

Frostings, Glazes and Finishing Touches

Quick Chocolate Buttercream

Have all the ingredients at room temperature. Put the chocolate in the top pan of a double boiler set over but not touching simmering water in the bottom pan. Stir until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Let cool to room temperature.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the flat beater, combine the confectioners' sugar, butter, the 6 Tbs. milk, the vanilla and salt and beat on low speed until combined, about 1 minute. Stop the mixer and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Increase the speed to medium and beat for 2 minutes, then reduce the speed to low. Add the chocolate and beat until combined, then increase the speed to medium and beat for 1 minute more.

If the frosting is dry, add more milk, 1 tsp. at a time, until it is creamy but still holds peaks. Makes about 4½ cups.

Chocolate Glaze

In a heatproof bowl set over but not touching gently simmering water in a saucepan, combine the chocolate, butter and corn syrup. Heat, stirring often, until the chocolate melts, then remove from the heat and stir until smooth. Let cool, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes; the glaze will thicken slightly.

To glaze a cake, set a wire rack on a baking sheet and place the cake on the rack. Pour the glaze over the cake, gently tilting it to coat the top and sides completely. Let the glaze set and then serve the cake. Makes enough glaze for one 9-inch cake.

Cream Cheese Frosting

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the flat beater, beat the cream cheese on medium speed until smooth and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the butter and continue to beat for 2 to 3 minutes more. Add the confectioners' sugar 1 cup at a time and beat until smooth and no lumps of sugar are visible. Add the vanilla and beat until combined. Makes 5 cups, enough to frost two 9-inch cake rounds or three 8-inch cake rounds.

Fruit Sauce

A simple fruit sauce adds bright flavor and color to cakes. Drizzle this sauce over angel food cake, or spoon onto individual plates and top with slices of decadent chocolate cake. The sauce is also delicious as a topping for pancakes and ice cream. If your berries are a bit tart, add confectioners' sugar, to taste.

In a tall silicone cup, combine the berries and confectioners' sugar. Using an immersion blender, blend until smooth. Strain the sauce if desired to remove the seeds and then serve. Makes about ¾ cup.

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Cake Styles

There's a different type of cake to suit every taste. The following are some of the most popular ones:

- American layer cake
- Angel food cake
- American sponge cake
- Génoise
- Chiffon cake
- Devil's food cake
- Pound cake

Tips for Successful Butter Cakes

- Start with room-temperature ingredients. Eggs should be large, unless otherwise specified.
- When creaming the butter with sugar, start by thoroughly creaming the butter before adding any sugar. Then beat the butter and sugar together well. Be patient; it takes several minutes of beating for the butter and sugar mixture to become light and fluffy.
- When mixing eggs into the batter, add them one at a time, incorporating each fully to create an emulsion.
- Combine the dry ingredients (flour, salt, baking powder) separately, whisking them 8 to 10 times before mixing them with the wet ingredients. This ensures that the salt and leavening are evenly distributed in the batter.
- Butter cakes are done when the top is lightly browned, the edges begin to pull away from the pan sides, and the surface springs back when you press the center with a fingertip. Another test: Insert a toothpick or cake tester into the center. It should come out clean and dry or, as some cakes require, with just a few crumbs clinging to the tester, showing that the center remains a bit more moist; follow the cues in your recipe.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Kitchen Companion* (Time-Life Books, 2000).

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Technique Class: Classic Cakes

Cakes are a staple dessert for many special-occasion gatherings. A home-baked cake is always fresher, tastier and more appreciated than a purchased one—and is really quite easy to prepare. We offer quick tips, simple shortcuts and basic recipes that will help you master cake baking and decorating in no time.

With a few key techniques in your repertoire, you'll be creating cakes for everyday enjoyment and special occasions, as well as whimsical and easy-to-transport cupcakes, a favorite with kids and adults alike.

Cakes are divided into two main types: foam cakes and butter cakes. Some, such as chiffon cake and the classic French génoise, combine elements of both types.

Foam cakes have a high proportion of eggs, sugar and liquid to flour, and the air trapped in the beaten eggs is the primary leavener. They contain very little if any fat, such as butter or oil, and so have a relatively dry, spongy texture. Popular foam cakes include angel food cake and sponge cake.

Butter cakes are richer and more velvety and rely on chemical leaveners—baking powder and baking soda. They are made with a comparatively high percentage of butter. Typical butter cakes are American layer cakes and pound cakes.

Tips for Successful Foam Cakes

- Eggs separate more easily when cold but whip up better when at room temperature. Separate the eggs as soon as you take them from the refrigerator, then let the whites sit out in a bowl for about 30 minutes before beating them.
- If a recipe calls for whisking the eggs or egg whites over hot water, do not let the bottom of the bowl touch the water or the eggs will cook.
- Be sure to use a spotlessly clean bowl and beaters or whisk for beating egg whites. Any spot of grease or fat (including egg yolk) will prevent the whites from expanding to their full volume.
- Lift the beaters or whisk from the whites and turn them upright to determine if they have formed soft or stiff peaks. Soft peaks will gently fall over onto themselves, while stiff, dry peaks will stand straight up.
- Overbeating eggs will cause them to clump and look somewhat chalky, and the cake will not rise as successfully.
- Before baking the cake, gently run a kitchen knife or small rubber spatula through the batter to deflate any large air bubbles.
- A foam cake is done when the top is golden and the cake springs back when gently pressed with a fingertip.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Kitchen Companion* (Time-Life Books, 2000).

