gradually pipe larger loops.
If chocolate hardens while piping, try placing the tube against the side of a hot saucepan. Sometimes this is just sufficient heat to melt the chocolate that is blocking the end of the bag.

Links:

Buttercream | Glycerine
COLOURS

Red, yellow and blue are the basic colours from which all others are made. However, the secret is to know the correct proportions to mix - and how to avoid what artists call 'mud'. In other words, a haphazard mix of colours. Or, to use an expression favoured by children - 'yuk!' 

But luckily, there are vast arrays of colours on sale - although it is always useful to know how to get a certain shade by mixing colours. You never know when a bride will turn up with an unusual colour for you to match.

Liquid colours are useful for painting on icing and colouring royal icing. Paste colours are vibrant - so add gradually with a cocktail stick.

Colour can give many different effects. For instance, when streaked into sugarpaste, it gives a marbled or variegated look to the paste, which is useful when imitating material.

Art shops sell colour wheels, helpful when working out a colour scheme. Green is the opposite colour to red. A tiny amount of red added to bright green will dim the green down - but too much will create 'mud'.

Mixing different amounts of yellow and blue together creates greens of various shades. Orange is made from red and yellow. By mixing these two colours, but with more yellow than red, peach is obtained.

Blue can be given a mauve tinge by adding a drop of red. But this depends on which shade of blue and red are used.

Some blues have a reddish tinge, some a green one. And it is the same with reds. So to obtain a true combination it should be mixed with its opposite partner.

A greenish blue mixed with a yellow/red will not produce mauve; instead use a reddish blue with a crimson red that has a blue tinge.

Testing out the colours on a piece of white paper is a good idea. Powder colours are made for dusting flowers and iced surfaces. There is no reason why they shouldn’t be used for colouring royal icing and sugarpaste, but it’s more expensive than using liquid or paste colours.

If it is impossible to obtain a really strong colour when colouring the icing, paint the colour on after the icing is dry.
A monochromatic colour scheme sounds daunting, but is not difficult, being different tones and shades of one colour. Think of a pale pink coating, decorated with variegated pink flowers and a deep pink ribbon. A colour scheme that never looks wrong!

Use a small amount of the opposite colour for a touch of zing. Say orange on a pale blue cake. Or copy modern flower arrangers and put red and purple together for dramatic effect.

Always repeat a colour somewhere else on a cake. One spot of colour (to quote an old saying) sticks out like a sore thumb.

For maximum impact, and to make the eye roam around a design, colour should be repeated at intervals. So for instance, the narrow pink ribbon mixed in with sugar flowers, could also be used, in a wider version, around the edge of a board.
CREAM

Cream comes in different thickness, depending on the amount of fat it contains. Single cream will not whip and contains only 18% fat.

Whipping cream, as the name implies, can be whipped and has 35% fat. Double cream, the most fattening of all, contains 48% fat.

Always keep cream in the fridge. Not only for hygienic reasons, but it whips better when cold. Beat until the cream holds a soft peak.

Once cream begins to thicken lower the speed of the whisk. This makes it easier to stop when the cream approaches soft peak.

Because it contains less fat, whipping cream takes longer than double to beat than double cream.

If cream is over beaten it will separate (look as if it’s curdled) and not reverse back.

Double cream is a deeper colour than whipping cream.

Use a large nylon piping bag that can be boiled. The serrated plastic tubes used for piping cream are known as Savoy tubes.

An easy way to fill a bag is to place it in a jug. Then fold the top of the bag over the edge of the jug and fill the bag until it is two-thirds full.

Twist the top of the bag to prevent the cream escaping.

When a small amount of cream is left over (rather than eating it) pipe into rosettes and freeze.

Links:

Tubes
CRÈME AU BEURRE (Boiled buttercream)

- 60g caster sugar
- 150g unsalted butter (softened to a creamy consistency)
- 2 medium egg yolks
- 4 tablespoons water

Whisk the egg yolks in a medium sized bowl. Pour the water in a small, strong saucepan – if possible, do not use the non-stick type. Place the sugar in the water and leave over a low heat until the sugar has melted. Bring to the boil and then simmer until ‘thread’ degree is reached. Do not stir.

Dip the end of a wooden spoon into the liquid, and test the solution between your thumb and forefinger. If it forms a sticky thread it is ready. Pour over the egg yolks, whisking all the time until the liquid is cool and pale cream in colour. Beat the softened butter in with a wooden spoon.

CUPCAKES – Making and Decorating

NAMES OF CUPCAKES
Cupcakes are made from a sponge mixture, and often given different names. Originally, these cakes were made by the quick and easy method of measuring the ingredients by the cupful, hence the name Cupcakes. They are also called as Fairy Cakes, but when currants are added, they become known as Queen Cakes. Muffins are a larger version of Cupcakes and usually contain fruit.

CUPCAKE INGREDIENTS
There are four types of sponge cake, a whisked sponge (also known as a fatless sponge) made from sugar, eggs and flour. This recipe does not contain fat, so the cake should be eaten within a day of making. Another type of sponge, involves beating butter and sugar together, until soft and light. The butter should be a creamy consistency before adding the sugar. Warming the bowl helps. This cake became popular during Victorian times, and is made in two halves then 'sandwiched' together with jam and cream - hence its name, Victoria Sandwich.

Next, there is the All-in-one method, made with soft margarine, with all the ingredients being mixed together, and as they are mixed and not beaten, the recipe contains baking powder to help the cake rise. Finally, there is the Genoese sponge. In this recipe the sugar and eggs are beaten together until light in colour, half the sifted flour is folded in, followed by the remaining flour, and melted butter.

MAKING CUPCAKES
Always check the size of the eggs used in a recipe. This is not usually mentioned in the list of ingredients but often found in the notes near the front of a recipe book. Most recipes call for large or size 1 eggs. The size of the eggs can often make the difference between a cake you are happy with and one that gives disappointing results. Butter and eggs should always be taken from the refrigerator the day before using.

Cupcake cakes can be successfully made using either the All-in-one or Victoria Sandwich recipe. Just a reminder here about how different brands of flour vary in the amount of liquid they absorb. For
instance, when working with wholemeal flour you may find the recipe requires more liquid. If so, add a teaspoonful of warm water at a time, until what is known as 'a soft dropping consistency' is achieved. To test for this tap a spoonful of mixture against the side of the bowl and it should drop off - this soft consistency will also make it easier to fill the paper cases. Any cup cake, which contains fruit, such as apple, bilberry banana etc, will not last long, as the moisture in the fruit will eventually create mould.

**CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES**

Cocoa powder, which is absorbent, is used to make chocolate cakes. The mixture may need extra liquid to make it the correct consistency. Drinking chocolate will not give the same colour or flavour as cocoa powder because it contains sugar. Milk chocolate contains (as the title suggests) milk and will not give a cake such a strong flavour or colour as dark chocolate - and it takes longer to melt and set.

True chocolate contains cocoa butter, which is why is has such a delicious taste. A product known as 'Chocolate flavoured cake covering' is not the same as chocolate. It contains vegetable oil in place of cocoa butter.

**CASES FOR CUPCAKES**

A variety of paper cases are on the market. Try matching the case with the decoration on top of cake. For instance, an iced cake decorated with spots could be teamed with a dotty (spotted) case. Or, a cake topped with strawberries looks enticing when served in case with a design of strawberries. Squires kitchen at www.squires-shop.com hold a large stock of decorated cases.

**FILLING PAPER CASES**

Here are a few suggestions to help when filling paper cases. Always place the paper cases in bun tins before filling. If not using a tin, use two cases together to give more stability - the outer case is peeled away once the cake is cooked. To hold the cases in place, smear the base of the tin with butter. Piping the mixture into the case is the easiest method - using a plain (savoy) nozzle. Alternatively, place the mixture in a medium freezer bag, and then cut a hole in one corner. Fill the cases about two-thirds full.

**DECORATING CUPCAKES**

One of the easiest decorations is to place a paper doily on the cake and sift icing sugar over the top, and then carefully remove the doily.

Glace icing is a quick way to ice a cake, using either water or egg white to give the correct consistency. Test before using by dropping a spoonful of icing back into the bowl. It should flow level and not leave a mark. A simple idea is to flood the top of the cake with glace icing, and before it sets, decorate with small sweets.

If cakes rise in the centre, use this to advantage by slicing the cake level then cut the slice in half. Pipe a thick line of butter cream along the centre of the cake and position the pieces of cake at an angle, then dust with icing sugar - a quick way to create a 'butterfly cake'

A pretty design is to cut a circle of sugar paste with a small scone cutter, then frill around the edge. Cover the top of the cake with a thin layer of buttercream and place the sugar paste on top. Press a
small ball of coloured sugar paste onto a sieve, and stick in the centre of the ‘flower’.

A mushroom cake is made by piping thin lines of chocolate butter cream into centre of cake, and then make a stalk with white marzipan.

Cut circle of white marzipan to cover top of cake, and cut three staggered holes in it. Spread buttercream over cake and position circle. Fill holes with melted jam or coloured lemon curd to represent traffic lights - red, yellow and green.

Cut circle of marzipan to fit cake, and cut two lines, each 2cm long, to form a cross in centre. Turn back the four points of the cross. Pipe large rosette of butter cream in centre of cake, and position marzipan, so rosette peeps through.

Chocolate decorations can be made by flooding melted chocolate onto a smooth layer of Baking Parchment. Leave until firm, but not hard, and cut into shapes. Make chocolate leaves by brushing the back of clean, dry leaves (leave a small amount of stalk on) with melted chocolate, and when dry repeat the layer. Finally, holding the stalk, carefully peel away the leaf.

**WEDDINGS CUP CAKES**
To give impact to cakes, they need to be seen from a distance, so the decoration should be stand above the surface of the cake case. Modelled flowers make an ideal decoration. Or pipe buttercream, cream or ganache (melted cream and chocolate blended together) in swirls with a large, star nozzle. Begin at the outer edge of the cake and pipe in a continuous circle, finishing off with either a rosette, or twirl of icing.

Laser cut Cup cakes wrappers give a delicate look to wedding Cupcakes. Available in different colours, and in a variety of lacy designs, they add a final flourish to the cakes.

Tie a few long streamers of lightly curled, floristry ribbon from the top of a stand of Cupcakes, and this will help co-ordinate the design.

For cakes on tiered stands, a pleasing colour scheme is to have all the cakes decorated in one colour, graduating towards the top in paler tints.

Dainty sprays of flowers or leaves tucked amongst the cakes will enhance the display.

**FREEZING CUPCAKES**
Open freeze these small cakes to prevent them becoming damaged, then pack into a plastic container.

Chocolate, sugar paste, marzipan and royal iced decorations will all freeze successfully. Take the cakes out of the freezer the day before needed and store in a refrigerator. You may find the surface of the icing will become moist from the warmer atmosphere, but will soon dry.
DOWELLING STACKED CAKES

When deciding whether or not to dowel cakes, think about the overall weight. Even rich fruit cakes, although it may not seem so, will often need dowelling. This depends on the weight of each cake. However, it is better to be safe than sorry!

The base cake should be on a drum (a deep cake board). If the combined weight of all the cakes is very heavy, stick two drums together. You will need thin cake boards, (the size of each cake) – apart from the lowest cake, and three or four dowels for each cake being dowelled. Plastic or wooden dowels are available. The wooden type are pointed at one end, making them easy to pierce into the cake. However, once the insertion is made, remove the dowel and cut off the pointed end.

You will need 4 dowels for the bottom cake, and 3 for other cakes, apart from the top cake. Cut paper patterns, the same size as the thin cake boards and mark on the paper where the dowels will be placed. Position them into a square for large cakes, or into a triangle, two at the front and the third at the back, for smaller cakes.

Once the cake is iced, leave for a day or two to dry and then place the pattern on the cake and prick the position for the dowels onto the surface of the cake. Make these marks well within the outside limit of the pattern.

Push the dowels into the cake, and at the same time gently twist the stick until it rests on the cake board. Occasionally confectioners use a small hammer (kept specially for the purpose) to bang dowels into a rich fruit cake – perhaps not such a bad idea, as it is quick and the weight of the hammer ensures the stick enters the cake vertically.

Withdraw the dowel using the same twisting motion, and wipe it clean, then replace the dowel back into the cake. Once all the dowels are in place, carefully mark the length of each dowel about 2 mm above the cake surface, and remove the stick. MOST IMPORTANT Make sure that you know which stick came out of which hole, by making a small mark on them. If the cake surface is not completely flat the level of the dowels may vary. Using the mark as a guide cut the dowels with either a serrated knife, or small, fine-toothed saw. NOTE: Dowels for ‘Wonky cakes’ have to be cut at the same angle as the cake.

Replace the dowels in their correct positions by twisting back into place.

Stacked cakes can be very heavy, so you may consider transporting the cakes separately and placing them in position once at the wedding venue.
**DUMMIES**

These are indispensable for serious decorators. Designs can be worked out and piping practised. And the only way to become super efficient at coating with royal icing - is by using a dummy to practice on.

A heavy wooden dummy makes an ideal base. Icing glides across the smooth surface, and dries as it would on the surface of a cake. After use the dummy can be held under water and the icing will melt away.

Polystyrene dummies are less expensive than wood. But being lightweight they move too easily. It's a good idea to stick them to a heavy board with craft glue. Experiment before applying the glue, as some types dissolve polystyrene! This type of dummy is ideal for displaying exhibition work.

However, sometimes pieces of polystyrene flakes off, so cover with a thin coat of royal icing before using.

Dummies are available is many different sizes and shapes.

**Links:**

Royal Icing
EMBOSSERS
There are many different types of embosser available in cake decorating shops, from a variety of flowers to various animals. However, some of the items around the home may also be used. For instance, a stiff, plastic doily gives a clear imprint. Many embossers are small and you may find a button with just the pattern on you were looking for. To make the button easier to handle, glue it onto a short wooden stick.

Embossers can only be used on soft sugarpaste. Press the design carefully into the paste.

When dry the pattern can be painted, dusted, or used as a template for piping with royal icing.

Some embossers, particularly those with an intricate design, need a sifting of icing sugar to prevent them sticking – for instance, the doily mentioned above, which would make a pretty pattern on top of a cake.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing
EQUIPMENT

If the old saying 'a workman is only as good as his tools,' is true, it certainly applies to cake decorators. The right equipment gives a decorator confidence and makes working much easier.

A heavy-duty mixer is a boon to cake decorators, but only for large amounts, otherwise the mixture just sits in the base of the bowl. For small mixture a handheld mixer is ideal. One of the most important pieces of equipment is a turntable. Check the height before buying.

Remember the depth of a cake will add extra height. And a high working top, with the extra height of a turntable could make decorating the top of a cake awkward and cause strain.

Test to see if inexpensive turntables move smoothly. They may be suitable for lightweight cakes, but not for heavy fruit cakes. If a cake board slips, place a lightly dampened cloth between it and the turntable.

A box of icing sugar, laid on its side is a good substitute for a tilting turntable. A trowel palette knife is useful. The angled handle prevents the hand from knocking the work.

For rolling out large areas of marzipan or sugarpaste, a long rolling pin is a must. A short one leaves marks where it ends.

Marzipan spacers are thin plastic strips that are placed either side of a piece of marzipan before it is rolled. The rolling pin rests on the spacers, keeping the marzipan an even thickness. Plastic rolling pins are easy to clean and glide across the surface of the paste. Torten dividers mark gateaux into equal portions, and are a good buy for someone who continually decorates gateaux.

Unless the top of a cake is completely flat the divider will not mark evenly. Prevent this by applying light pressure to all areas.

Clean the blades of the divider before using again or the lines may smudge. Buy a good quality pastry brush - so many of them shed hairs. Or try a one-inch wide paintbrush.

A long serrated gateaux knife will slice evenly through a cake. Use a long metal ruler – known as a straight edge – to level the top of a royal iced cake. Students have been known to try this technique with a plastic ruler. But, depending on the size of the cake, the ruler can bend under the weight of the icing.
Use a scraper (a piece of stiff plastic, with a plain edge) to smooth the sides of a royal iced cake. A serrated scraper is handy if you cannot get the sides smooth. It has a set of teeth that make a series of grooves in the icing.
Small steel rolling pin for use when making sugar flowers.
Small synthetic board for rolling out flower paste. A coloured board is kinder to the eyes than a white one.
Buy modelling tools individually, rather than in a pack. The aptly named, dog bone tool is useful to soften and thin edges of flowers. It is also used to frill and cup flowers. A Dresden tool has a fine point that is ideal for, amongst other things, veining leaves.
Plunger cutters, incorporating a spring-loaded cutter will cut and curve small flowers. They are very useful for making dozens of flowers quickly, and come in different sizes, some in sets containing a sponge to help curve the flowers.
A plastic stand on legs is used to support sugar flowers. An improvised version can be made with grey oasis (firmer than the green type) covered in a layer of cling film.
Heavy duty baking tins to ensure evenly baked cakes.
A stand for supporting bags of royal icing. A dampened sponge at the base of the stand prevents the tips of the tubes from crusting over.
Crimpers, for making attractive patterns on sugarpaste, or marzipan are available in various designs.
Another useful tool is a dressmakers’ wheel - a small gadget that can be used to make designs on sugarpaste and marzipan.
Treat yourself to a large workbox. Cake decorating equipment grows and grows so it’s false economy to buy a small box.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing | Marzipan | Flowers
EXTENSION WORK
An amazing aspect of decorating, which looks rather like a miniature suspension bridge on the side of a cake.

To achieve this effect a curved line is over-piped about six times around the base of the cake.

Use a strong royal icing - one made with pure albumen works well.

Pipe one layer at a time, allowing each layer to dry before piping the next. The lines are piped with a fine tube, but if you wish to reduce the number of piped lines, pipe the first two lines with a wider tube. Once the lines are dry, brush a coat of softened royal icing over them. This will both strengthen and smooth the lines.

Another version of the same technique makes an attractive curved design. Start by piping a small line in the centre of the curve, and then gradually extend each piped line on either side of the last line.

When piping vertical lines, the cake needs tilting forwards. Positioned this way the lines will hang straight down and not curve in towards the cake.

A simple way to tilt a cake forward is by positioning a box of sugar – on its side - under the back of the cake board.

Keeping lines at the same angle can be difficult. So begin by piping a line in the centre of a curve. Work from this line towards one side of the curve. Return to the middle and work outwards to the other side. Piped this way the lines will all hang vertically.

Try not to talk, or even breathe deeply, when piping. Any slight gust of air can make the lines of icing stick together. Sighing is out as well because it has the same result. Decorators often sigh while working - perhaps their bodies are subconsciously taking in air to keep them calm.

If attaching the hanging lines to the base lines is difficult, don't worry. Let them hang over the edge, and after piping three or four lines flick the surplus icing off with a fine, damp brush.

An extremely delicate version of extension work is when the bridgework comprises of just one curved line. This is achieved by placing greased pins (with coloured heads) at intervals, into the base of the cake, and then piping curved lines over the pins. The vertical lines are attached to this one base line. Once the lines are dry, the pins are carefully withdrawn.

Links:

Albumen | Royal Icing
FLOWERS - BUTTERCREAM
Buttercream roses are made with a petal tube, and can be frozen for future use. They can be made on a flower nail or around a cocktail stick. If the roses are for immediate use, wash and grease the blades of a small pair of scissors.

Slide the blades of the scissors up the cocktail stick until the rose rests on them. Now hold the scissors close to the surface of the cake and (using a cocktail stick) gently nudge the rose off the scissors onto the cake.

Use unsalted butter, which is a pale colour, firm, with a creamy taste. Both buttercream and royal iced roses are made in the same way.

Another way of displaying the flowers is to cut out small circles of green marzipan. Once the rose is made, slide the marzipan up the cocktail stick until it supports the rose.

Links:

Butter cream | Royal Icing
FLOWERS – CHOCOLATE

Chocolate modelling paste is available in different colours. If only a few flowers are being made, buying the paste is more convenient than making it. However if you do wish to make the paste you will need chocolate and liquid glucose.

The usual recipe for flowers is half the quantity of liquid glucose to chocolate. Add the glucose to the melted chocolate, stir and allow to cool.

When firm the chocolate can be modelled into a rose, using the same technique as for a marzipan rose. Any leftover paste can be wrapped and kept for another time.

Links:

Chocolate
FLOWERS – CRYSTALLIZED (sugar frosted)

Small flowers, such as miniature daffodils, violets, pansies and primroses, can be used as edible decorations. Leaving a small stalk on the flower makes it easier to hold. Colour small quantities of caster sugar to match the flowers. Spread the sugar out and leave to dry before using, otherwise the grains will stick together on the petals.

Carefully brush the petals of the flowers with either egg white - or 1 teaspoon of gum Arabic in 2 teaspoons of rose water. Place over hot water until the gum has melted, then allow to cool. Hold the stalk of the flower and sprinkle a thin layer of sugar over it.

Instead of drying the flowers by lying them flat, make a support to keep them upright. Use greaseproof paper to make a tight cover, like a drum, over a basin, securing the paper with a rubber band. Pierce the paper and thread the stalks of the flowers through the holes, then leave to dry in a warm room.

To store the flowers, layer them between sheets of tissue paper in a cardboard box.
FLOWERS – FLOWERPASTE
Cake decorators often become what they call 'hooked' on sugar flowers. Sitting hour after hour absorbed in their work they make dozens of different varieties. But if you are not yet at that stage, here are a few tips.

Rather than making different varieties of flowers in a session, keep to one sort. It concentrates the mind and improves the technique. There are various pastes on the market, as well as powders for making into pastes. Decorators tend to have their favourites. To prevent the paste drying out, always keep tightly wrapped in a plastic bag when not in use. Then place the bag in an airtight container. It's like wearing a belt and braces - a good insurance.

After cutting out flowers, roll the left over paste into a ball. If left in lots of small pieces it will quickly dry out. If possible, obtain a real flower to copy. Some adapting may need to take place if a cutter is not exactly the same shape as the flower.

Some cutters can be used to make more than one flower, so check before buying a multitude of different cutters. One of the secrets of success when making flowers is to roll the paste out thinly - so thin that you could read through it! Being so thin makes the paste difficult to handle, but it's the only way to make lifelike flowers.

Use only sufficient dusting powder to stop the paste sticking. Too much will result in the paste drying and cracking. The question of whether to use icing sugar or corn flour for this purpose varies from tutor to tutor. Having checked both through a microscope I know just how fine the grains of corn flour are. By comparison, icing sugar looks like granulated sugar. But corn flour is very absorbent and too much can dry the paste. So if that is your choice, keep dusting to a minimum.

There appears to be nothing on the market in the form of a small dusting pad. So we have to improvise. To recommend using a dusting pad made from a pair of nylon tights, or a baby's nappy liner, sounds out of place in the field of cake decorating. But they do give a fine After cutting out a petal, twist the cutter against the board to ensure the edges of the petal are clear cut.
When cutting out several petals at once, make sure they don’t dry too quickly by placing them inside a strong plastic bag. Or even better, buy a ready-made booklet, specially made for that purpose.

If you are uncertain of which wires to use, think of real flowers. A heavy headed rose has a thick stem, so use one of the stronger wires. Violets are small and have fragile stalks, so make them on thin wires.

Sometimes there is confusion about the numbering of the wires. The numbers on the packs would seem to be the opposite of what you would expect. Just like knitting needles, the higher the number the thinner the wires are. This is because a greater number of thin, rather than thick wires can be cut from a block of metal.

Perhaps you’ve spent a long time making a flower, only to have the wire come away. Place a dab of water or edible glue down the throat of the flower and replace the wire. Keep the flower supported and the wire will often stick back in place.

One way of making sure a wire is secure is to push it right through a bud, make a hook on the end of the wire and pull it down into the bud. This technique makes sure the hook is embedded in the paste.

Flowers don’t always have to be wired. If made around a greased cocktail stick they can be slipped off and placed directly on a cake.

Open roses are easier to make than the more traditional type.
Depending on the colouring the shape can be made into an anemone, a Christmas rose and other cupped flowers. By making your own mould you can control the size of the flower.

This is done by cutting a 7.5cm (3") circle from non-stick paper. Fold the paper into four and crease the folds. Cut one of the creases into the centre of the paper. Open the paper and overlap the two cut edges. Adjusting the size of the overlap will make the mould bigger or smaller.

To make the petals of the flowers look natural, lift some them while they are still soft and support with small pieces of cling film.
Various liquids are used to stick the petals of sugar flowers. Egg white is one of these, but can soon become smelly. Edible glues are on the market, or make your own.

Place a piece of flowerpaste in a container and melt it over hot water; add enough water to make a paste, or make a glue from Gum Arabic and water. However, a dab of water on a fine paintbrush is often all that is needed to stick petals together.

Positioned at the base of the flower, a calyx gives added support. But they can be quite fragile, particularly if turned back as on a fully open rose. Alternatively, paint the calyx on. Start painting from the base of the flower, flicking the brush up to achieve a perfect point.

Orchids are an exotic flower and not too difficult to make. Making the petals is just like making leaves. Colouring the paste a light lime green, gives a lovely fluorescent glow to the flower. Instead of painting the markings inside the trumpet, use a new toothbrush to splatter the colour on – it gives a much finer effect.

Arranging wired petals into a flower is made easier if the petals are still a little soft. Carnations are on old favourite, but the first petal can be tricky to attach. Give it something to stick to by making a small bud on the wire, then leave it to dry a little before attempting to put the first petal on.

Wires should never be stuck directly into a cake surface. Plastic spikes are on sale to support the flowers, and can be embedded into the cake. Some spikes are too long and can look ridiculous sticking up from a cake, but they can be cut. If only a few flowers are being displayed, a wide tube of macaroni will do instead.

Stamens in real carnations only show when the flower is ‘middle-aged’ and the petals begin to fall away – so is the hassle of attaching them necessary?
If your fingers feel too clumsy when arranging wired flowers, use tweezers to move the wires.
Flower paste, sugarpaste, pastillage, Mexican paste and royal icing mainly comprise of icing sugar.

Sugar attracts moisture from the atmosphere. This is why sugar flowers 'wilt' on a humid or rainy day.

They should be stored in a warm dry area - not in the kitchen where steam often lurks. Cardboard or polystyrene boxes make good storage containers, with the flowers protected in tissue paper. Avoid plastic boxes with tight seals, as contrary to popular belief; sugar flowers can wilt when placed inside.

**Links:**

*Stamens*
FLOWERS – GELATINE

Gelatine flowers are strong and last a long time. Thin wires are used to make an outline of a leaf or petal. They are then dipped into melted gelatine – rather like dipping a circle of wire into soapy water before blowing bubbles, only the gelatine stays within the wire.

Once dry the flowers can be arranged just like any other wired flowers. To make sure the gelatine is properly dissolved, pour the water in the container and sprinkle the gelatine over it. Now allow the solution to stand for ten minutes. During this time the gelatine will absorb the water.

This is known as ‘sponging’ as the gelatine absorbs water like a sponge. Then place the container in hot water until the gelatine has melted into a clear liquid. One way of testing is to dip a teaspoon in the liquid. Any undissolved grains of gelatine will be show up on the back of the spoon.

The gelatine can be coloured but stir it in gently; otherwise bubbles will appear and spoil the appearance of the gelatine petals.

To save making up different batches of coloured gelatine, make some petals in the basic colour, add yellow and make more petals. Then divide the remaining liquid in half. Add a small amount of red to one half to make orange. The remaining half can now be coloured green.

Links:

Gelatine | Colours
FLOWERS - MARZIPAN

A good quality ‘white’ (a cream colour) marzipan does not crack and is suitable for making flowers. It can be coloured pale shades, which yellow marzipan cannot.

To make a variegated rose knead two colours together until they blend but are not streaky. The outer petals of many roses are paler than those in the centre. Start with coloured marzipan and gradually add some uncoloured marzipan to each new layer of petals.

Marzipan roses can soon turn into cabbages. This is caused by making the petals too long, and of the same thickness. To prevent your rose turning into a vegetable, make each petal slightly thicker at the base and rounded at the top.

Another hint on making a rounded rose - begin with a bud shape and build the petals around this base.

Keep the edges of all the petals thin and the rose will look natural.

Use a light dusting of icing sugar, not corn flour to prevent marzipan from sticking.

If the marzipan sticks, model the petals between two layers of polythene – or inside a freezer bag.

If cutters are used, soften the edge of the petal to make it look lifelike.

To make the petals take a marble sized piece of marzipan and model it into a petal shape. The knack of achieving a thin edge is to use the pad of a finger to dab gently - rather than press - along the top edge of the petal. Place the petal on a hard surface, allowing the finger to overlap the edge of the petal, then use light pressure on both petal and working surface at the same time.

Only make a few petals at a time before sticking them together, otherwise the surface of the marzipan will dry, making it difficult to attach the petals together.

Turn back some of the outer petals to make a marzipan rose look realistic. When displaying marzipan roses, cut the base of some at a shallow angle, so they tilt outwards.
Leaves can be made by pressing a thin piece of marzipan onto the back of a well-marked leaf. To create the serrated edge of a rose leaf, use the point of a cocktail stick, and with tiny movements, pull the excess marzipan from around the edge of the leaf.

When displaying roses, tuck some leaves around the edge and the remainder between the roses. Daffodils can be made from yellow marzipan by making a Mexican hat shape and cutting the brim of the hat into six pieces. Do this by making two cuts, opposite each other, reaching to the base of the crown.

Now divide each section into three by making two more cuts. These are now the petals. Snip the tops of the petals with scissors to make them pointed.

Model each petal in your fingers until they are wide at the sides and softly pointed at the top. Make the trumpet of the daffodil with a modelling tool or on the rounded end of a paintbrush. Using the same tool, make a hole in the centre of flower. Now balance the trumpet on the end of the tool, press it into the hole. Daffodil petals have vertical lines. Make these with a veiner, or use the husk of a sweet corn.

Marzipan softens when handled. If your flowers are very soft and need supporting until they dry, fill a small box with sifted corn flour and position the flowers in it. Marzipan animals can also be dried in this way.

**Links:**

[Sugarpaste](#) | [Marzipan](#) | [Flowers](#)
FLOWERS – PULLED

Although these flowers seem simple to make, occasionally it is some time before the knack of modelling them is attained. But it is worth persisting for once mastered, many different flowers can be made in this way. Perhaps the word ‘pulled’ gives the wrong impression, for the technique is more like clicking the fingers. It is made by pressing the thumb against the forefinger and then quickly flicking the thumb upwards.

Quite a lot of pressure is needed to produce a thin petal, which is why the paste should be strong and pliable. Bear in mind that a piece of paste as tiny as a small pea will turn into a flower the size of a primrose. So if marble-sized paste is used, the result will be a much larger flower.

When practicing start with the larger size of paste, and make a flower with only four petals. These are easier to make than one with five petals.

The paste must be perfectly smooth before being rolled into a carrot shape. Insert a pointed piece of dowelling into the fat end of the paste and using your fingers thin the paste by pressing it gently against the stick. Make four cuts in the paste and pinch the tops of each section together. Remember if the cuts are deep the petals will be long and vice versa.

Now is the time to pull the petals, making them bigger and thinner. To thin the petals even more, lay one at a time on a lightly greased forefinger. Now using a cocktail stick and starting at the nearest edge roll the stick along the petal to thin it.

Many flowers, from the simple buttercup to an exotic orchid have five petals, so acquiring a tool that marks the paste accurately into five makes sense – particularly as it is difficult to estimate measurements when working on such a small scale.

Small pulled flowers are quick to model and make an ideal filler to use with larger flowers in a display. They are normally wired but can also be used without wires by placing them directly on the surface of a cake.

Sugar flowers need a warm atmosphere in which to dry. Sunshine is ideal, but remove flowers before the colours begin to fade. A cupboard over a hot water tank is an obvious drying area. In summer the heat rising from the back of a freezer or refrigerator is another source of heat.
FLOWERS – ROYAL ICED

This type of flower is made with a petal tube, one end narrower than the other. Although a rose is the most popular, altogether about twelve different varieties of flowers can be made with a petal tube.

The icing used must be well beaten and firm. Not a lot is needed; half a cup will make over a dozen roses. There are two ways of making roses. One is around the top of a cocktail stick, and the other on the top of a flower nail – a plastic circle with a nail-type handle. When using the latter method you may find it difficult to wrap the petals around each other. If so, make a small cone from flowerpaste, and stick it onto the flower nail with a spot of icing and pipe the petals around the cone.

The above method would also help anyone who had trouble piping roses on a cocktail stick. Often the first stage of making a bud is the most difficult. So again, a flowerpaste bud stuck on the end of the cocktail stick will form a base on which to pipe the petals.

Look at roses and you will see the centres are always lower than the surrounding petals and as the rose becomes fully blown so the outside petals fall back.

If you begin to pipe roses on a cocktail stick and find the rose slipping down the stick, this is a sign the icing is too soft. Rather than begin again, why not make some flowers on the top of a flower nail – if you don’t possess one, use the top of a cork! Flat flowers, such as daisies can be made with slightly softer icing than roses.

Always use wooden cocktail sticks. The icing won’t stick on the plastic type. One way of making icing stiffer is to add 1/2 teaspoon of albumen powder to half a teacup of icing. Beat well with a knife and leave at least an hour (covered up) before using. Before beginning to pipe always check to see that the narrow end of the tube is upright. It is from this end of the tube that the thin edges of the petals are formed.

The technique of making the petals is rather like forming a small upside down U shape. As you begin to pipe remember to keep the petals small, especially the first few rows, for these support the remaining petals. Have some squares of non-stick paper ready. Once the rose is the correct size, pierce the paper with the stick, and then push it up the stick until the rose rests on the paper.

Links:

 Tubes | Royal Icing
FLOWERS - SUGAR PASTE

Sugarpaste flowers are made by the same method as marzipan flowers, but as the paste is softer they are not quite so easy to model.

The paste can be coloured into pastel shades and the roses can look really lifelike if the centres are a deeper colour than the outside petals.
If your hands are warm, and the paste becomes sticky, place it between sheets of polythene (or inside a freezer bag) to thin.

Links:

Sugarpaste
FONDANT

Fondant is flooded over cakes and gives a soft, shiny finish. Sugarpaste is sometimes mistakenly called fondant. Fondant comes in a white block, which is properly why it gets confused with sugarpaste. Hard, slightly sticky and usually only obtainable from a catering source, fondant can also be made at home - but it is not something many people attempt.

Made by boiling sugar and water to a certain degree, the syrup is poured out (preferably onto a marble slab, so it cools quickly) and moved backwards and forwards until it is cool enough to handle. It is then it is kneaded until smooth. If a piece of fondant is so hard it is impossible to cut, soften the surface by holding under running water for a moment. Before using fondant icing on a cake, cover the surface with hot, sieved apricot jam. Otherwise the fondant could soak into the cake.

To melt fondant, place it over a saucepan of hot water. The temperature must not go higher than blood heat, or the fondant will lose its gloss If it reaches the correct heat and is still too stiff, adjust the consistency with sugar syrup - equal quantities of sugar and water boiled together.

Place small cakes (usually known as iced fancies) onto a wire tray, and pour the fondant evenly over the surface. If a sheet of paper is placed beneath the tray any icing which drips through can be reused.

Fondant fancies are iced in delicate colours. A way of prevent waste is to use white fondant for the first batch of cakes, then colour the fondant pink for the next batch. Add pale green colouring to the pink icing to coat the next lot of cakes, and finally, add brown colouring (grated chocolate or coffee essence) to obtain a light brown icing.

The bakery trade often uses fondant as a seal for marzipan. Instead of waiting for marzipan to dry before applying royal icing, a thin layer of hot fondant is poured over the marzipan. The fondant, which sets immediately, creates a barrier, preventing the oil in the marzipan from staining the icing.

Delicious peppermint creams can be made from fondant. Colour green and flavour with peppermint oil, then roll out on icing sugar, cut into shapes and leave to firm.

Peppermint creams look attractive half dipped in melted chocolate. Remove surplus chocolate by carefully brushing the creams against the side of the bowl. Leave on waxed or greaseproof paper to dry.
A little known use for fondant is as edible glue. This is useful for sugar or marzipan flowers and can have other applications. If a design features flowers cascading down the sides of a cake, unless the flowers are small (or wired) it is often difficult to secure the flowers vertically.

Small flowers can be secured with royal icing but larger flowers need stronger support. Hot fondant sticks like super glue! Dip the base of the flower into the hot liquid and be quick - it sets in a second.

Links:

Colours
**GARRETT FRILL**
A beautiful technique, named after a South African lady, Elaine Garrett. Elaine first thought of the idea approximately 30 years ago, and frills have since been used on millions of cakes. When demonstrated by an expert the skill looks simple but requires practice.

Most frill cutters are round, and some decorators even use scone cutters, when making frills. A straight cutter can also be used.

Use a template to mark the position of the frills on a sugarpasted (or royal iced) surface. If you frequently decorate different sizes of cakes with frills, it is worthwhile making permanent templates.

Made from a strong paper - such as baking parchment, or tracing paper - and marked with the size of the cake, it saves continually make new templates. On a round cake the number of frills is usually six. Take the measurement for the template after the cake has been iced, not before. If taken directly from the cake surface the template will be too small.

To ensure a perfect fit, make the template before piping the bottom decoration on a cake.

Fold a strip of paper - the circumference and depth of the cake - in half. Now fold into three equal sections, making six layers of paper. Fold into two. Starting near the top of the unfolded edge, draw a shallow curve. Cut on the line and unfold.

Try the pattern out on the cake. With the template resting on the cake board, the tips of the curves should end about half an inch below the top edge of the cake. Decorate the base of the cake before applying frills, as it is difficult to work beneath the frills once they are in place.

Instead of a piped decoration, tie a band of thin ribbon around the base of the cake. A traditional decoration is a line of tiny, royal iced shells. This dainty decoration is known as a 'snails trail'. Not really a suitable expression to apply to a cake. Surely a more apt description would be 'pearl drops'.

Scratch a line on the icing, and before starting the first frill, moisten the marked line with a thin line of water - this ensures the paste is sticky when the frill is applied.

Marking a square cake is simpler than a round. Cut the paper the length and depth of one side. Fold in two and cut a semi-curve. The edge of a saucer is often a good size to use as a guide.
Frills show to advantage on a deep-sided cake. But they can also be used in other ways. For instance, on a shallow cake, place a frill around the top edge, or around the base - or both. A circular frill can be used as a frame around a cluster of flowers on the top of a cake. A Garrett frill can be used around the neck of a clown.

If your frills are floppy it could be that the sugarpaste is too soft. To make successful frills mix flowerpaste and sugarpaste together - a quarter mix of flower paste to three-quarters of sugarpaste. Or add one 5ml teaspoon of gum tragacanth into 1 lb of sugarpaste, and leave to stand for two hours.

When the paste does not frill correctly it could be because it is not thin enough. Gauging the right thickness is not easy. It should be thin enough to frill but not too thin otherwise the paste will tear. If too thick the paste will mark but not frill.

Paste should be approximately 2.5mm (1/8" thick) or even slightly less. Once rolled it must be frilled immediately, otherwise it will dry out. When more than one frill is cut out at a time place it inside a plastic bag to exclude the air.

Frill the paste by placing a wooden (not plastic, it does not grip the paste) cocktail stick about half an inch in from the outer edge of the frill. Then with the forefinger (about one inch from the top of the stick) begin to roll. Press quite hard and the paste should frill before your eyes.
Points to perfection are:

- Ensure the paste does not stick by giving the working surface a light dusting of icing sugar.
- While frilling, occasionally move the paste a little. There is nothing
  o more frustrating than making a perfect frill, only to discover it is stuck to
  o the working surface!
- Only cut the circle of paste into a strip after it has been completely frilled.
- If cut first, the frill can become distorted; keep the cocktail stick on the
  o paste while frilling. If the stick is continually lifted up and down, parts of
  o the paste may not be frilled.
- Sometimes a stick will cling to the paste and not roll properly. This usually happens when it has become impregnated with sugar, so start again with
  o a new stick.
- Immediately after the frill is made, re-wet the section of the marked line where the frill will sit.

As the paste has already been moistened (see above) it will be slightly sticky, making it much easier to position the frill on the icing.

☐ Always moisten the cake surface, not the frill, which may disintegrate.
  Supporting the frill on the palm of the hand, gently position the top edge along the marked line on the cake. Attaching the frill is rather a tricky procedure so you may like to support it on a thin card. If inexperienced, cut the frill to the length of each curve on the cake. Before sticking frills on the cake, always fold back the cut edges.

☐ The top edge of the frill needs decorating. It can be finished off with tiny shells piped in royal icing. If sugarpaste is softened with a few drops of water, this can also be used for piping.

A quick and easy way to finish off frills is to use a dressmaker’s wheel. This tool has a row of tiny spikes around the wheel. When the wheel is rolled carefully along the top edge of the frill, it leaves behind a row of tiny indentations. These marks serve two purposes; they make a decorative design, and also help to secure the frill to the cake.

Another quick technique is to use the rounded end of a small, paintbrush to impress into the top of the frill. Both of these methods should be applied while the paste is soft.

Frills droop for various reasons. Often because of the humidity, or on a damp, rainy day. Another reason is when the frills are deep. The deeper the frill the more weight to keep up. Depending on the depth of the frill, running a paintbrush sideways under it will often give it a flounced effect.
But to make frills really 'frilly' they often need supporting until dry. Again there are several different ways of achieving this. While the paste is still pliable, position cocktail sticks into the sides of the cake, under the frills. Allowing the frills to rest on the back of the sticks gives them movement. The drawback to this method is that the holes made by the sticks are visible when the cake is cut.

Another way is to crunch up small lengths of cling film. Tucked under the frills, they support them until dry - but don't forget to peep under and remove them once the paste is dry.

Double frills are made position the second frill so that the bottom edge lies half way up the first frill.

Frills can be dusted in two ways, before or after they are attached to the cake. If before, roll and cut out the paste. Then lightly dust the colour around the edge and frill. This method ensures the dust firmly adheres to the paste.

The usual way is to colour the frills when they are on the cake, dusting when the paste is partly dry.

Be warned though, the dust will often land where it is not wanted.

To achieve a fine line of colour along the edge of the frills, load the brush with colour by using an art technique. To fill the brush, move it (not the tip, but the side), with a bouncing action, up and down in the dust. Apply the dust from under the frill, brushing upwards.

Frills can also be made by using royal icing and a petal tube.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing | Gum Tragacanth | Templates
**GELATINE**

When using powdered gelatine it is better to add the gelatine to the water, rather than the other way round, or you may find some of the gelatine has not dissolved.

Leaf gelatine, comes in sheets and is used in a different way than the powdered type. First it needs soaking in cold water until soft - about 10 minutes. Allow the excess water to drip from the gelatine before placing it in a bowl over hot water. Leave until melted and use in the same way as powdered gelatine. Four sheets will set 600ml (1 pint) liquid.

As leaf gelatine is already marked with a diamond pattern, it makes realistic windows for models. If the pattern is too larger, use the tip of a red-hot wire to add extra lines. Contrary to what would be expected, the gelatine will not melt. Sheets of gelatine can also be painted in bright colours to represent stained glass windows.

Links:

Colours
GELATINE ICING
Can be made at home and used successfully. However, care should be taken to make sure the gelatine is completely dissolved. If not, lumps of unmelted gelatine can ruin the paste.

Not all packets of gelatine contain instructions on how the powder should be correctly melted. The best way to make sure the powder is dissolved is to put the measured amount of cold water into a heatproof bowl, then sprinkle the gelatine on top. Leave it to 'sponge' i.e. the gelatine soaks up the water, for about 10 minutes. Only then place the bowl over a saucepan of hot (not boiling) water until the gelatine has dissolved.

Test if to see if all the gelatine has melted by dipping a teaspoon into the liquid. Any undissolved grains will stick to the back of the spoon.
GLACE ICING

This type of icing is quick, and comparatively easy to apply. It dries quickly with a shine.

Tins made especially for this type of gateaux have sides that slope outwards; ensuring the icing slides down the sides of the cake.

Glace icing is composed of water and sifted icing sugar. However, if the water is replaced with egg white, the icing will be whiter, and take longer to dry – allowing more time to place decorations on the surface. Thinned down royal icing serves the same purpose.

Always coat the cake with a thin layer of hot apricot glaze before icing; this prevents the cake crumbs from mixing with the icing. It also stops the icing penetrating the cake surface and makes a smooth surface for it to glide across. As always, with icing, it is the consistency which is most important; too thick and it will not flow; too thin and it will run off the cake.

After adding the liquid remember not to beat the icing, only stir it. Beating will result in lots of air bubbles and these can be difficult to remove.

Any bubbles in the icing can be brought to the surface by banging the base of the bowl on the working surface a few times. This will bring them to the surface. They can then be burst by scraping a knife across the top of the icing.

To test for the right consistency, take a teaspoon of the icing and drop it back into the bowl. Think of a raindrop in a puddle of water - it marks for a second, and then the surface is smooth again. This is how your icing should be.

If the icing will not flow exactly where it is wanted on the cake, touching it with a palette knife may help, but could leave marks.

The best way to make sure the cake is completely covered with icing is to place it on a wire tray. Pour all the icing quickly into the centre of the cake. Quickly grasp the wire tray and vibrate it up and down to help the icing flow down the sides of the cake.

When only the top of a cake is being covered in glace icing, there is a way of ensuring the icing does not drip down the sides of the cake. Wrap a band of greased, non-stick paper around the top edge of the cake. This will serve as a dam, holding back the icing. Remove the paper carefully once the icing has set.
Pipe a design on a cake with brightly coloured glace icing – light colours, such as yellow, do not show up well. Make the coloured icing a little stiffer than that used to flood the cake, and half fill small icing bags with it. Immediately the cake is flooded cut a small hole in each bag and pipe vertical lines of icing on the cake surface. Now using a cocktail stick pull the soft icing in the opposite direction and you will find the colours merge into each other.

All sorts of patterns can be made on glace icing. Little boys would perhaps appreciate a spider pattern on their birthday cake. Make one by first flooding the soft icing onto the cake. Now use coloured icing to pipe a continuous circle, starting in the centre of the cake. Hold the bag above the surface of the cake and you will find it easier to direct the icing. Then use a cocktail stick to pull the coloured icing outwards from the centre to give the impression of a web. Try a peacock’s tail in blues and greens by pulling the stick down through horizontal lines of colour.

The lines should all end the same point.
Decorations such as glace cherries, toasted split almonds (to give flavour and colour) and angelica, should be applied before the icing dries.

Links:

Royal Icing | Colours
**GLYCERINE**
This is a sweet, edible liquid obtainable from chemists and cake decorating shops. Often added to royal icing to prevent it setting too hard.

**Links:**

Royal Icing
GOLD LEAF
Gold (or silver) leaf can be bought in flakes or small booklets. It has a richer, softer glow than gold paint.

Handling a leaf is like trying to pick up thistledown. Don't allow anyone near when applying it, as the smallest movement will waft the leaf away. Some experts even wear a mask to prevent their breath disturbing the gold. Use a paintbrush to lift the gold. Stroking the brush across the back of your hand, will often release sufficient grease to enable the brush to pick up the gold.