Ingredients for Devil's Food Layer Cake

For the cake:

1 cup boiling water

³/₄ cup unsweetened natural cocoa powder

1³/₄ cups all-purpose flour

1¹/₂ tsp. baking soda

¹/₄ tsp. fine sea salt

2 cups granulated sugar

10 Tbs. (1¹/₄ sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

3 eggs

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1¹/₄ cups buttermilk

For the chocolate frosting:

3³/₄ cups confectioners' sugar

1 cup unsweetened natural cocoa powder

8 Tbs. (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 cup heavy cream, or as needed

Devil's Food Layer Cake

To make the cake, preheat an oven to 350°F. Lightly butter two 9-inch round cake pans. Line the bottom of each pan with a round of parchment paper. Dust the pans with flour, tapping out the excess.

In a small heatproof bowl, whisk together the boiling water and cocoa powder until smooth. Let cool completely.

In a bowl, sift together the flour, baking soda and salt. Set aside.

In a large bowl, using a handheld mixer, beat together the granulated sugar and butter on medium-high speed until the mixture is light in color and texture, about 3 minutes. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, then beat in the vanilla and the cooled cocoa mixture.

Reduce the speed to low and add the flour mixture in 3 additions, alternating with the buttermilk and beginning and ending with the flour mixture. Beat until smooth, stopping the mixer occasionally to scrape down the sides of the bowl. Divide the batter evenly between the prepared pans and smooth the tops.

Bake the cakes until they begin to pull away from the sides of the pans, 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer the pans to wire racks and let cool for 15 minutes. Run a knife around the inside of each pan to release the cake. Invert the pans onto the racks, lift off the pans and peel the parchment paper off the cakes. Turn the cakes right side up and let cool completely.

Meanwhile, make the chocolate frosting: In a bowl, sift together the confectioners' sugar and cocoa powder. Using the mixer, beat in the butter on low speed until it is crumbly. Beat in the vanilla, then gradually beat in enough of the cream to make a spreadable frosting.

Place 1 cake layer, bottom side up, on a cake plate. Using an icing spatula, spread the top of the layer with a generous ¹/₂ cup of the frosting. Place the second layer, top side down, on top of the first layer. Frost the top and then the sides with the remaining frosting. Slice the cake into thick wedges and serve. Serves 10.

Variation: For chocolate cupcakes, line 24 muffin cups with paper liners. Spoon the batter into the prepared cups. Bake until the tops spring back when pressed in the center, 20 to 25 minutes. Let the cupcakes cool before frosting.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Comfort Food*, by Rick Rodgers (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Rolled Cake with Mixed Berries

To ensure the cake will be easy to roll, smooth the batter as evenly as possible in the pan and then bake the cake until lightly browned but not dry. Once the cake has cooled, place it, still attached to the parchment paper, on a second piece of parchment, cake side down, and peel off the parchment. Spread the filling evenly over the cake. With a long side toward you, roll the edge of the cake onto itself, moving your hands carefully from one end of the side to the other to keep the roll even. Using both hands, continue to roll the cake into a cylinder.

Preheat an oven to 475°F. Line a 12-by-18-by-1-inch baking sheet with parchment paper and butter the sides.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the egg yolks and whole eggs on medium speed while adding the ¹/₂ cup granulated sugar in a steady stream. Increase the speed to high and beat until the eggs are almost doubled in volume, about 5 minutes. Transfer the egg mixture to a large bowl.

Thoroughly wash and dry the mixer bowl and whisk. Beat the egg whites with the whisk on medium speed until they start to foam. Add one-third of the 1 Tbs. granulated sugar and beat until opaque, then add another one-third of the sugar. When the whites start to increase in volume, add the remaining sugar and increase the speed to high. Beat until the whites form soft peaks but still look wet. Carefully fold the whites into the egg yolk mixture. Sift the flour over the egg mixture and fold in. Pour the batter onto the prepared baking sheet and spread evenly.

Bake the cake until it is springy to the touch, 5 to 8 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through. Run a table knife around the edge of the pan and slide the cake, still on the paper, onto a wire rack. Let cool completely.

Meanwhile, make the filling and finish: Beat ³/₄ cup of the cream and the crème fraîche until soft peaks form. Gently fold in the 1 cup berries. Place the cake, paper side up, on another piece of parchment paper. Peel off the top paper. Spread the whipped cream mixture on the cake, then roll it into a log (see note above). Transfer the cake, seam side down, to a serving plate.

Beat the remaining 1 cup cream and the confectioners' sugar until soft peaks form. Spoon into a pastry bag fitted with a ³/₄-inch star tip and pipe a spiral down the center of the cake. Garnish with the remaining berries. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serves 14 to 16.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Cake*, by Fran Gage (Simon & Schuster, 2003).

Ingredients for Rolled Cake with Mixed Berries

2 eggs, separated, plus 2 whole eggs, at room temperature

¹/₃ cup plus 1 Tbs. granulated sugar

¹/₄ cup cake flour, sifted

For the filling and finish:

1³/₄ cups heavy cream

³/₄ cup crème fraîche

1 cup mixed berries, such as whole raspberries, blackberries or blueberries, or sliced strawberries, plus 15 whole or sliced berries for garnish

1 Tbs. confectioners' sugar

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