If not, apply a minute film of petroleum jelly to your hand. Lightly moisten the area where the gold will be applied. Work quickly, using two brushes, one to apply the leaf and a second, softer brush to tamper it down.

Luckily, any tears or holes can be mended with tiny pieces of the gold.
GUM ARABIC
Available from specialist cake decorating shops. This light coloured powder comes from the acacia tree. To use, stir into a small container of cold water, then dissolve by standing the container in hot (not boiling) water.

To glaze petit fours, brush a solution of gum Arabic immediately they come out of the oven. Marzipan animals and fruits look more attractive with a shine. Achieve this once the marzipan is dry, by brushing with gum Arabic.

To join the petals of sugar flowers together, a strong solution of gum Arabic can be used as edible glue.

Links:

Marzipan
GUM PASTE
Often used for models, such as churches or houses. Made with water, icing sugar and either gelatine or gum tragacanth. Quite a difficult paste to work with, as it dries and cracks quickly. A small amount of white fat kneaded into the paste will help if it becomes too dry. When not using always keep covered in a plastic bag.

Links:
Gelatine | Gum Tragacanth
GUM TRAGACANTH
The stiffening powers of gum tragacanth have been recognized for many, many years. In fact, in 1609 a Sir Hugh Platt wrote a book entitled ‘Delights for Ladies.’ In the book Sir Hugh gave instructions on ‘The making of sugar-plate and casting thereof in carved moldes.’

‘Take one pound of the white refined or double refined sugar, if you can get it, put there to three ounces (some confit-makers put six ounces for more gain) of the best starch you can buy, and if you dry the sugar after it is poudred, it will the sooner passe through your lawne sieve; then sieve it and lay the same on a heap in the midst of a sheet of clean paper; in the middle of which masse, put a pretty lump of the bignes of a walnut of gum dragagant (gum tragacanth) first steeped in rosewater one night, a porenger (small, shallow bowl) ful of rosewater is sufficient to dissolve one ounce of gum (which must first bee well picked, leaving out the drosse) remember to straine the gumme through a canuas, then having mixed some of the white of an egge with your strained gum, temper it with the sugar betwixt your fingers little by little, til you have wrought up all the sugar and the gumme together into a stiffe paste, and in the tempering let there be always some of the sugar betweene your fingers and the gumme, then dust your woooden moulds a little with some of that powdered sugar through a piece of lawn or fine linen and driven out with your rolling pin a sufficient portion of your paste to a convenient thicknesse, cover your moulde therewith, pressing the same down into every hollowe part of your mould with your fingers, and when it has taken the whole impression, knock the mould on the edge against a table, and the paste will issue forth with the impression of the moulde upon it, or if the moulde be deep cut, you may put in the point of your knife gently into the deepest part here and there, lifting up little by little the paste out of the mould.’
After reading the above we probably realise how lucky we are to be able to buy the gum in a pot. And yet, reading Sir Hugh’s technique of making a mould, it brings home how little things have changed over 400 years.

Gum Tragacanth is sometimes confused with gum Arabic, as this gum also originates from a tree. To stiffen sugarpaste add one level 5ml teaspoon to 1 lb of sugarpaste. Work in well then wrap in a freezer bag - not cling film which is porous - leave for 24 hours until the gum swells and stiffens the paste.

Known in the trade as ‘gum trag’ it can also used to make pastillage. Add 1 level tsp to 1 lb of well beaten royal icing. Beat (on a low speed if using a mixer) until the paste becomes firm enough to handle. Then mould by hand (add a small amount of icing sugar if the paste is sticky) until firm enough to roll out.

Links:

Gum Arabic | Royal Icing
PINK HANDBAG

Materials

Madeira (or Victoria Sandwich) made from 3 egg recipe and baked in 30.5cm x 18cm (7 in x 12 in) tin with 4cm (1½ in) sides
150g (6 oz) Buttercream
250g (8oz) pink Sugarpaste
150g strawberry Cocoform (or more, see below) Icing sugar in sugar sifter
150g (6 oz) white Chocolate
2 Fondant filled candy sticks
Pink liquorice allsort
Equipment

Cake Board
Long pin
Baking Parchment
Crimpers
Transfer Sheet

Method

Level the cake and cut in half horizontally. Use buttercream to join the two sections together, making sure the smooth surface of the cake faces outwards. Freeze for a few hours – this makes it easier to shape.

Moisten cake board with water and cover with sugarpaste. Crimp around the edge. Make template or 'handbag' from baking parchment, curving the top and bottom edges. Make template for ides of cake, measuring from board on one side, across top of cake and down to board on other side.

The cake in photograph required a 46cm x 5cm (18 in x 2 in) strip, but not all cakes will be exactly the same size. Make template for handbag flap. It should be the width of the cake, cover the top, and down the front of the cake (not too far down, otherwise it will hide the pattern). Try out for size.

Cover sides of cake with smooth layer of buttercream. Roll out the Cocoform thinly, cut and apply a strip to the sides of the cake. NOTE: The amount of Cocoform needed will vary according to width of cake and how thick/thin the paste is rolled. The paste in the photograph was 3mm (1/8 in) thick.

Place template for front/back of handbag on shiny side of Transfer sheet and trace around edge with fine, fibre tipped pen. Cut out two pieces. Mark the top edge. NOTE: If not certain of exact size, it is better to cut the Transfer sheet slightly larger, as any excess can be cut away with scissors once the Transfer is on the cake.

Lay the cake down. Melt white chocolate over low heat. Lay one piece of Transfer sheet, shiny side down, onto baking parchment. Spread the chocolate evenly over the sheet, making sure it reaches right to the edge – the design should not be visible through the chocolate. Leave for a moment or two and then carefully position (chocolate side down) onto the cake surface. Trim away any excess Transfer with scissors before the chocolate sets. Leave until chocolate is completely set. Depending on the temperature of the room this could be anything from 15 minutes to over 30 minutes. Repeat for other side of cake. Peel away acetate from both sides of the cake.
Roll out Cocoform and cut flap for handbag. Crimp around edges - apart from the back. Spread white chocolate on top of cake and place the flap in position. Attach liquorice allsort with chocolate.

Bend the candy sticks to make them pliable. Insert four small holes in the top of the cake and push the candy sticks into them for handles. Apply a wide strip of melted chocolate to the base of the cake and position on the cake board. And last of all.....congratulate yourself!!

Links:

Chocolate
BLACK AND WHITE HANDBAG INSTRUCTIONS

Materials

Madeira (or Victoria Sandwich) made from 3 egg recipe and baked in 30.5cm x 18cm (7 in x 12 in) tin with 4cm (1½ in) sides
150g (6oz) Buttercream
2kg Sugarpaste
Colours: Green, Red, Yellow, Blue and Black Edible
Gold and Silver Paint or Edible Dust Strip of Liquorice for handle
Icing sugar in sugar sifter
Flowerpaste (optional)
Few grammes (ounces) chocolate
Small amount Royal icing/icing bag/writing nozzle (optional)
Equipment

Cake Board Long
rolling pin Baking
Parchment Smoother
Good quality paint brush
Crimpers Wooden spoon Teaspoon
Oval mould or metal top from wine bottle

Method

Level the cake and cut in half horizontally. Join the two sections together with buttercream, making sure the flat surface of the cake faces outwards. Freeze for a few hours – this makes it easier to shape.

Moisten cake board with water and cover with sugarpaste. Crimp around the edge. Make a template for the 'handbag' measuring 18cm (7 in) at the base, narrowing to 10cm (4 in) at the top. Make another template for the sides, which have vertical grooves. The sides on the cake photographed were 5cm (2 inch) wide (plus extra for groove) - by 13cm (5 inch) long. Not all cakes will be exactly this size.

Coat the sides of the cake and grooves, with a smooth coating of buttercream. Roll sugarpaste and use template to cut two side sections. Place in position, using the handle of a wooden spoon to press the paste into the grooves.

Coat the front of the cake with buttercream. Roll out the sugarpaste and place the buttercream surface on the paste. Cut around the edge and stand the cake vertically. Use cake Smoother to give a smooth finish. Leave a few hours for the paste to firm, then coat the second side with buttercream and repeat the process. If you have time, leave the paste to become firm again.

Make the decoration for the flap from either sugarpaste or flowerpaste either by using a mould or by squeezing the bottle top into an oval shape and using this as a cutter. Indent the edge of the paste with the end of a paintbrush. Paint or dust the decoration silver. Make the 'jewel' and paint red.

Make a template for the handbag flap. It should be the width of the cake at the top, long enough to hang about 2cm (1 in) down the back of the cake, and narrowing to a point half way down the cake. Try for size before cutting paste.
Coat top of cake with buttercream. Lightly moisten back of cake with water and place flap in position. Using the handle of teaspoon, ease the paste up slightly at each side of the top edge – to allow space for the handle.

Lay cake down on baking parchment and paint black design on the front. Dust or paint the sides gold and also the edge of the flap. Leave to dry and then paint the flap black. Pipe white royal iced dots on length of liquorice and once dry paint in various colours OR make tiny balls of coloured sugarpaste and stick in position with melted chocolate. Apply melted chocolate to either end of the handle and position inside the top flap. Attach the decoration to the front of the handbag with melted chocolate.

Spread a strip of melted chocolate to the base of the cake and position upright on the board.

Links:

  Chocolate | Royal Icing | Butter Cream | Templates | Sugarpaste
JAM
Apricot jam is the one most used by decorators. Its flavour is compatible with marzipan, so is used to stick marzipan to the surface of a cake.

When making apricot glaze, boil the jam before passing it through a sieve. It makes the process easier.

Don't replace the warm glaze back into the jam jar. It could make the remainder of the jam ferment.

It is often simpler to spread the glaze with a palette knife, rather than a pastry brush - particularly if a brush shreds hairs. It has been known for this operation to be performed with melted syrup, but imagine it could be rather messy.

Only a thin layer of apricot glaze is required to stick the marzipan. Marmalade can also be used.

A glaze of jam helps to fix cake crumbs and gives a firm surface to work on when decorating a buttercream gateau.

The same thing applies when flooding a cake with melted chocolate. Apricot jam and chocolate have a natural affinity. Both are used in that world famous Viennese delicacy - Sacher Torte.

Traffic light cakes are popular with children, and grown-ups. They can also be used to help children understand how real traffic lights work.

Make small cakes with flat tops, or cut off any rounded tops. Roll and cut out a circle of marzipan, the same size as the cake. Then using the wide end of a piping tube cut three circles out of this piece of marzipan - don't cut them too near the edge. Spread a thin layer of jam over the surface of the cake and place the marzipan in position. Divide heated apricot glaze into three. Colour one portion red, the next green, and leave the remaining portion uncoloured. Spoon (or pipe) the jam into the holes in the marzipan.

Links:

Marzipan | Butter Cream
LEAVES

Leaves can be made from marzipan, royal icing, buttercream, and sugar and flower paste.

Leaves made from flowerpaste are the finest and most lifelike. It is not always necessary to match the leaf to the flower in sugar work. For instance, the huge leaf of the lily-of-the-valley flower would dwarf these delicate flowers. Perhaps make the leaves the same shape, but on a smaller scale.

Royal iced leaves can be piped straight onto a cake surface. At one time only white leaves were used on wedding cakes, but now the fashion is to make them in delicate shades of green. Leaf tubes are obtainable, which pipe one size of leaf. But by using the method described below, leaves of different sizes can be made.

The icing should be well-beaten and stiff enough to peak. Dozens of leaves can be piped from half a cup of icing. Using a palette or table knife, beat the icing vigorously. Then place it in a small icing bag with a sharp point.

Squeeze the bag until the icing reaches the end. Then, with the forefinger underneath and thumb on top, press gently to flatten the point. Cut the end of the bag into a small inverted 'V' like the pointed tip of an arrowhead (this can always be cut bigger, if larger leaves are needed). Remember to cut both sides an equal size otherwise you will end up with a lopsided leaf!

When piping leaves place the tip of the bag on the spot the leaf is to sit. Press the bag until the icing oozes out. Keep pressing and leave in place until the leaf is the size you wish. Only then stop pressing and gently draw the bag away from the icing – it is this action that forms the point on a leaf.

Instead of lying flat, leaves look more lifelike when they are given movement. Angling them upwards can give a natural look. To give a backing to flowers and highlight their colour, pipe some of the leaves peeping out from underneath the flowers.

For variegated leaves place two shades of green icing in the piping bag. As the icing emerges from the bag, a fern-like leaf can be made by moving the bag slowly from side to side.

Buttercream leaves are made in the same way as those of royal icing. Leaves from the garden that have strongly marked veins can be used on marzipan. Rose leaves work well, but are absent during the winter, whereas blackberry leaves often stay on the bush all year.
Washed/dried and pressed into the marzipan they make perfect impression. As soft marzipan will stick to a leaf, make sure the marzipan is firm before using. The back of a leaf has a stronger marking than the front, so use that side. Some blackberry leaves have tiny prickles on the back. Don't worry they easily scrape off.

Sugarpaste Leaves: There are a wide variety of leaf cutters and veiners on the market, which can be used on marzipan, flower and sugarpaste. The techniques used on marzipan leaves, also applies to those of sugarpaste. Always roll out the paste for a leaf until it is thin around the top edge, but slightly thicker at the base. This will make a stronger leaf - allowing you to handle it without breaking.

To make a leaf look natural, use a modelling tool with a ball top to soften the edges. Rose leaves are serrated around the edge. Make a toothed surround on a leaf, by first pressing a natural leaf into the paste. Holding the leaf firmly in place, and working with the point of a cocktail stick, use tiny movements to pull the paste away from the edge of the leaf.

The curves in a holly leaf can be made by using the wide edge of a tube as a cutter - but unfortunately, not the screw-on type.

Cut the paste into a leaf-sized diamond shape. Using the sharp edge of the tube, and starting at the top of the diamond, cut small curves out of the paste - like the curves of a holly leaf. When completed, give the leaf a twirl in imitation of real holly. If it refuses to curl, prop it up with cling film.

Brushing leaves with edible dust when the paste is nearly dry, colours the top surface, but leaves the impressed veins untouched. This technique imparts a natural look.

Variegated ivy leaves look attractive when mixed in a bouquet of sugar flowers. Make them in cream flowerpaste. Then, leaving an area around the edge of the leaf cream, paint the rest pale green. When dry, paint the middle of the leaf with a darker green, blurring the edges so that the two shades of green mingle together.

Always check before placing ivy leaves on a commissioned cake – some people think they symbolize bad luck. Leaves can be stuck in position with softened sugarpaste, stiff royal icing, or gum Arabic. Flowerpaste leaves can be made and positioned on cakes, but they are usually wired into bouquets or sprays.

Wiring leaves can sometimes be difficult, so here are a few tips if you need help.

Most leaves are wired onto a 28-gauge wire. A 30 gauge, which is even thinner, is used for really small leaves. When wire is being threaded through a leaf, the tape on the wire sometimes begins to unwind. To prevent this happening burn the tape from the tips of the wires. Holding a small group of wires on one hand, apply a lighted match to the ends and the tape will burn away.
Burning the tape away leaves behind a black residue, so remember to wipe the tips of the wires with kitchen paper or it will mark the paste.

Leaves can be made in different ways. The usual method is to make a small sausage shape of paste, then with a thin stick (such as a paintbrush) roll each side of the paste away from the centre, leaving a tiny ridge down the middle - which is where the wire will go.

When cutting out a leaf, make sure the ridge is down the centre of the cutter. A less time-consuming method is to make several leaves at the same time. Make a sausage shape of paste, about six inches long. Roll towards and then away from yourself, leaving a slightly thicker horizontal ridge along the centre of the paste.

Cut the leaves out, placing the base of the cutter at the thickest part of the paste. Very thin flowerpaste leaves can be achieved with the use of a double leaf veiner. Cut the leaf out, and place it between the two veiners. Take away the surplus paste, then repeat the operation to obtain an extra fine effect.

One way of placing a wire in a leaf is to apply a thin line of water on the paste where the wire will sit. Position the wire and immediately cover it with a tiny sausage of paste. Place the other half of the leaf veiner on top and press firmly to imbed the wire into the leaf.

This technique can also be used with a single veiner. Once the wire is in place cover with the strip of paste. Next position the leaf on the veiner and apply pressure all over - particularly where the wire lies.

Green tape can be made into long narrow leaves. Cut a length of tape twice the length needed. Stretch the tape and place a thin wire down the centre of one half, and cover with the other half. Press well to stick both sides together (or apply glue) and cut the top to a point. Give the leaf a twist to make it look natural.

Long leaves can also be from a long thin sausage of flowerpaste. Roll the paste until thin then place a 28g wire slightly to one side of the centre. Fold the paste over the wire and then re-roll. Using a knife or a cutting wheel shape the paste into a leaf.

There are various ways to mark leaves. Most long leaves have vertical markings. The husk from sweet corn creates a good impression of these marks. But the husk curls as it dries, so give it some sort of strong backing – a piece of carpet tape works well.

Leaves in sprays and bouquets, make an attractive contrast to flowers, but making dozens of leaves can be very time-consuming. An alternative is to mingle bows of narrow green ribbon in amongst the flowers. Ribbon not only has an attractive shine but also provides a cushioning effect. Scattered between the flowers the bows prevent the flowers knocking together - and breaking.
Once leaves have been dusted, they can be given a shine by being held over steam. This also helps to set the powder.

Hold a selection of wired leaves over the column of steam coming from a boiling kettle. It only takes a moment for the powder to melt into the surface of the paste - left too long and the paste will begin to soften. But this can sometimes work to your advantage if the leaf needs reshaping, as once soft it can be re-cut.

After the leaves are steamed, make sure they are not touching each other, otherwise they will stick together.

Links:

Gum Arabic  | Royal Icing  | Marzipan  | Gum Tragacanth
LIQUID GLUCOSE ALSO KNOWN AS CORN SYRUP

Looks like colourless syrup, which melts when heated. It can be difficult to measure if using a spoon.

The best method is to stand the spoon in boiling water before dipping it in the glucose, and the glucose will roll off the spoon.

If a recipe calls for a measured amount, weigh the jar and record the amount - shall we say it weighs 950g. Now mentally deduct the quantity you require, say 200g, from 950g = 750g. Leave the jar on the scale and remove the glucose until the scale registers 750g.

You may see the word 'hygroscopic' used in conjunction with glucose. This means glucose absorbs moisture from atmosphere, and why it is added to some types of paste to keep them soft.

Powdered glucose does not have the same properties as liquid glucose. Liquid glucose added to a sugar boiling solution (when making liquid fondant) will help prevent the sugar crystallising.
MARZIPAN

This paste has been around for hundreds of years. In old cookery books, it was known as marchpane. It is an extremely versatile medium, which is available in yellow or natural colour. Small rolls of coloured marzipan are also for sale in some shops. Marzipan is easy to handle, which makes it suitable for modelling. It is also used as a cake covering, or as a foundation for royal icing. Many people love the taste of marzipan – others hate it.

When used on fruit cakes it serves as a barrier between the cake and icing. It also makes an attractive coating by itself.

Marzipan can be grilled to a light brown. As it contains nuts (which burn easily), allow the g to heat before placing the cake under it – then stay and watch the marzipan colour.

The flavour of apricots and marzipan go well together, which is why apricot jam is generally used to stick marzipan to a cake. A crimped pattern works well on a marzipan cake. Wipe the crimpers frequently to prevent them becoming sticky and tearing the paste. A simple diamond pattern can be made by marking the surface of marzipan with the back of a knife.

Having a smooth coat of marzipan on a cake makes the task of icing the cake much easier. But before applying the marzipan, make sure the cake is the correct shape. Use the base of the cake as the top surface and start by turning the cake upside down. If there’s a space between the cake and the board, remove a thin slice from the top of the cake. This enables the cake to sit neatly, without having a gap at the base.

When a block of marzipan is hard it can be difficult to roll. Soften it by placing it (well wrapped up) over a warm radiator, or in a low oven.

There are two ways of applying marzipan to a cake. The first, which is normally used under a layer of sugarpaste, is rolled out larger than the size of the cake, and applied in one piece. The second method entails covering the top and sides separately.
Apply a thin layer of hot apricot glaze to the top of the cake. Roll out the marzipan on a thin sifting of icing sugar until it is slightly larger than the cake – use a pair of spacers to ensure the marzipan is rolled to an equal thickness. Note: Remember most people have one arm stronger than the other, which can be why paste is sometimes rolled unevenly.

Position the upturned cake on the marzipan and cut the excess away. Place the cake on the cake board. Use a piece of string to measure the circumference of the cake and card to measure the depth. Brush the sides of the cake with hot apricot glaze. Make a long sausage shape from the marzipan and press it down to make it easier to roll into a strip. Move the marzipan occasionally to make sure it is not sticking. Use the string and card as guides to cut the length of marzipan the same depth and circumference as the cake. Dust the surface of the marzipan with icing sugar and roll it up like a bandage. Position the end of the ‘bandage’ on the cake (if square, attach to a corner) and unwind around the cake. Use a smoother to level the marzipan. A straight-sides jar also does the trick if rolled around the sides of a cake.

If possible, allow marzipan to dry for a few days before covering with sugarpaste or royal icing.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing | Equipment
MARZIPAN FRUITS

Fruits can be made with commercial or homemade marzipan. But delicious though the latter is, it contains a high percentage of ground almonds, which could release oil as the marzipan is being modelled.

Only a few items of equipment are needed: a small brush with closely packed plastic bristles, small knife, and a small pair of scissors, fine paintbrush, and a calyx cutter.

You will need icing sugar for dusting, a few pieces of All Bran (optional) and a packet of petit-four cases.

Make all the fruits the same size. The marzipan must be smooth before it is shaped, so roll each fruit into a ball before modelling. Try to copy the colours and shapes of natural fruits. Start with the yellow fruits.

LEMONS – use the index finger and thumb of both hands to mould the ball into the shape of a lemon. To avoid making sharp points at each end, handle the marzipan gently. Imitate the pitted skin of a lemon, by rolling the fruit around on the plastic brush.

BANANA – roll the ball into a sausage shape, making the ends slightly rounded. Use the same fingers as above, model the roll into a more angular shape. Paint on faint brown lines – with food colouring, or diluted cocoa or coffee – and smudge the lines with your finger. Put a dot of brown on each end of the banana and make is slightly curved.

PINEAPPLE – make the marzipan into an oval shape with a flat base. Mark the front surface into a diamond pattern with the back of a knife. Only mark the front of the pineapple, as it is difficult to get both sides perfect. Use the scissors to make tiny snips in the centre of each diamond and paint with a tiny dash of brown colour. Roll out some green marzipan and cut two calyx shapes. Place one on top of the other, alternating the points, then use the rounded end of a paintbrush press the ‘leaves’ into the pineapple and stroke them upwards.

PEACH – model yellow marzipan into an oval shape and use the back of a knife to mark a groove around the peach. Indent each end with a rounded tool. Give the fruit its characteristic rosy blush with food dust or colouring. Dust with corn flour to give the peach a ‘bloom’.

GRAPES – model a wedge-shape from light green marzipan and make tiny grapes. Only make a few at a time before sticking them on the wedge. Otherwise, the surface of the marzipan will dry and it will be difficult to attach them. Finish off the grapes with a stalk.
**ORANGE** – mix red into yellow marzipan to make orange. Roll on the bristle brush and push a tiny piece of All Bran into the top.

**STRAWBERRY** - colour some granulated sugar red by placing it in a plastic bag with food colour.

Rub the outside of the bag until the sugar is coloured Model a piece of deep pink piece marzipan to the shape of this fruit. Mark on the plastic brush. Roll in the plastic bag until covered in sugar. Cut a calyx from green marzipan and push into the top.

From these examples, you will be able to copy your own fruits and vegetables. They make very acceptable presents. The best way to display the fruits is in rows of the same variety, which gives them more impact than being dotted here and there. Included is a recipe for chocolate truffles. These are delicious and the colour makes a good contrast to the bright fruits.
**TRUFFLES**

100g (4oz) chocolate 50g (2oz) ground almonds
50g (2oz) unsalted butter 2 tablespoons of rum or a liqueur
150g (6oz) icing sugar vermicelli and paper cases

Melt the chocolate and butter over a saucepan of hot water. Stir in the rum, ground almonds and sifted icing sugar and mix together.

Leave until firm – if the mixture is at all dry, add some apricot jam. Place the vermicelli in a small plastic bag. Roll the truffle mix into balls – only make a few at a time – drop them into the vermicelli and shake the bag to coat the truffles. Truffles can also be given a coating of:

- equal quantities of icing sugar and cocoa
- grated coconut
- dipped in melted chocolate

Arrange the fruits and truffles, either in presentation boxes, or use a shallow box covered in cling film, making sure the film is overlapped under the box. Tighten the cling film by holding the box a few inches above heat – a gas jet on low is ideal - and the heat will tauten the film.

**Links:**

Colours | Chocolate
MERINGUES
These don't normally come under a cake-decorating heading, but are often piped and are made from the same ingredients as royal icing. They're included because they are easy to make (as long as a few basic rules are followed), and most people love them.

The usual recipe for meringues is the double the quantity of sugar to egg whites. So say you wanted to make about fourteen meringue nests. Depending on the size you make them, four egg whites and 250g (8oz) of sugar are needed.

Swiss meringue is made from the basic recipe but whisked over a saucepan of hot water. This makes a strong meringue, which holds its shape well. An alternative way of making the above meringue is to warm the sugar on a plate over a saucepan - but don't allow it to crust over.

Italian meringue is rather more complicated, but the procedure is made easier if someone lends a hand. The meringue is made by pouring a hot sugar solution (which is when a second pair of hands comes in useful) onto stiffly beaten egg whites. Whisking continues until the meringue is firm. Caster sugar is normally used when making meringues. Icing sugar makes delicious (but fragile) meringues.

If possible, avoid using granulated sugar with its sharp crystals. These could pierce the albumen, preventing the whites from aerating. Using golden caster sugar for meringues gives them a delicious flavour and creamy colour.

The same rules apply to making meringues as to making royal icing. An unseen film of grease on any bowl or utensil will stop egg whites whisking properly. To prevent this happening, pour boiling water over all the utensils in use.

Egg yolks contain fat, so make sure none falls into the whites when breaking eggs. Whenever possible, use fresh eggs. The longer eggs are stored the more watery the whites become, and will not whisk to the same volume as fresh whites.

Egg whites should be beaten until firm – then the sugar added gradually. Before the days of mixers, one way of whisking egg whites was with a fork on a dinner plate. And to test if the whites were ready, the plate was upturned. If the whites stuck to the plate, they were ready, if not...

Once the whites are stiff, gradually whisk in the sugar, a dessertspoon at a time. Eventually the meringue should be stiff and standing in peaks. Try standing a whole egg on the surface! It shouldn't sink.

To ensure meringue nests are all the same size, draw circles on baking parchment.
Grease a baking tray - otherwise the meringue pulls the paper away from the tray - and place the baking parchment face down on the tray.

Use a plastic Savoy tube and a large, washable piping bag.

There are two ways of filling a bag with meringue. 1) Place the bag in a jug, and fold the top third of the bag over the jug. 2) Hold the bag about two-thirds the way up and pull the remainder of the bag back over your hand. Spoon the meringue (using a large metal, not wooden spoon) into the bag until it is three-quarters full. Twist the top of the bag to stop the meringue oozing out.

Meringue nests are made by piping a large, flattened bulb. Circles are then piped around the edge of the bulb, until a low wall is formed. Lemon meringue pie has a marshmallow texture. This type of meringue has been cooked just enough to colour the surface and leave the inside soft.

An attractive design on meringues is to flick them with chocolate once they are cold.

Links:

Chocolate | Royal Icing
MODELS

Houses, churches and boxes are amongst some of the models displayed on cakes. Others include cards, bells, shells, eggs and umbrellas. In fact, many, many designs can be made into models. The most important factor is making sure the paste is the correct consistency.

Models must be made from a stiff paste; a paste that does not attract moisture from the atmosphere - otherwise it would eventually soften. Many of the pastes used for models, contain either gum tragacanth or gelatine, both of which stiffen. Recipes differ but most also include the following ingredients: white vegetable fat, water, egg white, liquid glucose – and it goes without saying – icing sugar. The paste dries quickly when exposed to the air, so keep well wrapped.

If you ever find the paste drying too much, add a little flowerpaste. Or a small amount of white vegetable fat – not an animal fat, like lard, or the paste will eventually go mouldy.

To prevent the paste sticking when it is rolled, dust the surface and the paste with icing sugar, or corn flour. But whichever you use, keep it to a minimum; it dries the paste, which will then begin to crack.

Roll the paste to an even thickness and then transfer it to either a sheet of glass or Perspex, which has been dusted with cornflour. The paste will dry quicker on this type of base than on a cake board.

Cutting the pieces out when they are on the glass means they won’t need moving again, and it prevents them getting distorted. Use a long, sharp knife, wiping the blade occasionally to prevent a layer of sugar from blunting it.
Leave the model in a warm place - an airing cupboard is ideal. Hasten the drying process by raising the glass to allow the air to flow under it. Turn the pieces over after a few days.

Once they are completely dry, smooth the edges of the pieces with fine sandpaper so they will fit neatly together. Stiff royal icing is normally used to attach the sections.

One use for models is as containers for wired sugar flowers. Although this type of flower is usually wired into a spray or bouquet, it is helpful (and less time consuming) to know how to display them in other ways.

For instance, make a posy holder for small flowers by using a Garret frill cutter to cut a circle of paste. Make the holder more interesting by using a tiny blossom cutter to remove flower shapes from just inside the edge of the circle. Cut a small circle of paste from the centre – through which the flower wires will go – and flute the edge slightly to give the paste some movement. Once dry, make a ‘Mexican hat’, with a crown about 2.5cm (1") long. Stick onto the back of the holder and arrange the flowers, embedding the wires through the centre hole into the soft paste.

A circular shape can also be made into an umbrella for displaying flowers in. Leave it to dry into a rounded mould. Curve a pipe cleaner at the top and make into a handle, with thin ribbon wrapped around it. The same ribbon could also be made into loops to blend in with the flowers.

To display flowers in a model, glue a piece of flowerpaste (sugarpaste is too soft and will not hold the flowers securely) inside and arrange the flowers.

Too many contrasting shapes make an arrangement look fussy, and will not give enough impact. The flowers must be in scale to the size of the model; too big and they look out of proportion. Try to keep to three or four different shapes.

For instance, with their frilly petals, carnations are a fussy flower. Contrast them with the smoothness of a rose. Vary the size of the flowers, a few large, some medium, and some small flowers. The smaller variety is particularly useful for hiding the wires of other flowers - leaves will also do this. There is no better way of learning more about displaying flowers than to look at the work of florists.

Bells can be used for many occasions and moulds are available in different sizes. But contrary to the opinions of some beginners, they are made on the inside, not the outside of the mould. Roll the paste in your hands to obtain a smooth ball, then dust it with icing sugar, and press it into the bell mould.
Keep pressing into the centre of the paste and it will begin to creep up the sides of the mould. Every now and again, remove the paste and dust both it and the inside of the mould. Continue pressing until the paste is up to the top edge. Use your thumb to thin the paste against the edge of the mould, and cut the surplus away. Leave the bell in the mould until it can hold its shape, then remove.

Two half bells can be made by cutting the bell in half, when it is still in the mould, and before the paste begins to dry. Begin cutting from the base of the bell to the top edge on one side, start again at the base and cut up the other side. Always make sure the cut edges are slightly apart before leaving to dry. To display flowers in a bell, position a ball of paste into the base of the bell and stick the wires into it. Don’t allow the flowers to protrude too far out of the bell and hide any wires with smaller flowers or loops of ribbon. Another idea is the dainty shoe mould, which is made in two sections and stuck together. This adds height and interest to a cake. Flowers can be arranged to nestle between the wings of a modelled swan, or in half of an Easter egg.

Give models a reflection by placing them on a small mirror. Scallop shells can be used as moulds. Roll the paste thinly, leaving one edge thicker. Dust the paste and position on the back of the shell with the thick edge at the base. This will make the model stronger, particularly if it is to be raised. Impress the grooves of the shell into the paste with a finger, and then thin the edges by continually easing the paste towards the edge of the shell. Once satisfied with the marking, carefully remove the paste from the back of the shell, and re-position inside – with the grooves uppermost.

Or make two shells, stick together at the back and have flowers peeping out at the front.

Cards can be used for lots of different celebration cakes. Make two identical pieces, and use the tip of a round tube to cut two small holes on the left side of each piece. When dry tie together by slotting ribbon through the holes. A scene could be painted on one card and a window cut from the other through which to view the painting.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing | Gelatine | Gum Tragacanth
MOULDS
Most cake-decorating shops stock a variety of moulds. But if the one you want is not available – make your own.

Moulds have been around for hundreds of years. In the past intricately carved wooden moulds were used to make decorations for royal occasions. Pastillage was pressed into the moulds, turned out, and left to dry. Later the decorations would be attached to royal wedding cakes, or used as ornaments to adorn banqueting tables.

Nowadays most moulds are made of clear plastic. Marzipan can be pressed into a mould. But to obtain a really clear impression use sugarpaste, flowerpaste or pastillage.

There are also rubber moulds on the market, which are ideal for complicated objects, as the pliable rubber ensures an easy release. Moulds can be made at home from either plaster of Paris (if the ornament is not to be eaten) gelatine, pastillage or flower paste. A homemade mould made from flowerpaste will last a long time – providing it is kept dry and away from any humidity.

When a plastic mould is not available, make your own from flowerpaste. For instance, to make a cauliflower for a display of marzipan vegetables. Cut a small sprig from a cauliflower.

Take a piece of smooth flowerpaste, which should be about 4cm (1.1/2") deep. Dust the top of the paste with icing sugar, or cornflour and press it onto the cauliflower until a clear impression is obtained.

The flower paste will take some days to dry, so place it in a warm area such as the airing cupboard until dry right through. Before making a mould from flowerpaste, always make sure the surface of the paste is smooth and free from cracks. And lightly dust, both the mould and paste with cornflour or icing sugar.

Impressions can be taken from pots or vases with upraised designs. By pressing a smooth piece of paste against the design, a clear imprint can be obtained. Homemade moulds last well. But after some time, you may find small, dark spots appearing if the mould has been made with gelatine. This is a form of mildew caused by gelatine originating from animal products.

When using commercial moulds, press the paste firmly into the mould and cut the back level with a sharp knife. Then immediately knock the paste out of the mould. If it will not release, use the point of a knife to ease it out.
If the impression taken is deep, it will often take days to dry, and needs drying from the base as well as the on top surface.

Impressions left to dry on glass or Perspex, dry quicker than on a surface like a cake board. To make sure the paste is dry throughout, place in a warm, dry area and raise the glass a few inches so air can circulate underneath.

One type of moulding gel for sale is gelatine based and can be re-melted and made into a mould more than once.

The gel can be melted in a microwave. When it is placed over hot water to melt, hasten the process by chopping it into small pieces. Don’t stir as it is melting, or air bubbles will form.

Links:

Gelatne | Royal Icing | Marzipan
NOVELTY CAKES
These cakes are many and varied. Trends come and go and Mums are kept busy keeping up with their children’s demands for yet another outlandish design. One of the biggest decisions is the amount of mix needed for the unusual shaped tins.

Madeira cake (pound cake) is the most suitable if the cake is going to be cut into shapes, as it is less likely to crumble than other mixtures. An alternative is to use a Victoria Sandwich mix. Cutting a large slab of cake into sections can produce a lot of crumbs. Reduce these by freezing the cake for a short time before cutting.

A long, sharp gateau knife is a good investment. It will cut in one movement.

When cutting around a curved shape, use a small knife with a fine blade.

If you have a picture to work from, it’s a good idea to have it enlarged. Stick the picture onto card, cut around the edge and use as a template.

Before covering a cake with sugarpaste, coat with a thin layer of buttercream. Sometimes jam is used instead. However, jam sinks into the surface of the cake, but buttercream fills any small holes and cracks that could affect the smoothness of the sugarpaste.

Coat a gateau with buttercream, by first applying a thin layer, then leave the cake in the refrigerator for a short time before applying the final coat. This first thin coat prevents cake crumbs lifting when the top coat is applied.

Most novelty cakes are decorated in bright colours. If you find it impossible to obtain a deep enough colour, paint the food colouring on the sugarpaste after it is dry.
Use only the minimum amount of icing sugar to roll out on. An alternative is to smear the board with a thin film of white fat before rolling out the paste. Once sugarpaste has dried, any surface streaks of icing can either be gently brushed away, or taken off with a slightly dampened cloth.

Use the end of a spoon to tuck in any cut edges of sugarpaste. This technique gives a three dimensional effect, especially to figures.

As many children don't like the cloying taste of sugarpaste, (and yet it is used on most novelty cakes) the top of the cake can be coated with sugarpaste and the sides with buttercream.

One way to do this is to coat the top surface of the cake (making sure it's flat) with a thin layer of buttercream. Cover a cake board (a little larger than the cake) with a fine dusting of icing sugar. Roll out the sugarpaste and reverse it onto the cake board, then place the buttercreamed surface of the cake on the paste, and cut away the surplus paste. Place a second board on the cake and gripping both boards together upturn the cake. Once the top board is removed, the sides of the cake can be decorated with buttercream.

There are three ways of creating figure and number cakes. The first is with a shaped tin, the second is by cutting the shape from the cake, and the third by outlining the design onto the cake.

To make sure a cake baked in an intricate tin will be easy to release, first grease the tin, and then sprinkle it with flour, rotate the tin until the surface is covered with a thin layer of flour. Any surplus flour can be removed by upturning the tin and knocking the sides until the flour falls out.

It can be difficult to decorate cakes that are side by side. For instance, number twenty-one. One method is to place the left-hand cake on the board and completely decorate it. Next, sprinkle sifted icing sugar onto waxed or non-stick paper, and position the second cake on the paper. Decorate the left side of the cake and leave to dry. If the decoration is cream, or buttercream, leave to firm for about an hour in the freezer. Finally, slide the cake from the paper until it sits alongside the first cake, and complete the decoration.
Make cakes such as an 8 from two round cakes and use a large slab of firm cake, like Madeira (pound) cake to cut straight numbers from.

If the inside curve of a horseshoe-shaped cake is difficult to ice in royal icing, cover it with sugarpaste instead. The slight different in tone won’t be noticeable once the cake is decorated. Imitation water can be created with softened royal icing. Even sifted marmalade, or apricot jam, coloured with a spot of blue colour, looks 'watery'. Piping gel makes effective water.

Grass and moss are made by pushing marzipan, or sugarpaste, through a wire sieve. Flatten a ball of paste and keep pushing on the same spot until sufficient paste comes through. Cut off with a sharp knife.

Once the 'grass' is made, use immediately, or the strands may clog together. Book cakes can be adapted to suit any age and occasion. A ribbon ‘bookmark’ looks attractive; choose one to blend in with the colour scheme.

Open books can be carved from a slab of cake or baked in a special book tin. Some book tins have shallow corners, which means the mixture in the corners of the tin will be cooked before the centre. To sort out this problem, grease and line each corner with greaseproof paper, allowing the paper to extend above the top of the tin. Now you will be able to place extra mixture in the corners and they will not cook so quickly.

Make closed books from square or rectangular cakes. When the ‘pages’ are made from royal icing, mark them with a serrated scraper. When working with sugarpaste, pages can be marked with the back of a knife or a serrated scraper.

Use marzipan or sugarpaste for the top cover, remembering to overlap it slightly on the edges. The bottom cover is false – just a strip of paste placed around the base. Allow the ‘spine’ of the book to curve out slightly and mark a groove on the top cover where it begins.

Textured rolling pins give sugarpaste or marzipan an interesting surface, but, of course, it also depends on the decoration placed on the surface; too much will make a cake look fussy.

Apart from rolling pins, other items around the house can also be used for texturing. For instance, a stiff plastic doily, or the type of canvas used for tapestry. Some designs call for a roll of paste. As the palms of our hands are not flat, it is better to use a firm, flat object. A smoother is ideal. Make the roll in the usual way and then lightly roll the smoother over the paste and you will have a perfectly round, smooth roll. If you don’t possess a smoother, a new tablemat works just as well.
Hat cakes, decorated with sprays of flowers, make pretty gifts for ladies. The crown of the hat should be about 10cm (4”) smaller than the brim. And can either be placed in the centre of the brim, making a boater, or towards the back to make a bonnet.

Another unusual design (which could be used for a celebration) is a cake covered in sugarpaste and marked into 5cm (2”) squares. Pipe (or crimp) a dainty border around each square and, depending on the occasion, place a flower, or other sort of decoration in each square. If the cake was covered in marzipan and had a marzipan fruit in each square, it would be ideal for Christmas.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Butter Cream | Colors | Royal Icing | Piping Gel
**ORIENTAL STRINGWORK**

This type of string work consists of upturned loops surrounding the top edge of an iced cake - a technique that leaves the uninitiated wondering how on earth it is made.

Mark the top of the cake into about 2.5cm (1") sections with tiny dots of icing. Select a support, smaller than the size of the cake, and cover it with foam or a thin pad of material. Now upturn the cake onto the support. Use royal icing that has had half a teaspoonful of liquid glucose added to two tablespoons of royal icing. This will make the icing flexible.

Use a no. 1 or 1.5 tube to pipe the loops that hang down from the top edge of the cake. To make the loops, touch the surface of the cake with the tube, and keep pressing the icing out (allowing the loop to hang) until the loop is the right length, then attach the icing back on the cake.

The design is of three loops, each slightly wider and longer than the last. Begin with the smallest loop.

The next loop extends either side of the first and is slightly longer. The third loop is longer and extends either side of the second. The next set of loops begins halfway over those already piped. Once the loops are dry, turn the cake the right way up, and pipe the same design again, attaching the lines of icing to those already piped.

**Links:**

- Royal Icing
- Liquid Glucose
PAINTING

Even if you don't possess a great variety of colours, don't worry. The basic colours of red, yellow and blue can be used to create other colours.

Mix red and yellow to obtain orange; slightly less red and peach is the result. Red and blue mixed together equal purple, dilute with water and the purple becomes mauve. Yellow and blue make green. Varying one or other of the colours, results in paler or deeper shades. Bright green can be darkened by adding a spot of red colouring.

Painting on cakes should be approached with caution. Make sure the surface is dry, smooth and level. If a beginner, it may be better to practise on plaques and then choose the best one to place on the cake.

Only the very experienced would think of painting directly on a cake without some sort of guidance. If you want to copy a picture, trace it onto greaseproof paper, then lightly scribe through the paper onto the cake. Only draw in the main details – you will soon have enough confidence to paint in smaller details freehand.

Both liquid or paste colours are suitable for painting, but paste colours are much stronger. It is always easier to paint on a runout rather than a sugarpasted, or royal iced surface. This is because it has a much smooth surface and the paint glides across the top. After dipping a brush into colour, make sure it isn't too wet by dabbing it onto a piece of kitchen paper.

The time colours take to dry is important. Icing contains a high proportion of sugar, and dissolves if it becomes moist. So only use a small amount of paint on the brush. Gin and vodka can be used to dilute paint - they both dry faster than water. Non-toxic (but non-edible) gold and silver paint tends to settle in the base of the pot, so stir briefly before use.

Edible gold and silver paints are available from some manufacturers. Buying good quality brushes is an investment. Sable bristles are the highest quality, but a mixture of sable and synthetic work well. Or even a good quality synthetic brush, providing it keeps to a sharp point.

Before starting to paint, check your brush. Sometimes a small amount of colour remains from previous use. And this can be disastrous to any painting.

Backgrounds can be stippled in with a piece of sponge. Natural sponges give different effects than synthetic ones, but they are both equally effective. Eyes on models need extra care (unless they are the round-faced, snub-nosed types, who usually have a dot as an eye), as they are a focal point. Never use black, either to surround an eye or for the pupil, it's too hard.
Look around and note just how small eyes are in relation to the rest of the face. They are also partly hidden by the upper lid; so don’t just paint a dot in.

Take a tip from the china-painting experts, when painting eyes; only paint the top lid in. The eye will have a more open look.

Keep the pupil of eyes small, with only a dot for the iris.

To make an eye look lifelike it needs a speck of light in.

Eyes on novelty figures look cute if the eyes are focused to the side.

When painting hair, start with a light colour (even when the hair is dark) and gradually cover some of this with a darker shade. It will look much more authentic that being painting all one shade.

The same technique applies when painting flowers or landscapes on plaques or cakes. Paint light colours first, then the deeper shades on top. Keep background leaves and flowers a lighter colour than those in the foreground. This gives the picture a three-dimensional appearance.

Instead of adding water to lighten colours, add white food dust; this will also make the consistency of the paint thicker.

Remember colours will look different when painting on a coloured, rather than a white base. Painting portraits on cakes is usually a task for the professionals. However, there is an easy way to achieve the same result with photographs. Cocoa painting is popular and the result looks like an old-fashioned sepia picture.
Place white vegetable fat and cocoa over hot water to melt, then add cocoa and mix in. To make sure the ‘paint’ stays fluid; leave it over the hot water as you work.

While painting, support one hand with the other. Another way to keep your hand steady is to bring the painting to the front of the working surface and rest your wrists on the edge.

If a design is being copied, the size may need altering. Enlarging or reducing a design can be done on a photocopier. However, if not possible, draw a grid of squares (on tracing paper) over the design you wish to alter. Depending on the design, the average size of the squares could be 2cm (3/4”). Using a separate piece of paper, draw another set of squares, either larger or smaller than the last, let’s say, 3cm (1.1/4”) square. Numbering the squares makes it easier to transfer the design. Now, using the squares as guidelines, copy each portion of the design from the original onto the enlarged, or reduced, grid.

Links:

Colours | Plaques
PHOTOGRAPHY

While demonstrating at an exhibition I was once asked 'How can you justify spending so much time on something that will be eaten.' By the time I thought up a suitable reply, the person had moved on!

But we cake decorators are well rewarded by the pleasure others receive from our work. People remember the cakes we decorate long after they have slipped from our memory - which is why a clear photograph is a good reminder. Of course, the more expensive the camera, the better the quality of the photograph, but we all need to know some ‘special tricks of the trade’.

One of these is to light the shadowed side of the cake. Professional photographers do this with silver lined umbrellas. But we can achieve a good result with either a large silver cake board or a sheet of foil. Either of these will reflect light onto the side of a cake. Get someone to hold this light source just out of camera range, while the photograph is being taken.

Cakes photograph well in an even light outdoors. Avoid direct sunlight, as it will create hard shadows.

If indoors, try to make sure the light comes from only direction only. Very often the fine detail on cakes does not show to advantage. This happens when a built-in flash in a compact camera is too strong. Try placing a ‘filter’ such as a paper handkerchief over the flash. The bright reflection from a wedding-cake stand can affect a photograph. Dim the shine with a thin coating of window cleaning liquid.

Standing a camera on tripod ensures it will not move. Or balance the camera on the back of a chair. Elbows pressed into the body will help keep a camera steady when the button is pressed. If you can find a convenient wall, stand against it to steady yourself when ‘snapping’.

If you find your hand wobbles when taking photographs, consider buying a film with a faster speed. Backgrounds can be distracting. Try keeping them all one colour. Two large pieces of pale-blue card, one to stand the cake on, and the other propped behind it, makes a good background. A pale coloured sheet draped over the surface and background will give a continuous flow against which to photograph a cake.

Just before taking a photo, take a last look at the subject. It’s easy with so much to think about to forget to check small details. For instance, on a tiered wedding cake are the decorations on each cake all in line with each other? Is the overlap on a ribbon at the back, not the front, of a cake?

If a cake is decorated with frills, are they being displayed to the best advantage? Or would the frills look better photographed from a different angle?
PHOTOS- EDIBLE

Some sugarcraft firms have computers that scan photographs and then print coloured duplicates on an edible surface.

I used this technique one Christmas and the grandchildren were delighted to see themselves on a cake.

The first task was to find five equal-sized photographs. These were then photocopied in colour and stuck in a row onto white paper.

Had the reproductions not been the right size, they could have been enlarged or reduced. The picture was then magically transformed by computer onto edible paper, which was then attached to a sugarpaste ‘pillow’.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Butter Cream
PILLARS AND STANDS

Nowadays there are a wide variety of pillars and stands for brides’ to choose from. When shiny, silver pillars are used, silver should be repeated somewhere else in the design. Otherwise, the pillars become too eye-catching.

Four pillars can often look too crowded on a cake, and sometimes only three are needed for each tier - unless the cakes are very heavy. If two pillars are placed towards the front of the cake and one at the back, making a triangular shape, it gives a more open look to the cake.

Decorated pillars can look attractive – but if the cake is elaborate, it is better to keep the pillars plain.

One way of decorating pillars is to tape small bunches of coloured stamens into long strands. When wound around the pillars they give the impression of tiny flowers.

Pillars for the top of a three or four tiered cake should be slightly shorter than those used at the base.

Tiered cakes, covered in sugarpaste need support. If the cakes are lightweight – such as sponge, chocolate or Madeira – a thin cake board placed under the pillars will prevent them sinking into the icing. But to be quite sure the cakes stay upright, place three sticks of dowelling into the bottom and middle cakes. Tiered fruit cakes, covered in soft icing should be supported. Hollow pillars are often used for this purpose. A plastic dowel is inserted down the pillar and through the cake until it reaches the cake board. This procedure should be carried out within an hour or two of the cake being iced, or the paste may crack. Measurements must be precise. Place the pillars in position on the cake and insert a dowel, pushing it down until it touches the cake board. Now mark the dowel level with the top of the pillar, and cut off any surplus. Don’t cut all the dowels the same height. The depth of the cake can vary a fraction from one area to another, so place each pillar in position and measure each dowel separately. If the dowels and pillars are being removed, it is a good idea to tie each pair together with an elastic band.

Twist the dowels gently as they are being taken out of the cake. This prevents any small pieces of cake from becoming dislodged as it is being withdrawn. Dowelling can also be used under solid pillars.

Yet another alternative is a pillar with a long spike at the base. Use a small spirit level to make doubly sure the pillars are level.

Some pillars are available in 13cm (5”) lengths. These create an impression when used on large, deep cakes.
Plaster of Paris pillars are absorbent, this means the pillars can be coloured.

Dip into water that has been tinted with food colouring, for a delicate effect.

For stronger colours, give the pillars a coat of matt emulsion.

When dry they can be brushed with edible colour or dusts.

On royal iced cakes, upturned sherry glasses can be used instead of pillars. With a small flower tucked into the bowl of the glass, they make an attractive alternative to traditional pillars.

Positioning pillars on royal iced cakes with a dab of royal icing can be dangerous, while the cakes are being moved. If the pillars happen to fall, the decorations on the cake could break. It is safer to carry the pillars separately and secure them once the cake is in place.
Some pillars are made with one end wider than the other. Pillars should follow the theme of the cake – going smaller as it rises – so the widest part of the pillar should rest on the cake surface.

Cake separators are an easier (but more expensive) way of supporting cakes. They give a light airy look to cakes. And as the pillars are combined with a top and bottom support of clear acrylic, there is no danger of them sinking.

A traditional wedding cake stand, not only highlights a cake, but also adds inches to its height. This is an important factor when a reception takes place in a large room, when a cake placed straight onto a table can look insignificant.

Many cake stands, for sale or hire, are made from plastic. In either gold or silver, they are lightweight and presentable; but having said that, an embossed, silver-plated stand gives a look of quality to a cake. But of course, the design should be reflected by the stand. A heavy silver stand is more suitable for a traditionally decorated cake, than one of modern design.

Many brides now favour an ivory coloured dress, and choose a cake of the same colour. Use gold, rather than silver, stands for ivory cakes.

Stands should reflect the shape of the cake, square for a square or hexagonal cake, round for a round or petal shape.

Stands get booked up well in advance, so order early. Remember you will also need a decorative knife.

A curved chrome stand, with each cake standing on a separate base, can look rather stark. Soften by weaving flowers, or ribbons, around the stand. This also helps to link the cakes together, which otherwise look rather isolated. Make sure the flowers blend in with the overall colour scheme of the wedding.

If you worry about the cakes slipping off these individual supports, buy non-slip mats made especially for this purpose.

An unusual stand is a hanging basket stand. Rather like the hanging baskets we place in our gardens, these stands (with stainless steel rods) suspend cakes at different levels. This novel way of displaying cakes is very attractive, particularly if the cakes are decorated with sugar flowers.
PIPING BAGS

Professional confectioners always use a paper-icing bag, and will chose a different size according to the work in hand. For instance, a small bag for lettering, a medium bag for piping shells and a large bag for scroll work. Nylon piping bags are normally all one size, and the smooth material makes them difficult to grasp. Because they are large, the tendency is to overfill even when only a small amount of icing is needed.

Writing 'Happy Birthday' on a cake only takes about two teaspoons of icing. Many decorators use icing syringes when they first begin piping, but soon discover they do not give the same flexibility as piping bags. Bags made from baking parchment are stronger than greaseproof paper, which often split in the process of piping.

Buy a long roll of paper. This will make both large and small bags. If, when happily piping away, the tube pops out of the bag, it could be that too big a hole has been cut in the end of the bag. To avoid this happening again, place the point of the tube and the point of the bag against the palm of your hand. Before the scissors come into use, observe how much to cut. Approximately one third the length of the tube is ample.

Use a knife (not a wooden spoon) to fill the bag with icing. But before you begin, do make sure the tube is in place. In the excitement of starting to pipe this essential piece of equipment can easily be forgotten.

One of the easiest ways to fill an icing bag is to make a circle with your thumb and forefinger, then place the bag into this space. Take a knife full of icing; insert it into the bag then scrape the knife against the side of the bag and the icing will be where you need it - and not all over your hands Never fill bags more than three quarters full, or the icing will flow over the top.

Before turning the top of the bag down, ensure the smooth side of the bag is facing you - not the overlapping paper. I say this because sometimes the pressure of piping can result in icing creeping through this gap.

A comfortable way to hold an icing bag is between the first two fingers of the hand, with the soft pad of the thumb on the folded end of the bag. When working with large bags, extra pressure can be applied by curling all the fingers around the body of the bag, and pressing the thumb on the folded end.

To stop your hand wobbling (and this can happen to any age group) support the icing bag with the fingers of your opposite hand. Another tip is to keep the elbow close to the body; not stuck out like a chicken's wing. Again, this will steady the hand.

Links:

Royal Icing | Tubes
PIPING GEL

Piping jelly pictures are very eye-catching, partly because of the sheen from the gel. They are not difficult to make and can be used for different occasions - not just on children’s’ birthday cakes.

The traditional way of using piping gel has been for making cartoon-like figures on novelty cakes. Surrounded by an outline made from chocolate, the area inside is filled with gel.

The gel can be coloured with paste or liquid colours. It needs warming to make it flow easily. When adding colour, only stir gently, don’t beat. Otherwise air bubbles will be incorporated, and these can be difficult to remove.

When working on a colourful design, instead of making up several batches of coloured gel, first paint the design onto the cake. Once dry, pipe clear gel over the painted area. This quick method gives more variety, as the colours can be made deeper or lighter as required.

Use the above method to make a stained glass church window on an Easter cake. Chocolate is used for an outline because it is quick to pipe and fast to dry. It also acts as a foil to bright colours. Royal icing can be also used as an outline, just like it is for a runout (colour flow) but piping gel flooded in instead of softened royal icing.

If you are not happy making piping bags, a tiny hole cut in the corner of a small plastic bag can be used. This method is better than trying to use a teaspoon, which makes it difficult to place the gel against the piped outline.

If piping gel is not available, marmalade makes a good substitute. It can be coloured: orange, red, green and brown. Warm and sieve before using. Embossing can be incorporated into a piping gel design. Instead of being piped, the outline is embossed. Fill the design with piping gel, but do not allow it to spread into the embossed lines. The final picture will look rather like a stencil, with white lines separating the different parts of the design.

Adding piping gel to royal icing (for brush embroidery) is sometimes recommended, as it prolongs the drying time. However, as the climate affects royal icing, it may not always be necessary.

For a glamorous effect, add iridescent dusts to piping gel to make tiny staggered dots on the surface of a cake.

Links:

Colours | Chocolate | Runouts | Royal Icing | Embossers
**PIPING STAND**

Anyone who works with royal icing will know how quickly the icing in the end of the tube can dry - especially in hot weather. So a piping stand is a great help when working with several bags of royal icing.

The stand is made of metal and has six holes to support the bags. The base of the stand holds a piece of foam (ready to be moistened) on which the tips of the tubes rest.
**PIPING TECHNIQUES**

The famous American cake-decorator, Frances Kyper, said the most valuable advice she could give her students was not `practise makes perfect' but `practising properly, makes perfect.'

A tube that becomes blocked up with icing is (to say the least) annoying for a decorator. And this can easily happen, especially when working with fine tubes. Prevent by pressing the icing through a piece of new tight, which is about the finest `sieve' obtainable.

A plain writing tube can be used to pipe lines, dots, trellis, loops, lettering etc. When piping continually check the end of the tube to make sure it is clean. Excess icing can smudge the design.

A straight line is the foundation for trellis, lettering and many designs. Always try to pipe towards yourself. Working the opposite way is like trying to draw a line backwards instead of forwards.

But drawing a straight line (and artists will tell you it's rarely possible, except when using a ruler) and piping a straight line are two different techniques. To pipe a straight line, position the tube very close to the work. Then apply gentle pressure to the bag, until the icing sticks to the surface of the cake.

Blobs at the beginning of a line mean one of two things. Either the icing is too soft, or too much pressure has been applied.

To achieve a perfectly straight line, don't try to guide the icing along the surface of the cake. Courage is needed. But don't cake decorators already possess this quality in abundance? Who else would try balancing one cake on top of another with only thin pillars between? Or drive miles (trembling at every bump in the road) to delivery a cake decorated with fragile sugar flowers.

But back to the subject in hand. To pipe a straight line, first make sure the icing is in contact with the surface of the cake. Then, keeping a slight pressure on the bag, lift the line of icing 2.5cm-5cm (1"- 2") away from the cake surface and gently guide the line forward.

If the line breaks it could be because pressure on the bag was not constant, or the icing too stiff. Reduce pressure on the bag shortly before the end of the line, and gently place the tube onto the cake surface. This action will break the thread of icing.

Sometimes, when piping, it is easier to obtain a smooth rhythm if you count at the same time. For instance, when piping loops (like the ropes on the side of a drum, known as hanging loops) around the top edge of a cake. Depending on the size of the loops, the method goes something like this. Attach the icing.
Begin the loop and at the same time start counting - 1, 2, 3. On the 4th count attach the loop to the cake.

Working in this way, all the loops should be an equal size. Hold loops a short distance from the side of the cake as they are being piped, and only attach them once they are long enough.

When using a number of tubes, prevents the tips from drying by placing them against a damp cloth.

One piped design that necessitates using three tubes is known amongst those using royal icing as 3, 2, 1. It is normally piped on a traditional royal iced cake, although there is no reason why it shouldn't be used on sugarpaste as well.

The lines are generally piped in white on a white cake. And due to the light and shadow they create, make a delicate decoration. Use a template to pipe the first line in a number three tube.

Very close line, pipe a line with number two tube. Now keeping to the same tube, pipe a line over the first line. Pipe a line with the smallest tube alongside the second line, and using the same tube overpipe the first and second lines, and you will see why the technique is known as - three, two, one. Another attractive edging is made piping groups of three dots. Two dots are piped alongside each other, and the third one piped on top, forming a triangular shape. They must all touch each other.

Leave a small space between each group of dots and the pattern can look like a lace edging.

A pretty pattern, which gives added interest to a cake, is known by at least two different names. One of these is cornelli (an embroidery term) work and the other is known as 'take a line for a walk'. Whichever name is chosen it is a useful design to have up your sleeve, especially if the surface of the cake is not as smooth as hoped for.
Use a fine tube; 1.5 tube is ideal for this work, not too thin, not too thick. Think about a jigsaw when piping, lots of interlocking curves none of them touching. When well done the design looks as if it is continuous, but this is not so. Although stopping and starting are kept to a minimum, breaks do occur, but if neat will not be noticed. Surplus ends of icing can be tidied away with a damp paintbrush.

While using a fine tube make a few butterfly wings at the same time. They don't take long and can be stored for future use. They can either be piped directly onto waxed paper or made on shaped pieces of net - this will make stronger wings. Once the wings are dry, complete the butterfly by piping a royal iced body. Insert the wings, using folded pieces of card to prop them up.

Antennae can be made by piping curves of royal icing! An easier alternative is to cut the knobs from stiff stamens and cut them to size. Make the stamens look more lifelike by curving them over your finger, before inserting into the butterfly's head.

When you need a quantity of piped lace, but don't possess a sheet of patterns, draw a few lace designs onto a strip of thin card, leaving a tab at the end to hold it by. Place the card under waxed paper and copy the designs in icing, using the tab to keep pulling the patterns along.

When royal icing is too soft, always beat it well before adding extra icing sugar. The beating may well stiffen the icing, whereas adding more icing sugar could result in a heavy icing - which is difficult to work with.

To pipe stars, shells and scrolls, the icing needs to, what is known in the trade as 'hold a peak'. Test this by dipping a knife into the icing. Hold the knife up. If the icing stands in a peak, it is the correct consistency.

Stars are piped by holding the bag straight above the surface of the cake, and about 5mm (1/4") away.

Keep pressing the icing out until the star is the correct size. Then stop pressing and lift the bag quickly. Many beginners keep pushing the icing out as they are lifting the bag resulting in a star with a long point.

Shells can be made with a shell tube, which has a half circle of grooves at the end. Or they can be made with a finely cut star tube. Holding the bag at an angle, and close to the cake, press out the icing until a shell shape is formed. Break off the icing by scraping the tube against the cake surface. This action forms the end of the shell. Pipe the next shell so that it slightly overlaps the finish of the first shell.
When the occasion warrants it, shells around the base of a cake can be made into swans. Use a number 2 tube and pipe a long reversed S, curving the bottom part of the letter around the front of the shell. Insert the tube into the head, and, without pressing, pull some icing down to create a beak.

Most of us are familiar with frills made in sugarpaste, but they can also be made with a petal tube and well-beaten royal icing.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing
PLAQUES
Plaques are invaluable as a memento. Although photographs remind us of a celebration cake, a decoration is more tangible. It can revive memories and associations long after the occasion has flown.

Kept under the right conditions, plaques made from flowerpaste, Mexican paste and pastillage will keep for decades.

A runout plaque dries with a soft sheen on the surface. Plaques are quick to make and can be stored for future use.

Piping a name or message on a plaque eliminates the worry of writing directly onto the surface of a cake.

Links:

Runouts | Flowerspaste
PRESSURE PIPING
This may sound a daunting procedure, but it’s a quick and creative way of making designs in royal icing. Even piping a dot is a form of pressure piping. The way to make a perfectly round dot is (once a small dot of icing has been piped) to place the tip of the tube inside the dot, and keep pressing to allow the pressure of icing to expand the dot from within.

Icing for pressure piping should be strong and well beaten. Piping bags must be small and easy to hold. Use icing which is at least one day old, otherwise it could be too full of life and contain air bubbles. Beat half a cupful vigorously with the blade of a knife. The icing must hold its shape and yet not be too stiff. Beating the icing on a scraper is another way of ensuring air is knocked out of it. Just like a dot, designs can be made with smooth surfaces and shaped without withdrawing the tube from the icing. If mistakes do occur, brush them away with a damp paintbrush.

Pressure piping is rather like writing on a cake. The tube is held at an angle and the icing pressed out. Depending upon the amount of pressure all types of designs can be made. Seeing tiny bluebirds on her wedding cake will delight many a bride.

They are easy to make by piping small wings onto waxed paper – one facing left, the other, right. Allow the wings to dry and then pipe an oval shaped body. Before taking the tube from the body, push out sufficient icing to make a head. Stop pressing once the head is the right size and quickly pull the tube away from the icing. With luck, a small beak will have formed. If the beak makes the bird look like an eagle instead of a bluebird, this is the time to wield your paintbrush. Place the wings into the soft icing and support them with balls of cling film. Save time by piping rows of wings for future use.

Links:
Royal Icing
QUESTION
Occasionally my cakes are on the dry side. I’ve read about applying a boiled sugar/water solution. Do you think this would help me?

ANSWER
You could make such a solution by using, for instance, 4 fluid ounces water and 6 oz sugar. Allow the sugar to dissolve in the water in a small, strong saucepan. Bring slowly to the boil – do not stir – and boil for a few minutes before removing from the heat. To flavour, add some liqueur. Don’t pour the liquid on the cakes, instead brush some on each layer.

QUESTION
What advice can you give on a chocolate cake which is to be coated with ivory coloured sugarpaste. I’m worried the chocolate colour may show through. Should I apply two coats of sugarpaste?

ANSWER
No, two coats of sugarpaste would be too sweet. The best idea would be to brush the cake with a thin coating of melted apricot jam. Then roll out white marzipan very thinly and cover the cake with this. Leave to dry for a day, brush the marzipan with sherry etc and apply the ivory sugarpaste.

QUESTION
I usually make rich fruit cakes for weddings, but I was recently asked to make two cakes, one sponge and the other chocolate. How long can I make them before the wedding.

ANSWER
They could both be made well in advance and frozen. Use butter in both recipes and this will give a good flavour and keep the cakes moist. Defrost 3-5 days before the wedding, and then ice and decorate. The icing serves as a barrier and will keep the cakes from drying out.

QUESTION
I wish to make some figures using a mould. Would sugarpaste be stiff enough?

ANSWER
Paste pressed into a mould has to be just right – not too stiff, or it will not take an impression, and not too soft otherwise it distorts on removal from the mould. You could use either flower or Mexican paste with a little added sugarpaste to make the paste supple.
**QUESTION**
Saw a pretty decoration on a wedding cake and was told it was done with Transfer Sheets. What are these?

**ANSWER**
This is a quite a new technique in cake decorating and although it looks complicated it is a relatively easy, and interesting one. Transfer sheets are pieces of acetate with coloured chocolate designs on. Start by spreading a smooth coat of melted chocolate over the textured side of the sheet. Before the chocolate sets, place the chocolate coated side of the sheet down onto the cake surface. Then once the chocolate has set the film can be peeled away. A dark pattern will need a light chocolate backing so that it shows up well, and a light design requires a darker chocolate. It is a good idea to experiment with different coloured chocolate.

**QUESTION**
My friend tells me she is having a 'wonky' wedding cake made. I am intrigued as to what exactly this is.

**ANSWER**
Wonky – or funky – wedding cakes are a case of 'once seen never forgotten'. Many are decorated in vibrant colours, such as orange and red, a perfect foil for such an unusual shape, and look well at a themed wedding. The technique for making 'wonky' cakes is to cut the cakes at angles – but not too shallow an angle, otherwise it just looks as if the cake is not properly balanced. They can be made as a two tier cake, but give much greater impact as three, or even four tiers. The cakes should be about 10cm (4 in) deep and stacked. They need dowelling for support, otherwise there is a risk they may topple over.

**QUESTION**
My rich fruit cakes always crumble when cut. I usually soak the fruit for a few days before baking. I would be grateful to know the answer as to what I am doing wrong.

**ANSWER**
Using soft margarine could make a fruit cake crumble, so always use butter (or a hard margarine, but butter has a better flavour). You say you soak the fruit before baking, but do make sure no excess liquid is added to the cake mix, otherwise there may be too much moisture and this could affect the quality of the cake. Try sprinkling the brandy over the cake after it is baked. If you do this while the cake is still warm, the brandy will absorb into the cake. Another reason could be the heat of the oven, which vary quite a lot in temperature.
QUESTION
Have been asked to make a wedding cake filled with custard and raspberries. Please help!

ANSWER
Custard comes under different headings. For instance there is custard cream, pastry and crème anglais. The last recipe will probably be the one to use as it contains cornflour to help stabilise the custard – and you will need a firm custard. The ingredients to make 15fl oz of custard are: 15oz milk, vanilla pod, 5 standard egg yolks 4oz caster sugar, 2 level tablespoons plain flour, 1 level tablespoon cornflour. Once made, let the custard get nearly cold and then gently fold in dry, firm raspberries. To be sure the customer approves, how about giving them a 'taster' beforehand.

QUESTION
My daughter attends ballet classes and I would like to make ballet shoes to place on top of her birthday cake.

ANSWER
Use sugarpaste and an equal quantity of flowerpaste, as this gives added strength. Copy the shape of an innersole onto cardboard and use this as a template. Stick the top and base together with royal icing, or failing that add a few drops of water (or egg white) to a small knob of Flowerpaste and work together. Leave until sticky and use as a 'glue'. It is also possible to buy a shoe mould (and edible glue) from many cake decorating shops.

QUESTION
I am interested in starting my own business making cakes from home, but need to find out about the various rules and regulations that are involved.

ANSWER
Get in touch with your local Council first of all regarding the rules for making and decorating cakes at home, as well as Health and Safety at home. Another good contact is Squires Kitchen in Farnham Surrey www.squires group.co.uk (Tel. 01252 727572) who run courses (with a well qualified tutor) on just the subject you are looking for.

QUESTION
How do I go about making bubbles on a seascape cake?

ANSWER
Piping gel, obtainable from most cake decorating shops, will make very realistic bubbles. However, as you probably don't want too many bubbles you could make some from melted and sieved marmalade. Place in a small icing bag (or cut a corner off a plastic bag) and cut off about 5mm (¼ in) then pipe your bubbles. Make sure the jam is not too warm, otherwise the bubbles will not hold their shape.
**QUESTION**
When I cover a cake with sugarpaste the paste always overlaps down the sides. How can I prevent this?

**ANSWER**
Measure each side of the cake and across the top, then add these measurements together, adding a couple of extra inches to be on the safe side. Cut a piece of string to this size and use as a guide when rolling out the paste. Do make sure to cover the surface of the cake completely with either a thin layer of jam or buttercream. This acts as a glue when applying the Sugarpaste. Another tip is to use the soft pad of your hand to press the paste on the sides of the cake.

**QUESTION**
Is there a reliable method of gauging the amount of mix needed for a cake.

**ANSWER**
I want to make a 9" cake but only have a recipe for an 8" cake. How do I work out the difference in size.
Pour water into the smaller tin up to the level your cake mix normally reaches. Now tip this water into the 23cm (9 in) tin and this will give you an idea of how much more mixture you will need. Remember that a larger cake will take longer to cook, and so use a slightly lower oven setting.

**QUESTION**
How can I prevent lines and creases appearing when applying sugarpaste onto a cake surface.

**ANSWER**
Dust the working surface lightly with icing sugar and gently knead the sugarpaste until it is free from cracks before you begin rolling it out. After a few rolls move the sugarpaste slightly, this will make sure it does not stick. Do not turn the paste over - the top surface is always the smoothest. Buy a plastic tool known as a 'Smoother', and use once the cake is completely covered.

**QUESTION**
Have been asked to make a cake covered in chocolate. I feel confident about making the cake, but can you offer any advice regarding coating the cake.

**ANSWER**
Cover the cakes with a type of chocolate coating icing – known to professionals as Ganache. This is a mixture of chocolate and cream. For a superb flavour, use a good quality chocolate. The cream can either be single, whipping or double. However, when double cream is used the icing has a higher gloss. To apply, place a large sheet of greaseproof paper under a wire tray. Position the cake in the centre of the tray and pour the icing into the centre of the cake.
Immediately this is done pick up the tray and shake it slightly. This action will help the icing to spread evenly down the sides of the cake. Any icing left over can be re-used.

**QUESTION**
I am making three Madeira cakes for a celebration and the client wants them placed one on top of another. As the cakes will not be very heavy, do you think there is any need for supports.

**ANSWER**
Yes, it is better to be safe than sorry! Position the two smaller cakes on thin boards the same size as the cakes and use three plastic supports in the two bottom cakes.

**QUESTION**
I am making a wedding cake and plan to coat it in royal icing, having heard of a Fortified Albumen can you tell me how to use it please?

**ANSWER**
Fortified Albumen is dried egg white which is very easy to use. It dissolves in water and can then be used just like fresh egg white. Another type of dried egg white on the market, is pure egg white. This takes longer to dissolve, but just leave it for an hour and it will disperse naturally into the water, and because it makes a stronger solution it is ideal when used for piping lace and runouts (colourflow).

**QUESTION**
Can you help with this query? I have not had much experience with making sugar flowers, and am making my son’s wedding cake. They would like sugarpaste roses on the cake. How do I go about making them?

**ANSWER**
I can imagine you are feeling apprehensive about your son's request, but don't worry, before long you will be able to make a pretty display. Flowers can be made well in advance, and the easiest edible roses are those made from marzipan, which is very pliable, but marzipan roses cannot be made in such delicate colours as those made from sugarpaste. Some methods of making roses begin with a curled petal with the other petals being wrapped around it. But experiment by making a bud shape first, and using this as a base. This method makes a more rounded rose.
**QUESTION**
Any tips on cutting a round wedding cake into slices?

**ANSWER**
Round wedding cakes are not cut into wedges in the way as round birthday cakes are. Instead they are cut into slices, and the best way to do this is to cut the cake into two separate pieces. Remove one half from the cake board - this will give more room to cut the remaining half. Cut the first slice the length of the cake, and about 1" wide. Lay this long piece down on the cake board and cut into pieces – which are normally about two inches wide.

**QUESTION**
I have trouble covering cakes in sugar paste when I try to cut the excess paste it has gaps and the cake underneath can be seen.

**ANSWER**
One reason sugarpaste does not stick well is when it has nothing to stick against! So make sure whatever the cake has been coated with i.e. jam or buttercream, it extends down to the base of the cake. Another tip is to use the padded edge (away from the thumb) of your hand and gently press the paste into the base of the cake.

**QUESTION**
Would like some advice on decorating and smoothing sugarpaste on a wedding cake, how do I avoid creases when putting icing on a cake

**ANSWER**
To avoid creases dust the working surface lightly with icing sugar and gently knead the sugarpaste until it is free from cracks before you begin rolling it out. After a few rolls move the sugarpaste slightly, this will make sure it does not stick. To achieve a soft sheen on the icing gently polish the surface with the palm of your hand.

**QUESTION**
Please can you help? I have seen these wedding cakes, placed one on top of another, how is it done without them toppling?

**ANSWER**
The cakes have hidden supports, known as dowelling. These are plastic (or wooden) rods which are inserted into the cake until they touch the cake board. Each rod is then cut level with the top surface of the cake. Three rods are usually sufficient in each cake, but a large cake will require four.
QUESTION
Have you a guide on how to make those big chocolate curls/ruffles I often see on chocolate wedding cakes.

ANSWER
The curls can be made in two ways. The first method is used by experienced chefs and consists of pouring chocolate onto a very cold marble slab. Then at a precise moment (before the chocolate completely sets) arrange it into curls.

The second method, is to form the curls from modelling chocolate.

QUESTION
Why do sugarpaste roses dry so quickly, and what can I do to prevent this happening?

ANSWER
Sugarpaste is a very soft paste and when pressed out thinly (as is the case when making roses) it has a tendency to dry and split. This can be avoided by working quickly, but this is difficult unless experienced. So the best way is to place your petals inside a freezer bag, which is thicker than a normal plastic bag, and thin the petals through the surface of the bag. Another tip is not to make more than two, or at the most, three petals at a time, because once the paste is thinned and exposed to the air, it will rapidly dry out.

QUESTION
My fruit cakes always go hard on the outside. I cooked a wedding cake recently for eight hours and had to cut away the hard bits, even though I had wrapped brown paper around the outside of the tin.

ANSWER
Regarding your query, eight hours is a very long time to cook a cake. Even a 12" rich fruit cakes only takes approximately 6 hours to bake - but of course the exact time depends on your oven. One 'trick of the trade' is to pour a couple of tablespoons of water over the cake before you place it in the oven, then immediately pour the excess away. Moistening the surface of the cake will help to stop it going hard.

QUESTION
How are the arms, legs etc stuck on small figures that decorate cakes.

ANSWER
If the figures are made from marzipan use chocolate to stick on arms and legs. Just a dab is usually enough. If made from any other pastes on the market, use sugar glue which is obtainable from most cake decorating shops.

Or make your own by adding half a teaspoon of gum tragacanth to 2oz of sugarpaste, and then add a little water to make stiff paste. Alternatively, depending on the size of the model, a piece of spaghetti, or macaroni can be used to join two pieces together.
**QUESTION**  
Can you advise me? Have been asked to make a cake with a tennis theme and it has to be for over 50 people. What size cake shall I make.

**ANSWER**  
Make a Madeira type cake which is a firm consistency, and so easier to decorate. The usual size of cake given to guests is about one by one and a half inches in size. Use a rectangular tin 8" x 12" and one and a half inches deep, which are available in good quality kitchen shops, and just right for a tennis cake. You could cover the top in sugarpaste, and the sides in buttercream and then chopped nuts. Hoping this is of help to you.

**QUESTION**  
Could you please tell me whether it is possible to freeze roll out icing and marzipan? Sometimes the weather in my country makes the shelf life of goods rather limited.

**ANSWER**  
Yes, it is possible, either well wrapped before use, or else on cakes after they have been iced. If the paste is already on a cake, open freeze for a few hours before wrapping in foil and freezing.

**QUESTION**  
I have been asked to make a large cake in the shape of a book. Any suggestions?

**ANSWER**  
There are several ways of making a book cake. You could buy (or hire) a cake tin in the shape of an open book. This design is very attractive with two ‘pages’ to decorate. Another style is a closed book. This can be made from a cake baked in a rectangle tin. To give impact this type of cake needs to be approximately three inches deep. The cover can be made of marzipan, or sugarpaste and the ‘pages’ from white sugarpaste, ribbed with either the back of a knife, or, better still, a serrated scraper.

**QUESTION**  
Always, always the wires slip out as I am making flowers. How can I stop this happening.

**ANSWER**  
To prevent wires slipping out from sugar flowers, loop the top of the wire over approximately 1cm (½ in) Then make a small bud-shaped piece of paste, and insert the bottom end of the wire into the paste and pull through, making sure that the wire loop connects into the bud.
**QUESTION**
This business of making stamens to put in the centres of sugar carnations is very fiddly. I can see stamens need to be in flowers such as lilies, but in real carnations they don't show.

**ANSWER**
You are right. The only time stamens are seen in carnations is when the flower starts to open right out. So, if you wish you can omit them – leaving you time to make another flower!

**QUESTION**
At Christmas I like to ice the cake with red lettering on, but it always seems to run into the white background. I have even seen this on cakes in bakery shop windows. Is there anything that can be done about it?

**ANSWER**
Red icing is notorious for running into, either the background, or other colours. It happens when the atmosphere is moist and icing attracts moisture because of its sugar content. Instead of piping directly onto the cake surface, make a plaque (not of sugarpaste, which is too soft, and therefore liable to attract moisture) of gum, or Mexican paste. Leave the plaque until completely dry and then pipe your message. Also make sure the colouring is glycerine-free.

**QUESTION**
I never seem able to make the exact amount of royal icing I need, and also it does not work properly.

**ANSWER**
Royal icing needs beating well. Do this with a wooden spoon. Dried egg white (1 tsp to 1 tablespoon water) is quick to make, or try the packeted Royal icing mix which already has the correct proportion of dried egg white added to it, but the icing still needs beating!!

**QUESTION**
I love the variegated ivy leaves seen on some cakes. How is the variegated effect achieved.

**ANSWER**
Cake decorators use two methods. The quickest is to mix two shades of green paste into cream coloured paste, and work together until the colours blend. A more realistic way is to make cream coloured ivy leaves. After they are dry paint with a light green, leaving an edging of cream – using a real ivy leaf (or picture) as a guide. Once dry, paint a darker green over part of the light green.
QUESTION
When royal icing a square cake, I usually fix some decorations to the corners of the cake to hide the fact that they are not really sharp. How do the professionals do it?

ANSWER
First of all the marzipan needs to be properly applied. On a square cake marzipan is usually applied to the top surface first, and then a separate piece on each of the four sides. Allow the marzipan to firm for two or three days, then apply the royal icing to two opposite sides of the cake. Once dry, apply icing to the remaining sides.

QUESTION
I cheat when I need to pipe a message and use cutters instead, but often find that the paste sticks in the cutter. Any hints?

ANSWER
If you are using sugarpaste to make letters, it needs stiffening. The reason why the paste sticks is because the sugarpaste is so soft, and the cutters small. Try stiffening up the paste by mixing it with flower or Mexican paste. Also check the cutters as you use them. They can become sticky, so either dip in icing sugar, or wipe them before cutting each letter.

QUESTION
I saw a chocolate log in a magazine decorated with chocolate holly leaves. How would I be able to achieve the same

ANSWER
Making any type of chocolate leaf requires a delicate touch and great care, but holly leaves present their own problems – but they can be made. Use a dark, rather than a milk chocolate, as it sets harder. Choose young holly leaves (those that are still soft) leaving a small amount of stalk attached to the leaf. Wash and dry well. Melt dark chocolate, until it is just fluid, but not too runny. Using a spoon spread a thin layer chocolate over the back of the leaf, wiping away any chocolate that may spread onto the front of the leaf. Once the chocolate is firm, coat again with chocolate, then leave on non-stick paper until completely firm. At this stage, hold onto the stalk, and gently peel the leaf away from the chocolate – taking extra care as each spike on the leaf is reached.
QUESTION
Had a go at painting faces on sugar models – made them look like clowns. What is the secret?

ANSWER
Be very careful when using edible colours to paint with. It is so easy to make the colours too bright, so dilute them with a small amount of water.

For instance never use black for eyebrows or eyes. Eyebrows look best painted very finely in light brown and eyes either the same colour or a mid blue. You can always make the colour deeper if you wish, but it is difficult to eliminate if too deep. Around the eyes only paint in the top line. This looks much better than having the eye completely surrounded with a line. It pays to buy a good quality paint brush. One made from sable and synthetic works well.

QUESTION
I am very interest in the history of wedding cakes, can you tell me where I can obtain some information about this subject.

ANSWER
Having written articles on Royal weddings for the Cakes and Sugarcraft magazine, I can say that issues 8, 19, 12 and 13 contained photographs of Royal wedding cakes. The dates of these weddings were 1871, 1879, 1885 and 1893. If still available you could obtain back issues. Another source could be back issues of national newspapers of that period.

QUESTION
Having seen a chocolate cake in a shop window with a band of chocolate around the sides, I was wondering how it was done, and whether it is something I could Attempt?

ANSWER
Yes, it is possible. This is one of those techniques that look difficult but are comparatively easy. Do make sure you melt enough chocolate – any left over can always be re-melted. Measure the exact height and circumference of your cake, and make a template from baking parchment (or specialist non-stick sheeting). Place the template on larger sheet of greaseproof paper. Pour the melted chocolate onto the non-stick sheet and, using a palette knife, spread the chocolate evenly. Don't worry if it extends over the edges. Then wrap the sheet of non-stick material around the cake and leave until the chocolate is firm before peeling the paper away.
QUESTION
Have tried making Easter eggs, but they always break when I try to get them out of the mould.

ANSWER
It is often assumed that one layer of chocolate is enough when making Easter Eggs, but it is usually not strong enough, so once the first layer of chocolate is dry, apply a second. Once dry, spoon extra chocolate around the top edge to strengthen it. Leave for a day in a cool area before removing from the mould.

QUESTION
I am making a two tiered wedding cake for my daughter. How many pillars will I need to support the top cake?

ANSWER
This depends on the size of the cakes. Round cakes look better with just three pillars, two at the front, an equal distance apart, and one standing at the back, forming a triangular shape. On square cakes you can use either three pillars, positioned as above, or four pillars, set in a square.

QUESTION
I always get into difficulty when taping stamens for sugar flowers, and they invariably fall out. What is the secret formula.

ANSWER
If you buy stamens with stiff stalks, there is not need to tape them. Just moisten the centre of the flower and push the stamens into the paste. Depending upon the type of flower, you may find (to give a natural effect) the stamens need curving. Do this by stroking them over your forefinger. The easiest way to tape and wire fine stamens together is to take each stage separately. For instance – hold the stamens between forefinger and thumb and tie together with a narrow length of tape. Now take the wire and position it so that it lies alongside the stamens, but about 1cm (½ in) higher than the tape. Wrap the tape twice around both wire and stamens. Bend the extra wire down over the tape and secure it by giving an extra turn of tape. Using this method your stamens will always stay in place!

QUESTION
I know that dusting flowers gives them an added attraction, but I cannot seem to get the dust to stay on the flower.

ANSWER
One piece of small equipment which is a great asset to cake decorators is a good quality paint brush. These can be bought from art shops. Buy a brush which has a percentage of sable in it, and big enough to hold the dusting powder in its bristles. These can be quite expensive, depending on size, but they can also be used for: moving the petals of flowers when fingers are too big, painting designs
on cakes or plaques, and the wooden tip is useful for making patterns into paste, and last but
not least, a good quality brush is ideal for dusting powder
onto flowers. To do this pour a small amount of powder onto a flat surface, then press the flat
surface of the brush (not the point) into the powder, and load the brush with powder by gently
‘bouncing’ it up and down in the powder. And you will find the combination of using this method and
the right brush will achieve your aim.

**QUESTION**
I am a beginner at cake icing and wonder how many colours I should buy to start off.

**ANSWER**
Make sure you buy paste colours. These colours have at least three advantages over liquid colours.
First of all, they are much stronger, so deeper colours can be obtained. Secondly, as only a small amount of paste is needed, the colouring lasts longer, and finally, as the paste is thick it does not flood everywhere if knocked over. Buy only the three basic colours of red, blue and yellow to begin with. Adding a drop of water will make the colours lighter. Experiment with mixing them, you will find that many shades of green can be made by adding differing amounts of yellow to blue. And to make green even darker, add a touch of red. Mix a small amount of red with yellow to obtain peach – add more red to get orange. Pale blue with a touch of red will become mauve.

**QUESTION**
Wish to surprise my family by making some meringues. Read in a book about a 'Swiss' meringue. What is that?

**ANSWER**
Swiss meringue differs from other types of meringue by either being whipped over a saucepan of simmering water, or warming the sugar. The warmed sugar slightly cooks the egg whites and makes a firmer meringue. Make sure the equipment is grease free (egg whites will not whip if in contact with grease) by first pouring boiling water into the bowl and over the beaters. Beat the whites until they are stiff and white before gradually adding the sugar, a dessertspoon at a time.

**QUESTION**
When making sugarpaste drapes for the sides of a celebration cake, I could not stop them splitting. Why would this be?

**ANSWER**
Sugarpaste is too soft for drapes when used by itself. Mixing sugarpaste with one third of flowerpaste or Mexican Paste will make it firmer to use. Roll the paste out carefully – if too thin it will crack on the folds, too thick and it will not curve correctly. Look out for moulds on the market which can be used to model swags and drapes.
QUESTION
Having tried out a boiled fruit cake recipe, which I would like to make for a special celebration we are having soon, I was horrified to find it had gone mouldy, why would that be?

ANSWER
The reason your fruit cake went mouldy is because boiled fruit cakes (as well as carrot, banana, and apple cake) are extremely moist -which is one reason why they taste so good. As you want to make the cake for a special occasion don't make it too far ahead. Then, if any cake is left over, cut it into slices, freeze and eat as required.

QUESTION
Have tried making these pretty frills on the sides of cakes, but they always flop. Is it my technique, or the paste I use?

ANSWER
It could either be the technique or the paste. If the frills are too thick, the weight of the paste will hold them down. The paste needs to be firm so that it can be rolled out thinly. Make the proportions about two thirds sugarpaste to one third flowerpaste. When you thin the frill, make sure you thin all the edge of the paste. And finally, to make the frills stand away from the cake, tuck lengths of cling film carefully under the frill until it is dry. But don't forget to remove it!

QUESTION
Can you tell me what is meant by the instruction 'Make a Mexican hat' when making sugar flowers?

ANSWER
Knowing how to make a Mexican hat is a very useful skill, and can be used when making a variety of sugar flowers. First take a piece of flowerpaste about the size of a large pea. Roll between hands until smooth. Then, using the thumb and first finger, gently pinch around the paste to make a 'brim'. Now place the brim on a flat surface and, with a cocktail stick, thin until it is large enough to place a flower cutter over and cut out the flower shape. Thin the crown of the 'hat' to a point, and shape the petals to make them look realistic. Indent and dampen the centre of the flower. Make a hook at the end of a piece of floral wire and pull down through the middle of the flower. The hook will inbed itself into the paste, keeping the flower secure.
**QUESTION**  
When I try taping flowers together they always start swinging about, and it is very difficult to hold them in place?

**ANSWER**  
Do make sure you have a strong gauge wire to wire your flowers onto. Think of it as the backbone. When wiring different sized sugar flowers, keep garden flowers in mind. A delicate flower such as a snowdrop has a thin stalk, poppies have thicker stalks, and a flower with a large head, for instance, a rose, has a thick stalk. If you discover, when taping your flowers together, that they become uncontrollable, introduce another strong wire, taping it to the ‘backbone’ for added support.

**QUESTION**  
When I bake my cakes the paper I have lined the tins with always falls forward and stick to the cakes. How can I avoid this happening?

**ANSWER**  
It may be that you are not greasing your tins. If tins are lined with greaseproof paper they must be greased first, so that the paper sticks to the tin. Otherwise, as you have found, it will fall forward and stick to the top of the cake. Greasing the tin also ensures the paper is neatly tucked into the corners of a cake tin. And make sure the paper is only slightly higher than the tin.

**QUESTION**  
Stencils seem to be an easy way of cake decorating, but how are they made, are they painted on?

**ANSWER**  
Yes, stencils are a quick and easy way of decorating a cake. They can be painted on a cake or plaque, dusted on with edible dust and also sponged on. The last technique gives an interesting, speckled effect. Stencils can either be home-made, or bought at a specialist shop, where they are usually made of acetate, and sometimes of thin metal. Make sure the stencil is kept perfectly still when working, otherwise the colour will smudge, and when completed, peel away the stencil carefully.
QUESTION
Would like to try cocoa painting. Is it very difficult?

ANSWER
Cocoa painting is not too difficult. Find a clear picture to copy, preferably black and white, or have a coloured picture photocopied in black/white. Scribe the picture onto the plaque so that you have a faint impression to follow. The paint consists of cocoa butter (or white vegetable fat) and added cocoa. Melt the fat over gentle heat and then add the cocoa. The picture is painted onto a cake, or plaque, with a good quality paint brush. Mix the paint in varying shades. Begin with the lightest shades at the back of the picture, and gradually increase the intensity of the colour towards the front. Keep the paint container over a gentle heat, or it will begin to harden – however this depends on the time of year – and which country you live in!

QUESTION
Cannot ever get the top of my iced cakes level, have even tried using a spirit level, but I think it is something to do with my rolling out?

ANSWER
You may find that one of your arms in stronger than the other! It is usually the right arm, and this could result in your marzipan or paste not rolling out to an even thickness. Being aware that this can happen is a help. You could also buy 'spacers'. These plastic rods are positioned either side of the paste, with the rolling pin resting on top of them. This means that the the paste will only roll to the depth of the spacers. Alternatively you could make your own spacers from thin cardboard strips glued together.
RIBBONS
These have always been a wonderful gift to a decorator. They pick up a colour and add an eye-catching sheen to the matt surface of a cake. Ribbons can often replace time-consuming techniques. One suggestion is listed below.

Cakes nearly always need a border around the base to make them look finished. Placing a ribbon around the bottom of cake finishes it off and saves having to pipe a border. The ribbon can also help coordinate the general colour scheme. Sometimes a cake looks out of proportion. This can happen if a cake is too deep for its width. Disguise by wrapping a ribbon around the sides, which will effectively reduce the depth of the cake. Always use colourfast ribbon. If unsure, leave the ribbon in water for an hour or two. If the colour spreads when you handle the ribbon, it could do the same on your cake.

One frequently asked question is ‘How is a ribbon stuck around a cake. First wait until the icing is dry and measure the ribbon around the cake, allowing for a small overlap. If the cake is covered in royal icing (always keep a small amount in reserve) stick one end of the ribbon on the cake with a dab of stiff royal icing. Secure it with a pin (those with coloured heads are easier to see) and then wind the ribbon around the cake. Now dab icing on the other end of the ribbon, remove the pin, overlap the ribbon and replace the pin, which will be left in place until the icing is dry.

Ribbon around a sugarpasted cake can also be attached with royal icing. However, there is another way. Moisten a small area on the side of the cake and secure the ribbon with a pin. Wind the ribbon around the cake, and moisten the cake surface in front of the secured ribbon. Remove the pin, overlap the ribbon, and replace the pin. Leave until dry before removing the pin. Either of the above methods can be replaced with double-sided tape. And the same applies to ribbon around a cake board. Or use a glue stick. Ribbons with decorative edges make an attractive finish to a cake board when they stand slightly above the edge.

Bows can be difficult to tie on a round cake. Make the bow separately and stick it on. The corners of a square cake are ideal for pulling a bow tight. Once made, move the bow into the correct position.

Cut the tails of small bows diagonally. Large bows look better cut into an inverted V shape. Fold the ribbon in half. Begin at the bottom edge, opposite the fold, and make a diagonal cut. Making tiny bows from narrow ribbon is fiddly and takes some practise, try using tweezers – or buy the bows.

Floristry ribbon, torn into narrow strips, can be twirled into ringlets Do this by pulling strips of ribbon firmly over the blade of a knife or a pair of scissors.
Ribbon loops are often mixed into sprays of sugar flowers. They serve two purposes. First, they create a barrier between the fragile flowers, helping to prevent damage. And secondly, the shine on the ribbon makes a pleasing contrast to the matt surface of the flowers.

When time is short, green ribbon loops can be used instead of leaves with sugar flowers.

One common complaint made against ribbon loops is how often the ribbon and wire part company. This can be avoided by first securing the loops together with tape.

Now tape the loops 1cm (1/2") from the top of the wire. Turn the extra wire down over the tape and rewind.
RIBBON INSERTION
Gives a dainty look to a cake, and is especially suitable for a christening cake. The trend to keeping everything on a cake edible has led to ribbon insertion only being used on dummy cakes. However, the same effect can be achieved with long, thin strands of flowerpaste or stiffened sugarpaste, cut into small pieces and left to dry over a piece of dowelling. Once glazed with confectionery glaze they can be slotted into the surface of a cake or plaque.

Ribbon used for ribbon insertion must be firm. Floristry ribbon (tearing ribbon) works well. It can be torn into any width and slots well into a sugarpasted surface.

Cake decorating shops sell a tool containing a blade with a straight edge. This ensures all the cuts are the same width.
Using a pair of square-ended tweezers is another possibility. When held slightly apart they make two cuts at the same time.

As it is very easy for a line of ribbon insertion to waver, tie a ribbon, or a band of paper around the cake and use as a guide when making cuts.

Links:
Sugarpaste
**ROCK SUGAR**

Resembles pieces of rock and can be broken into any size, and is useful for novelty cakes or making a snow scene on a Christmas cake.

Boiling sugar and water to a high temperature makes rock sugar. Once reached the base of the saucepan is dipped into cold water to stop the liquid cooking. Then a small quantity of well-beaten royal icing is added. The intense heat of the liquid immediately cooks the egg whites in the icing, which froth and rise, making the solution into an aerated rock-like mass.

This can be broke into pieces and used for decoration.
ROYAL ICING
This name was given to this type of icing after being used on Queen Victoria's wedding cake in 1840.

Icing was used as long ago as the 16th century. Sugar (scraped from a block) would be finely ground, and mixed with lemon juice and water. The icing was then spread over the surface of a cake - with the help of a feather. The cake would then be placed in front of a 'great fire', to set the icing. There are various ways of making royal icing. But each one requires the utensils are free from grease.

Otherwise, the grease makes the egg whites difficult to beat. Royal icing is traditional made with egg whites; into which sifted icing sugar is gradually beaten. Depending on the size of the white, approximately 6-7 ounces sugar is needed to one white.

Dried egg white is convenient, as you are not left with a guilty complex at having to throw away surplus yolks! However, these could always be added to puddings, used as a glaze, beaten into mashed potatoes, or used to enrich the contents of a quiche.

No matter which method is used to make royal icing, it always needs lots of beating. If making icing by hand, use a wooden spoon, which will give more power to your beating. Keep one especially for this purpose, as wood often can become impregnated with cooking flavours.

Royal icing can be made in a mixer. But make sure to keep it on a low speed. If the speed is too fast, unwanted air will be created in the icing. However, using a mixer for small quantities of icing is more trouble than it's worth - the icing just sits in the base of the bowl. So there is no alternative, but to beat by hand. And the important word is beating (not stirring) the icing sugar in gradually. It can take approximately 150 beats to achieve the correct consistency. But take heart, a hand mixer can do some of the hard work. Royal icing can sometimes be over beaten in a large mixer, but if you beat the icing by hand, this can never happen.

Just like a bowl of sugar, royal icing can go lumpy, so while working with it, always keep the bowl covered with a damp cloth. Don't be surprised, if over an hour or so, the icing seems to be softer. It will have absorbed some moisture from the cloth.

Royal icing will not hold its shape indefinitely. Think of how beaten egg whites collapse, well the same thing happens icing. Armed with this fact, if icing does not create the right effect it probably just needs a few minutes beating.
When icing has been stored, always beat before using, this will strengthen it again.

Depending upon which type of decoration you are working on, the consistency of royal icing may need altering. This can be done with either egg white, or water. As icing sugar is so fine, and dissolves easily, even a small amount of liquid can make a difference. Often the tiny amount, which drops from the tip of a knife, is sufficient to alter the consistency. If you have time, try this experiment. Place a rounded teaspoon of granulated sugar, icing sugar and flour in three separate saucers. Add a teaspoonful of water to each, and watch the reaction. You will be amazed at how quickly the icing sugar disappears.

For the traditional layer of smooth icing make a consistency like beaten cream - not too stiff, but not sloppy.

Only apply about two or three palette knives of royal icing onto the top of a cake. Too much and it is difficult to manipulate. Push the icing backwards and forward with the ruler (known as a straight edge) in an action rather like the waves coming and going.

This will help to push any air from the icing and smooth it over the surface. Use a scraper to smooth the icing on the sides of the cake. Be aware that the little finger is often weaker than the others. This can lead to less pressure being applied to the base of the scraper, making the cake look like a sandcastle with sloping sides. The fingers should be splayed out across the width of the scraper, with equal pressure all over.
Whether using fresh whites, dried albumen, or the commercial icing sugar that contains dried whites, royal icing always requires a lot of beating - not stirring. Wooden spoons can become impregnated with grease if used for stirring sauces. As any grease will prevent egg whites from expanding properly, keep a wooden spoon specially for beating royal icing.

If over beating does occur. Place the icing in an airtight container, leave overnight and then beat again by hand.

Some recipes suggest adding glycerine to the icing. Glycerine attracts moisture from the atmosphere and so makes the icing softer. The difficulty is to know the right amount to use. One teaspoon to a pound of royal icing will make a little difference, but too much glycerine can make icing crumble. A good compromise is to ensure the layer of icing on the cake is not too thick, so that it will be easy to cut. Three very thin layers of icing are better than one thick one.

Lemon juice is another ingredient sometimes added to icing. This practice has come down through the years, from mother to daughter, from book to book.

It can impart a slight flavour to the icing. In the past, its main contribution was to strengthen weak egg whites.

Years ago eggs could be weeks old before they were used, so the acid in the lemon would jerk some life into the whites (which unless fresh wouldn’t aerate properly) but they still would not be as perky as new eggs. These days, with eggs being date stamped, we don't need to worry. And such a thing as a 'bad egg' is never heard of!

You may see recipes for royal icing which say: 'separate the eggs the day before using' If you wonder why, this is because a percentage if the egg white will evaporate when exposed to air - making it stronger.
If the consistency of the icing is too thin, beat it well before adding extra icing sugar. The beating may well do the trick, whereas adding more icing sugar can result in a heavy icing - which is difficult to work with.

Piped scrolls, stars and shells require firm icing, known in the trade as 'holding a peak'. Test this by dipping a knife into the icing. Hold the knife up. If the icing stands in a peak, it is the correct consistency.

Adjust the piping consistency according to the tube in use. The finer the tube the thinner the icing must be.

Links:

Albumen
RUNOUTS (COLOUR FLOW)
This is one of the most useful aspects of cake decoration. A wide variety of designs can be made by this method. These include letters, numbers, heraldic plaques, figures, collars, flowers, and much more.

The technique is not difficult, providing, as always, certain rules are followed. Either fresh egg whites, or dried albumen powder, can be used to make the royal icing, which should be well beaten. It is possible to buy a powder especially formulated for making runouts.

When making royal icing by machine, keep the speed low, or the icing will be full of bubbles. Aim to make it a day or two before needed. If fresh icing is used, no matter how carefully made, air bubbles can still be lurking around. By leaving the icing to settle, it helps to eliminate any excess air.

When piping runouts make sure the icing does not contain glycerine, as it attracts moisture from the air. This means the runouts would difficult, if not impossible, to dry. If despite all your efforts your runouts still won't dry, it could be (particularly if dark colours are being used) that the colouring contains glycerine; preventing the icing from setting.

Making runouts requires icing of two different consistencies. The stiffer icing acts as a barrier to the softer icing that is flooded inside the outline. Adjust stiff icing with egg white or a few drops of water. It should be sufficiently fluid to flood smoothly. Test before using by dropping a spoonful into a bowl of softened icing. Think how a raindrop leaves a mark on a puddle for a moment, and then the surface of the water becomes smooth again. This is what the icing should do.

Before placing the icing in a bag, gently bang the base of the bowl a few times. This helps to bring bubbles to the surface that can then be broken with the blade of a knife.

Waxed paper is an obvious choice for runouts on, but there are also other alternatives. Teflon-coated paper will last for years. This type of paper does not crease. It will lie completely flat – an important point when making runouts. Baking parchment is ideal for small runouts, but tends to buckle if used for large pieces of work. Butchers wrap and cellophane are suitable, but discard any with creases.

Never use greaseproof paper, the runouts stick to it. Only cut the paper slightly larger than the drawing, otherwise it can become dislodged and disturb the runout before it dries.
If possible, make runouts on glass, or Perspex, as they both attract warmth from the atmosphere.

The piped outline must be perfect, without breaks; otherwise, the soft-flooded icing will escape. Use a fine, damp paintbrush to eliminate any points of icing that may be sticking up.

When making several runouts of the same design (say for the four sides of a square cake) only one picture is required. By carefully removing the pattern once the outline is piped, it can be used again.

Runouts should be flooded with soft icing immediately the outline has been piped otherwise it could break. So have the soft icing ready in a piping bag. But wait until ready for flooding before cutting a small hole in the end of the bag.

As the icing begins to flood into the runout, work with the tip of the bag below the surface of the flooded icing and keep pressing the icing out. This action helps to break any air bubbles, and directs the icing into narrow sections. Air bubbles, if trapped inside the icing, leave holes, which will weaken the runout. Newcomers to runouts often imagine the soft icing will flood over the outline. This very rarely happens, however, like a burst in the wall of a dam, if the outline is broken, the icing will leak through.

When the outline is narrow (such as for a capital I) make sure the icing floods the whole area, as sometimes it looks as if it has, but may only be resting on the piped outline – and breaks when moved. A thin, flat runout will not be very strong. If sufficient soft icing is flooded in to give a rounded appearance to the top of the runout, it will make it stronger.

The quicker the icing dries, the more successful the runout, so try to get the icing the correct consistency before starting. However, if after all your effects the icing does not lie smoothly, the following technique may help. Slide a knife under the paper, moving the blade gently from side to side. Often this small amount of movement is sufficient to level the icing. Another trick is to shake the base on which the runout lies.

Once the runout is finished, raise the base on small blocks. This allows air to pass under, quickening the drying time. A warm airing cupboard is ideal for drying. Focusing a desk lamp, with a flexible arm, about 15cm (6”) away from the runout, will dry the surface quickly and give it a glossy surface.

Make curved runouts for a round cake on the tin the cake was baked in. Position a desk lamp over the icing to dry it quickly.

Place the tin – on its side – so that it doesn’t move. Make the runout on a flat surface. The flooding icing should be as thick as possible, but still lie flat. Once the runout is flooded, secure it to the tin and immediately direct the heat of the lamp over it.
Don’t expect large runouts to dry quickly. Much depends on the temperature of the room and the consistency of the icing. It is possible to make a runout in the morning and use it in the evening. But the old saying ‘it’s better to be safe than sorry’ is a good piece of advice. Try to leave them at least two days to dry.

Once their confidence has grown, many decorators make runouts straight on the cake, which saves the worry of any breaking. Runout collars, which surround the top edge of a cake, need flooding quickly, so they are best made by an experienced decorator.

A completely circular collar, which makes a cake look bigger, requires a lot of soft icing to flood it. It is better to make too much, rather than too little royal icing. Have a second large bag of icing ready in case you need it.
If a large, round collar is flooded in one direction only, the start may begin to dry before the complete circle is flooded. So begin by flooding the collar in one direction, say for 10cm (4"), go back to the start and work in the opposite direction until the whole collar is flooded.

As a large runout dries, the paper beneath it can shrink, distorting the icing. Prevent this happening by making a slit in the centre of the paper immediately the runout is flooded.

It is less complicated to make four separate collars, than one large one, as they are easier to make and handle.

As the separate collars will always be slightly larger than the pattern, allow for this when planning. It is better to leave small spaces between the collars, and then fill them with small decorations, such as flowers – than to discover the collars will not fit around the cake.

Runouts with insertions (lace, flowers, trellis) can be made in three different ways. One method is to make the runout first. Once it has dried, remove it from the template. Now pipe the lace inserts, with the piping coming slightly over the edge of the pattern. Immediately the inserts are piped, place the runout in position on top of them.

The second technique is to pipe the inserts first, again slightly bigger than the pattern. Then pipe the runout over the inserts, working on one section at a time, otherwise the icing would dry too quickly. Yet another way is to place the dried runout upside down on non-stick paper and pipe the insertion into the open space, making sure it is well secured at the edges. The insertion will be slightly curved when it is dry.

Some cakes are designed with runouts on the boards. The simplest way to do this is to make the runout once the cake is in position. There is a method of making a circular runout separately and lowering it down over the cake, onto the board. But unless the cake and runout are of equal size, the idea could be a complete disaster.
Collars are vulnerable creatures and to save them being knocked, cake boards should be at least 10cm (4") larger than the size of the cake.

Three-dimensional runouts are not difficult to make. Figures are popular. Use separate bags of soft coloured icing for flooding, or flood in white and paint the colour on once the runout is dry.

To make a figure look lifelike, parts of the body are flooded separately. This method keeps the sections distinct from each other. Each section must be crusted over (dry on the surface) before the adjacent part is flooded. This will not take long if a desk lamp is used.

Upstanding runouts, such as a swan, should be smooth on both sides. It is sometimes suggested to do this by sticking two runouts together, but there is a better way, which gives a smoother edge. Make one runout, let it dry and turn it over. Pipe a line of icing around the edge and flood in. The result is a smooth runout with identical sides.

Decorators often pipe runout letters to give impact on large cakes. Naturally, they take longer than piping directly on the surface of the cake, but the sheen of the runout is an added attraction.

Links:

Royal Icing | Glycerine
SMOCKING
Is yet another embroidery technique now used by cake decorators. A kit can be purchased which contains a ridged roller and tweezers.

As an alternative to a ridged roller, cocktail sticks can be used to make grooves. But this is a fiddly method and is only possible when the smocking pattern is smaller than the length of the sticks.

Use stiffened sugarpaste for the panels. Add 1/2tsp gum tragacanth to 500g (1 lb) paste, and leave to rest for 2 hours. Once the grooves are marked in the paste, scratch fine lines across the paste where the smocking design will lie. These lines will be covered later, but they help to keep the pattern level.

Set the pattern with tweezers and secure the first panel to the cake. When a cake is surrounded with a continuous band of smocking, mark the remaining panels with tweezers when they are on the cake.

Then the pattern can be neatly aligned. Make sure the last panel placed on the cake matches up to the first panel by counting the number of ridges it has, they must be an even number.

When the tweezers are in continual use they become sticky and can dislodged the paste. To prevent this happening, either wash and dry them occasionally, or keep dipping them in icing sugar.

Keep the lines of pinching close together - or it could prove difficult to connect them together with icing.

Use a fine, damp paintbrush to dab down any points of royal icing.

Take heart if you are not adept at piping fine lines. Grooving and pinching the ridges of paste together form a pleasing pattern – without using piping skills.

Links:

Sugarpaste | Royal Icing | Gum Tragacanth
STAMENS

There are many different types of stamens on the market, or you can make your own. Fine micro-
stamens are realistic when used in dainty flowers.

Trying to handle stamens, wire and tape at the
same time can be difficult. If you secure the
stamens to the tape first, and then add the wire,
the task is not so tedious.

Nothing is more annoying than when wire and
stamens part when being pulled through a
flower.

Prevent this happening by taping the stamens 1
(1/2") from the tip of the wire. Once the stame
are secure, fold the extra wire down over the
tape, and re-tape.

Matt white stamens are a good buy. They can be
dipped into food colouring and used for different
varieties of flowers.

To give stamens a lifelike look, always curve the threads over a finger before using.

Most stamens are taped to wires before use. However, stamens with stiff threads can be
pushed straight into a flower while the paste is still soft.

Soft threads on stamens can be stiffened by dipping them into confectionery glaze.

Black or yellow cotton can be made into authentic looking stamens.
An easy way of achieving the look of stamens (without actually making them) is to press a small ball
of sugarpaste – or flowerpaste – onto a piece of net. This will make an impression on the paste, which
can then be stuck into the centre of a flower. A nylon sieve can also be used to make an impression.

Centres for daisy-like flowers can be made by piping bulbs of royal icing onto non-stick paper.
Sprinkle coloured caster sugar over the bulbs and immediately pick the paper up, allowing the
excess sugar to drop off – the bulbs will stay in place if this is done quickly.
STENCILS
This technique is one of the quickest and easiest methods of applying lettering, or a design onto the surface of a cake or plaque.

As most of you will know, one of the simplest forms of stencilling is to place a doily on to a cake, then use a fine sieve to sprinkle icing sugar through the doily.

It sounds simple, but like everything else to do with cake decorating, there’s a knack to it. And this one is to make sure the icing sugar is evenly sprinkled not a thin dusting in one place and a thick cloud in another.
If the cake is iced in a colour, say blue, the white icing sugar shows up well. Another alternative is to cut paper into strips about 2.5cm (1”) wide. Lay them on the cake, leaving spaces between of the same width, and sprinkle with icing sugar.

When a second set of strips is laid, in the opposite direction, over the first set, squares will be formed.

Royal icing, buttercream, food colours and edible dusts can all be used for stencilling. And as long as the pattern is not too finely cut, piping gel can even be used with a stencil.

Using a cranked palette knife makes stencilling easier.

Those of you who have stencilled furniture and walls, will already know that a stencil must be kept perfectly still until the colouring process is complete – otherwise the design will blur.

Stencils can be made from oiled parchment – obtainable from an art shop – or acetate. A steady hand is needed, plus a pattern, a sharp craft knife and a smooth, firm working surface. Cutting mats, the type used by dressmakers for cutting material on, are suitable.

A pencil will not mark acetate, so use a waterproof pen instead.
Any small mistakes made while cutting a stencil can be repaired with masking tape.
Knowing where to place the ‘ties’ on a stencil is important. Unless the ties (like tiny bridges) are in the right place, the design can fall apart. Mend any accidental cuts with a small piece of masking tape.

One quick way of making a flower stencil is by cutting rows of petal-shaped stencils. Each petal should be slightly pointed at the base, and about 2cm (3/4”) high. Place the stencil on acetate or waxed paper and smooth royal icing over the stencils.

When dry pipe bulbs of royal icing and position five petals into each bulb. Making your own stencils is creative, but time-consuming. There are a wide variety of plastic and stainless steel stencils for sale, and many shops send goods by mail-order.

Before repeating a design always wash and dry the stencil, otherwise the pattern could blur.

A stencil can also be used to make a design in flower or Mexican paste. This type of stencil has a lot of impact, as it can be raised from the surface of a cake or curved around its sides.

The paste is rolled out very thinly and then reversed and the stencil pressed into the paste. If you wonder why the paste is reversed, it is because the base of the paste will be softer than the top surface – making it easier to make an impression.

After the stencil has been pressed in the paste, coloured dusts are applied. Inevitably, some of the colours will overlap others, but this creates a ‘watercolour’ effect that can enhance the design.

Once the stencil is peeled away any excess paste must be immediately cut away (leaving a narrow margin around the edge) or the paste will begin to crack.

**LINKS:**

Royal Icing | Buttercream
SUGARPASTE
This type of paste has been in use for hundreds of years. In the past the name was used to describe a stiffer type of paste, used mainly for making models. Even as long ago as the 1700s, royal confectioners were pressing a type of sugarpaste into intricately carved wooden moulds. The resulting models would be made into fantastic displays - a feast for royal eyes.

However, now that the use of sugarpaste is so widespread, confusion arises over the various names it is given – which can make newcomers to cake decorating very confused.

Some of the bewildering numbers of names include satin icing, plastic icing, rollout icing, mallow paste, gelatine icing, fondant icing and rolled fondant. And even more confusing, the name ‘fondant’ applies to another type of icing; which is also white and firm, but is used by being melted and poured over cakes. Sugarpaste makes an ideal cake covering. Before being so widely available, it was made at home. But as the commercial variety works so well, making your own sugarpaste does not really warrant the effort.

Colour should be kneaded into sugarpaste. When colouring the paste into a delicate shade, add colour gradually by applying it with a cocktail stick. Knead the paste on a working surface. Check the colour is evenly applied by cutting the paste in half, and then you will soon see any streaks of unblended colour.

Many shops now sell sugarpaste in bright colours. Rolling out on icing sugar (or corn flour) can leave marks on the highly coloured sugarpaste. Instead, smear the working surface with white fat and roll out on this.

Sugarpaste is relatively simple to apply, provided certain rules are followed. Among the different techniques, sugarpaste can be used for are bas relief, modelling, Garrett frills, flowers, smocking, marquetry and drapes. And no doubt many sugarcrafters are constantly inventing new ways of using this paste.

When covering a cake remember to measure it before applying the paste. There is nothing worse than applying the paste, only to find it doesn’t cover the cake. Use a piece of string to measure up one side of the cake, across the top and down the other side, and then allow a little extra. A square or hexagonal cake should be measured diagonally, from one corner to the opposite corner.

The cake needs coating with a ‘glue’ to get the paste to stick. Melted jam is often used, but it tends to soak into the cake, whereas buttercream gives a smooth coating, which fills in any holes or cracks. Do make sure this coating is applied right to the base of the cake – or the sugarpaste will have nothing to stick to.
When a cake is already coated with marzipan, brush with a thin layer of cooled, boiled water, or alcohol. Sherry, found in many cupboards, tends to be the favourite for this purpose.

If possible, use a long rolling pin. Shorter pins leave marks on the paste. Knead the paste until smooth and depending on the shape of the cake, make it into a round or square.

Roll out the sugarpaste on sifted icing sugar. Cornflour, although finer, tends to dry the paste, particularly if it is repeatedly rolled. When rolling, keep moving the paste slightly. This is to make sure it is not sticking to the working surface. Roll the paste about 5mm (1/4") thick. Remember if it is too thick it will not mould easily into the sides of the cake. It could also be too sweet for the taste of many people. On the other hand, if too thin it will be difficult to lift and will not cover the cake well.

If the paste is being made to fit a round cake, give it a quarter turn after every few rolls, this will help to keep the paste round. And never turn it over. The top surface is always the smoothest, and the paste could distort as it is being handled.
When ready for coating, position the cake immediately in front of you. Then you won’t need to stretch. Support the pastry on the rolling pin – if you are happy with this technique, which is how pastry is often lifted – and before slowly lowering the sugarpaste over the cake, make sure it is touching the board at the front.

Another way of covering the cake is by carefully placing your hands (palms down) under the paste, taking the weight of the paste on the back of your hands. Then, starting at the back of the cake, gently slide the paste from your hands.

Mould the paste into the sides of the cake, not by pressing down from the top, but by using the palm of your hand in a gentle curve, to ‘cup’ the paste. This technique should prevent the paste cracking along the top edge of the cake. If there seems too much paste to fit into the sides of the cake, don’t allow it to overlap. Instead flare the excess away from the cake and then gently mould it to the sides.

Once you are sure the paste is firmly in place, cut away the surplus.

On a square cake ‘cup’ the paste on the corners first, and then into the sides. No matter how carefully applied, cracks will sometimes appear in the paste.

These can often be eliminated just by rubbing the cracked area with the palm of the hand. Another way is to leave the sugarpaste to dry for a day or two, then using a small amount of paste, softened with water, fill in the cracks – just like a bit of home decorating!

Bubbles sometimes appear on a recently sugarpasted surface. These are caused by trapped air. Hold a sterilized needle at an angle to prick them and then give the hole a gentle rub.

One easy way to design in sugarpaste is the ‘tablecloth effect’. This is when the sugarpaste covers the top of the cake and hangs a short way down the sides. If a wide band of ribbon is wrapped around the sides of the cake before the sugarpasted is apply, the design can be made quite quickly.

Sugarpaste can be made to shine by rubbing it carefully with a warm hand. But, otherwise, try to keep your hands (especially fingers) away from the soft sugarpaste. One way of preventing marks is to use an indispensable tool, known as a smoother. As its name implies, it is used to make a sugarpaste coating perfect. In fact, two smoothers are even better; one can be used to hold a cake steady, while the other is used to smooth the icing.
Drapes that imitate fabric are popular on cakes. Made of sugarpaste, the drapes must be given extra strength so they will fold easily. Do this by adding one quarter of flowerpaste to three-quarters of sugarpaste. Patterns can be applied be using a sponge to lightly dab the paste (before it is attached to the cake) with colour. Now sift a layer of icing sugar over the design carefully brushing it in. Remove the excess icing sugar and position the drape on the cake.

Crimpers are often used on sugarpasted cakes. They make a quick, attractive decoration, and are mainly used around the top edge of a cake. However, once a cake is crimped, it is impossible to eliminate any mistakes, so it is a good idea, when crimping a side design, to use a template to guide you.

Practise with crimpers on a sausage of sugarpaste before attempting to work on a cake. Some crimpers have more spring than others do. By the way, the little rubber band around some types is there to prevent the crimper springing out of control.

To prevent the crimpers tearing the paste, hold them slightly apart, and then push into the paste and gently squeeze until the paste is marked. Now release the pressure on the crimpers – not to the full width, which would tear the paste – but just a little, and remove them from the paste.

When crimping around the top of a cake it is possible end up with an uneven join.

To prevent this happening, crimp a few inches one way, then crimp in the other direction another few inches. As the gap between the start and finish closes, it is easy to judge the level of crimping.

Instead of crimping the paste on a cake, making a separate, crimped edging gives more impact. Roll out the sugarpaste to about 5mm (1/4") thick and cut into thin strips. Stick around the top edge of the cake with cooled, boiled water and then crimp. Whenever possible, leave a sugarpasted cake a few days to dry before decorating with royal icing.

Sugarpaste can be used for piping a delicate border. Soften the paste with a few drops of water until a piping consistency.

Piped sugarpaste shells, can be made with grooves in, like royal iced shells. Add water as above then cover the tip of a teaspoon handle with gum tragacanth and mix this powder into 25g (1oz) of sugarpaste. Leave for about 40 minutes to allow the gum to swell before using.
Before storing left over sugarpaste, knead it into a ball. Then there is less surface area to dry out.

Wrap tightly in cling film, and then in a freezer bag or airtight container. By the way, it can be frozen for future use. Or if the paste is going to be used within a few weeks, store in a cool place.

If you ever find sugarpaste that has crusted over on the outside, cut this part off with a sharp knife. You will probably find the inside is still useable.

Watch out for water marking a sugarpaste (or royal iced) surface. Even a tiny drop can melt the surface, leaving a hole. One of the chief culprits is running water. Many of us decorate cakes in the kitchen and spray from a tap can travel some distance.

Believe it or not, we create another source of moisture when we speak. So we need to stop talking while decorating – or wear a mask!
TEMPLATE
Can be made in all sorts of designs, and are usually cut from greaseproof paper. However, templates made from cartridge paper, or thin card, will not crease and can be stored for another time. Marking the templates with the size of the cake saves time in future.

Always measure for a template after, and not before, a cake has been iced. Otherwise the pattern may not be the right size.

When making a template for the top of a cake, leave sufficient room for a piped border. It can be difficult to remove a top template when a pattern has been piped around it. Prevent this happening by cutting a cross in the centre of the template, then curl back the paper – and you have a tab to lift up the template. Making an accurate template to go around the sides of a cake can take time. Instead of trying to make the ends of the paper meet accurately, overlap the paper. Then make a mark where it overlaps and cut through both pieces of paper together.

An eight-pointed star template for Christmas cake can be made by the following method. Make a circle of paper the same size as the cake. Fold the paper into half and then quarters. Fold in half again and yet again. By this time, there should be 16 layers of paper. Depending on the size of the cake, measure and make a mark 2.5cm (1") from the top of the open edge side of the paper. Now make a diagonal cut from this mark to the top of the folded edge.

Make a six-pointed star by folding the paper in half and then into three equal portions, making six layers of paper. Fold in half again and mark the paper as above. By folding the paper in this way, and cutting the top edge in varied patterns, such as curves, points and semi-circles, a variety of designs can be made.

Another method of making a six-pointed star is with two triangles. For a 20cm (8") cake cut two 12cm (4.1/2") squares of paper. Fold each in half and make a diagonal cut from the outside corner to the top of the fold. Reverse one triangle and place it slightly below the tip of the first, and you have a star.

Once a template is positioned on an iced cake, the outline can be piped or scratched onto the surface. When decorating a tiered wedding cake, try the template and pillars in position before beginning, as the template may need adjusting.

LINKS:

Christmas Cakes | Wedding Cakes
TUBES - ALSO KNOWN AS NOZZLES, TIPS AND PIPES

It is worth buying the best quality; they will last a lifetime, and are tapered to fit neatly into the point of the bag.

Beware of tubes with overlapping joins; these may cause the icing to twist as it emerges. Tubes with screw threads are too wide to sit comfortably in a paper bag.

Discard any tubes which do not fit smoothly into the bag; the icing will ooze through the gap and onto your hand. Tubes can be cleaned in two ways either with a small brush, made especially for this purpose.

Or left overnight in water, by which time the icing will have miraculously melted away. Just a cautionary note to watch out for - sometimes, an extremely fine tube will seem clear, but can be blocked by a tiny drop of sugar/water that has hardened in the tip.

Rather like clothes sizes, the numbers on tubes are not consistent. This can be confusing; for instance, a number two made by one manufacturer can be a different size to another make.

A tube with a small, round hole is usually called a writing tube. They are used for lettering, lines, dots and loops.

The 1.5 size tube is popular for fine work, but not too fine to make it difficult to work with. Some shops sell petal tubes especially made for left-handed decorators, many of whom find difficulty in piping flowers.
WEDDING CAKE INSTRUCTIONS

EQUIPMENT

- 13” (32cm) cake board
- Spare cake board
- Bell mould
- Small blossom cutter
- Crimpers – with double scallop
- Paste colours – Gooseberry, Mulberry, and Grape Violet
- Long and small rolling pins
- Rose leaf cutter
- Leaf veiner
- Sugarpaste smoother
- Three Dowelling rods
- Ribbon
- Pastry brush
- Small freezer bag
- Piping bag
- No 2 piping nozzle

MATERIALS

10” (25cm) round rich fruit cake
5” (13cm) round rich fruit cake
2lb 8oz Marzipan) These weights are approximate, depending on depth
4lb 8oz Sugarpaste of cakes and how thick or thin the pastes are rolled.
Clear alcohol (vodka, gin etc) or cooled boiled water
Apricot Glaze
200g Flowerpaste
Icing sugar (for rolling out) Instant mix Royal Icing
METHOD

Bell
Knead 2oz (50g) of sugarpaste until smooth, and roll between palms of hands into a fat sausage, the same length as the bell.

Dust the interior of the mould with icing sugar. Push one end of the paste into the bell, and press into the centre of the paste with your thumb. Continue until the paste takes on the shape of the bell. While at the same time (to prevent the paste sticking), keep removing the paste, re-dusting the bell and replacing paste Repeat until the bell is hollowed out to half its depth. Trim the top edge and use the crimpers to make a decorative edging. Leave to dry upright in an eggcup lined with plastic for three days.

The Cake
Cover the cake board with sugarpaste, trim the edge and use crimpers to make a decorative edge. Leave to dry for 24 hours.

If the cakes are not flat, level with a long knife, then upturn and use the base of the cake as the top surface. Place the large cake on spare cake board and brush with apricot glaze. Roll out marzipan (spacers placed either side of the marzipan will ensure it is rolled to an equal depth) and apply, using method described in section on Sugarpaste. Leave to dry for one day. Repeat with the smaller cake.

Brush a thin layer of clear alcohol over the surface of the marzipan and cover with sugarpaste. Apply a cake smoother to the surface, or polish with the palm of your hand. Try to keep fingers away from the surface – if need be, wear a pair of thin rubber gloves. Leave cakes to firm for one day. Place the larger cake towards the back of the sugarpasted board.

Place the thin cake board towards the back of the large cake and carefully mark the position. While the sugarpaste is still soft, position the three dowels within the marked area at an equal distance to each other. See section on Pillars and Stands. Place the small cake (on thin board) towards the back of the large cake. Wrap the ribbon around the base of the cakes and secure at the back with stiff royal icing.
Making Roses, Leaves and Drape
Knead the flowerpaste into 1 lb (450g) sugarpaste until well blended. Tie tightly in a freezer bag and leave 24 hours.

Roses
Make some buds and two different sizes of rose, using the method described in Flowers-Marzipan. You may find it helpful, if your hands are warm, to press out the petals inside a freezer bag.

Leaves
Colour some of the paste green. Roll out thinly and cut out leaf shapes, some smaller than others. Mark the veins, and leave to dry on crumpled foil. Curl some of the leaves so that they dry in interesting shapes. If necessary, paint the leaves a deeper colour when dry by diluting a small amount of paste in a drop or two of water.

Cutter flowers
Colour a small amount of paste with Grape Violet colour. Roll out thinly and cut out small blossom flowers. These can be curved, either by using a plunger cutter, or by placing on a sponge (or clean, folded tea towel) and using the end of a paintbrush to push the centre gently in.

Drape
Position the bell towards the back of the small cake with a large dab of royal icing and leave to dry. Take a measurement for the drape from inside the bell, down both cakes and onto the cake board.

Roll out the paste very thinly (this will allow it to flow naturally) and cut so that it narrows towards the top. Place a large dab of royal icing inside the bell and arrange the drape to flow out, and down the cakes.
Try not to handle more than necessary. Use the handle of a metal dessertspoon to fold under the side edges of the drape. Leave until firm.

Decorating the cake
Before sticking the roses on the cake place them in position. Position some of them to point in different directions. This can be done be slicing an angled section from the base. When satisfied with the design, secure with royal icing, tuck leaves amongst the flowers, and scatter the tiny flowers around.
WEDDING CAKE - WITH BRIDGE

MATERIALS
15cm, 20cm, 25cm (6", 8", 10") Round Rich Fruit Cakes
2.25kg (5lb) Marzipan ) Exact amount depends on depth of
3kg (6½lb) White Sugar Paste) cakes and thickness paste is rolled out
Pkt White Flower Paste
Three pkts Nasturtium Flower Paste
Red Scintillo Piping Sparkles (Squires Kitchen) or Piping Gel
Yellow Colouring
Jar Apricot Jam
Instant mix Royal Icing
Alcohol - sherry, gin etc (or cooled, boiled water) Icing Sugar

EQUIPMENT
18cm, 23cm, 33cm (7", 9", 13") cake drums
13cm, 18cm (5" and 7") cake drums
4m White ribbon for around boards
2m Gold ribbon
2m Narrow ribbon (same shade as flowers, or dye white ribbon
by adding yellow/red colouring to a little water
Good quality Paint Brush Small
Star Piping Nozzle Flower cutters in two sizes
Large calyx cutter
Long and small rolling pin
Large Ball tool Sugarpaste
Smooother Pastry Brush
Metal sieve
Non-toxic glue stick

METHOD

BRIDGE
Roll white Flowerpaste to 5mm (¼”) and using template, cut out two sections of the bridge with a sharp knife. Note: The roadway over bridge will be made later. Use the end of the piping nozzle to cut out the design on top edge of the bridge. Leave to dry, preferably on piece of glass, in a warm area. Turn the pieces over after 2 days and leave a further 2 days to dry out.

Spread a thin layer of ROYAL ICING (See Royal Icing section in website) over one section of the bridge and immediately begin to stipple by placing the back of a knife on the icing and moving it gently up and down. Once dry lay one piece of the bridge on working surface. Cut out the roadway and immediately piping a thick line of stiff royal icing down both sides. Curve the piece (while still soft) and stick one side onto the bridge, lining up the edge of the road with the outside corner of the bridge. Place the second side of the bridge on top and support until dry.

Attach white ribbon to the sides of the five cake drums with non-toxic glue stick.

Position each cake towards the back of the corresponding cake board. These are 18cm; 23cm and 33cm. apply a layer of apricot glaze to the cakes, followed by the marzipan - using the method described in the SUGARPASTE section on the website. Leave to dry for at least a day then brush with a thin layer of alcohol and cover with Sugarpaste. Leave until paste is firm.

Cover the cake boards by rolling out sugar paste, and cutting a long strip. Moisten the cake board lightly with water. Lay paste on the boards, cutting away any surplus. Once dry place gold ribbon around the cakes, making sure the joins are at the back and then position the narrow ribbon over it.

FLOWERS
Make moulds for the flowers by cutting 9cm (3½”) squares of foil. Fold into four. Unfold and cut along one fold mark, then overlap the foil to create a bowl shape

The flowers on the bridge are made with a calyx cutter and stuck in position while still soft.
Roll out Nasturtium Flower Paste thinly and cut out flower. Use the ball tool to thin the edges and place in foil mould. To give the flower a lifelike appearance, use a soft paintbrush to curl some of the petals.

Once the flowers are dry, make stamens by pushing a small ball of yellow Flower paste through the metal sieve to create strands. Moisten the centre of the flower with either Edible Glue - or make glue from a small knob of Flowerpaste and a few drops of water. Carefully slice the strands away from the sieve with a sharp knife and place in the centre of the flower.

Brush each flower with a thin layer of red ‘Scintillo’ or alternatively, piping gel. Leave in a warm area to dry.

**DECORATING THE CAKE**

Pipe a line of stiff royal icing along the bottom edges of the Bridge and place in position, leaving until completely dry before moving the cake. Then place the 15cm (6) cake board on top of 20cm (8") cake and 18cm (7") board on surface of large cake. Position the three cakes on top of each other.

Starting from the top with the smaller flowers, stick them in position with stiff royal icing. Try to make the cascade of flowers look continuous - even though there are two gaps. But make sure the petals do not go below the bottom edge of the boards.
WRITING ON CAKES

Is one of the most important aspects of cake decoration, giving a personal touch to a cake. Lettering can really be called the finishing touch. It either enhances or detracts from the look of a cake. And yet many decorators don’t get much practice. Apart from birthday cakes, there are not many opportunities for writing in icing. Yet there may come a time...so here goes. Commercial cutters can be used to cut letters from marzipan or sugarpaste. Such letters are useful for giving impact, and are suitable for a child's cake. Both these pastes have a tendency to stick (particularly marzipan) in the cutters. To prevent this, dip the cutter into icing sugar before cutting each letter.

Texturing gives cut out letters an interesting surface. Shading also creates added interest. Dust each letter before placing it on the cake. Apply the deepest tone at the base, and gradually lighten towards the top of the letter. Stencilling is quick technique for writing on cakes. Embossed lettering is yet another alternative.

Icing pens, containing edible colours, can be used to write on the dry surface of a cake, but need using with extreme care, especially if the colour is strong. Writing on a plaque rather than the surface of a cake, makes more sense, and a raised plaque will add interest to the design.

Try making a scroll from Once dry, write the greeting on the surface. Old English lettering would be ideal. Lowerpaste.

Spacing is important with lettering. Look around at commercial cakes and lettering in magazines and newspapers. Each letter is extremely close to the next - making them easier for the brain to read! Even the space between words should only be the size of the letter 0.

It is natural to want to place 'Happy Birthday' in the centre of a cake. But centralising can lead to trouble, especially if you have a long word like ‘Congratulations’, which contains 15 letters. One trick of the trade is to start writing on the left side of the cake. This technique saves time and also the worry of running out of space.
If you do wish to place a name in the centre of a cake, first count the number of letters it contains. An odd number makes the process easier. Let’s take the name Peter. Position ‘T’ in the centre of the cake, and place two letters on either side of it.

A name with an equal number of letters should be balanced either side of a central point. However, be aware of names or words which have a number of straight letters, such as ‘i’, ‘l’ and ‘t’ as these take up less room than letters such as ‘s’, ‘w’ and ‘p’. Write out any long words or difficult names and copy them when writing on a cake. With so much to concentrate on, it’s easy to miss letters out!

When a line of lettering is being piped, there is a tendency for it to stray upwards. This doesn’t only apply to cake decorators. Lettering on many handwritten posters often rises towards the end of a line.

Being aware of this tendency helps, as does placing a thin card across the cake to give the correct angle. If the greeting doesn’t have ‘tails’ the card can be placed immediately below the lettering. Another way to combat this inclination when writing a long phrase such as ‘Christmas Greetings’ is to stagger the second word, slightly below the first, i.e. ‘Christmas Greetings’.

Piping a name or greeting around the curved edge of a round cake highlights its shape. To ensure the lettering is accurate, make a template the size of the cake. Draw 2 circles - the first 2.5cm 1” from the edge of the paper, the second 5cm 2” from the edge. Fold the paper in half and crease. Now count the letters in the inscription, and divide the number in half. For instance Happy Birthday contains 13 letters, but the space between the two words also counts as a letter, so 14 spaces are required seven each side of the crease. This will result in HAPPY B on the left of the crease, and IRTHDAY on the right side. Cut away the marked area of the paper and practice piping within this space before attempting the lettering on a cake.

Pin pricking a greeting through paper onto a cake surface can result in a mass of tiny holes, which are difficult to follow. And unless the piping covers all the holes, they become eye-catching. So the best way is to practise piping freehand.

Pipe lettering on the surface of a cake before adding the top border. This makes it easier to pipe, and also prevents your hand damaging any work already piped. There’s nothing worse than getting to the final stage and discovering you have to start again.
Keep the lettering in proportion to the size of the cake. Small letters on a large cake are lost. A large cake looks better with runout (colour flow) lettering which can be made any size. When piping lettering, make sure the cake is immediately in front of you. It is often safer to have the cake on the working surface, rather than a turntable, which may move.

Decorators sometimes find their hand trembling when piping. Supporting the piping hand with the other hand will stop this happening. As does, tucking the elbow into the side. Another tip is not to talk while working, as even the slight movement of the body can affect the flow of icing.

Royal icing should be well beaten and tested to make sure it is the right consistency. Too thin and it will run everywhere, too thick and the amount of pressure needed to force the icing from the bag will cause it to burst. Make icing the day before it is needed. The following day half fill a cup with icing and, using a palette or table knife, give it another quick beating. This action removes any extra air that could cause breakages in the piping.

A 1.5 tube is a good size to pipe lettering. A size 2 can look rather thick, especially on a small cake, and a number 1 can look too scrawny! Instead of piping directly onto the cake with coloured icing (difficult to remove mistakes) first pipe the letters in a size 2 using the same colour icing as the cake surface.

Then any mistakes will not show too much. Once the letters are dry, overpipe in coloured icing with a finer tube. OR paint a fine line of colour on the letters. Painting needs a steady hand, and a fine brush, slightly dampen with colour.

Dip the brush in edible colour and try out before beginning to paint. Have a piece of kitchen roll ready to absorb excess paint on the brush. Rather than trying to paint lettering with the point of the brush, use the side.

Often a large bag of icing is used just to pipe a dozen letters. A smaller bag is easier to hold, and piping a greeting on a cake only requires a small amount of icing less than one tablespoon.
Remember to put the tube in before half filling a small bag with icing. Press the paper at the top of the bag together, and fold the corners into the centre. Roll the paper down (in small folds) until it reaches the icing. Hold the bag just as you would a pen, between the first two fingers, with the thumb on the roll at the top.

Begin by practising piping in straight lines. More than half the capital letters in the alphabet are made from straight lines. They are much easier to pipe than curves.

Often the greetings on cakes which go wrong, are those piped in continuous writing. This is one of the most difficult ways of writing in icing, but is probably used because it is the way we write with a pen.

Before beginning to pipe, make sure the tube, is touching the surface of the cake. Icing should always be piped towards the decorator. Try drawing a pencil line towards yourself, and then one the opposite way, and see which is easiest. Well it's the same with piping, which is why a turntable is a good investment - it can be swivelled to suit the direction of the piping.

Using only a slight amount of pressure, touch the surface of the cake with the icing. Once it's in contact, continue pressing and gently lift the line of icing about one inch above the surface of the cake - strange as it may seem, this is the way to achieve a straight line.

To finish, ease the pressure on the bag and gently lay the tip of the tube onto the cake surface. This will break off the line of icing.

If the line of icing breaks as it is being piped, check you are keeping a constant pressure on the bag. There are so many different aspects to remember when writing in icing - spacing, height, joins, angles - and it is easy when concentrating to forget to press. Result - the line of piping breaks. When one line of icing joins another, say for instance in the letter K. Don't overlap the icing, instead butt the edges together - like wallpaper.

Curved letters, such as S, are more difficult to pipe. When piping a small 's' the tube should be close to the surface of the cake in order to direct the icing around the curves. For a large S hold the bag higher and guide the icing into position.

The letter O takes some practice. Starting at the top, guide the icing down, and up again. Another way to pipe an O is to start at the top, and pipe a half curve, ending at the base. Begin again at the top and pipe the opposite curve – something like a rugby ball shape. This may not be a perfect circle, but is a lot easier to pipe, and standing amongst the other letters, it reads as an O. Highlight the first letter of a name or greeting with a runout. Piping the lettering in 'Old English' for occasions such as a golden wedding, gives it a special magic.
This type of lettering is not difficult, but as it entails lots of stopping and starting at each corner to make sure they are neat.

Use a slightly damp, fine paintbrush to flick away any unwanted ends, or to dab down any points of icing.

Always make sure that colour used in lettering is repeated somewhere else on the cake, either in the ribbon, flowers or overpiping. Dots and scrolls highlight lettering. Scrolls are made by holding the bag at a shallow angle and piping the scroll towards you. To make dots, hold the bag vertically just above the surface of the cake.

Once you feel confident with piping letters, try highlighting the last letter in a name with a swirl or curve it makes them look much more interesting.

And if you really can’t face piping straight onto a cake, make several plaques from either sugar/flowerpaste or marzipan. Leave to dry, and then decorate with the greeting. Now choose the best one for your cake.

MONOGRAMS are made by linking two or three letters together, and are usually made in runouts. They are sometimes used on wedding cakes when initials of the bride and groom are entwined.

To make a monogram, trace each initial onto separate pieces of tracing paper. Make each letter a different colour as this will help when piping the outline.

Overlap the two pieces of paper, adjusting the initials until you are happy with the design. The bride’s initial should be on the left hand side.

If the monogram is for the side of a cake, measure to make sure there is sufficient space for the top and bottom borders around the cake.

Ideally, link the letters together three times, under, over and under or the other way round. Two curved initials, such as S and B curve easily around each other. Unfortunately, some letters are more difficult. For instance, straight letters cannot be linked together. Instead place them close together, with one letter slightly higher than the other.

When flooding in the monogram only cut a small hole in the piping bag.
Before signing off my cake decorating guide I'd like to share this light-hearted poem with you. It's about the pleasure of being a cake decorator, and I'm sure you will sympathise!
“Only A Sponge”

You’re ever so clever – I’ll get you to make for my mother’s birthday. A beautiful birthday cake. Only a sponge – That’s all I need. (only a sponge, I thought, ONLY indeed)
Make it look pretty, she’d like it in pink
Put one of those frills on – No –
two frills I think.
Insert some ribbon and cover the board, Remember to put ‘Happy Birthday to Maude’.
As for the flowers, her favourite’s sweatpea and orchids and roses – Well just do all three.
Mustn’t forget some embroidery things –
You know flowers and ribbons and birds on their wings.
You’ll charge me ‘nine fifty’ Well that’s a bit steep.
Its only a sponge and they’re ever so cheap!!