Farm and home—cake icing for the beginner

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THE icing of a celebration cake need not necessarily be a task for the specialist. With a little patience, perseverance and practice even an inexperienced person can turn out some pleasing results.

If you are a beginner in the art of cake icing these few simple rules will help to make your task easier; if you are already experienced, a reminder will not go astray.

Firstly be content with simple designs. Many beginners endeavour to hide basic errors by adding an elaborate camouflage which results in over-decoration.

Secondly, the beginner should be content to use white icing and pale pastel colours as these blend easily. Avoid using too many colours on the same cake.

Lastly, pastel backgrounds show up the decoration to advantage. A background that is too dark or too bright detracts from the design.

THE CAKE BOARD

Some type of firm support is necessary before we commence the task of icing the cake. This may be provided by a piece of thick cardboard, three-ply, masonite or light wood at least 1 in. larger all round the cake in order to give balance and make handling easier.

The board should be covered with clean white paper, cellophane, or a paper doyley. Silver or gold paper doilies may be used to highlight a cake and coloured doilies to match, or in contrast to, the colour scheme of the icing are also attractive.

Suitable icing boards may be bought from city stores for a few pence—a 12 in. board costs about 1s. 2d. These boards are circular or square in shape and are usually covered with gold or silver paper.

If two strips of wood about 1 in. wide and 6 in. long are tacked to the bottom of the board so as to raise it off the table, it may be handled much more easily.

Fig. 1.—A cake on the cake board. This cake is covered with a rolled plastic icing and decorated with sprays of flowers and leaves in pastel shades made as shown in Figure 2. The decorations are in plastic icing secured with dabs of royal icing.
PREPARING THE CAKE

Before commencing the icing operations, decide which side of the cake you wish to ice. If the aim is a perfectly flat base it is usually easier to ice the bottom of the cake as very few cakes rise quite evenly and it is not always easy to cut the top to give a level surface. Should the cake have risen evenly or to a symmetrical peak the top may be utilised as the basis for the design.

COVERING THE CAKE

The covering can be a rolled plastic icing, or royal icing. Plastic icings give a smoother finish and while they set firmly, they do not harden, and are still edible after being exposed to the air for some time. Royal icing is difficult to apply smoothly as a base and dries very hard. It also tends to absorb grease from the cake and becomes discoloured with the passing of time. Royal icing is therefore better suited to decorative work than for use as the main base.

Before applying the icing, rub a little sifted icing sugar into the surface of the cake to remove any loose crumbs, then brush the cake with a little smooth jam (jam without seeds or lumps). An alternative is to apply beaten egg-white to help the icing to adhere to the surface of the cake.

When the plastic icing is to be used, roll it into a smooth ball. Measure the width in inches across the cake and add twice the depth. The measurements of a cake 8in. across the top and 3in. deep would therefore be 14in. (8in. plus 3in. plus 3in.) For a cake of this size the icing should be rolled out into a circular shape a little less than 14in. in diameter and $\frac{3}{4}$in. to $\frac{1}{2}$in. thick. If you find the icing sticking to the rolling pin or board dust with a little cornflour or arrowroot instead of icing sugar.

The circular piece of icing is rolled out smaller than the cake to allow for stretching when it is applied. If it is rolled any bigger you will find that you have a lot of fullness which is hard to ease out when applying the icing.

Lift the icing carefully on the rolling pin and place it evenly on the cake. By using the rolling pin you are less likely to have holes appearing in the icing sheet which will spoil the smooth finish. Any fullness in the icing may be eased down and pressed out against the sides of the cake. When icing a square cake, the icing is naturally rolled out into a square shape and it will be necessary to cut triangular pieces out of the corners to obtain a neat finish.

The icing should be pressed firmly to the cake, starting from the top to avoid air-bubbles. Any bubbles which do occur should be pricked with a sterile needle.

Should the icing split or tear while being placed in position, moisten the cut edges slightly with water and gently press them together. The same treatment should be
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given to the edges where pieces have to be cut out at the corners of a square cake. The joins may then be smoothed over and made invisible.

When the icing is in position the top of the cake can be “polished” by rubbing it gently with the palm of the hand.

If you have decided to ice the bottom of the cake because the top is uneven, don’t worry if you have gaps between the edges of the cake and the board. These may be filled in by making a roll of plastic icing and pressing it into the spaces before the top is covered.

Trim off the bottom of the covering icing before it sets too firmly.

ICING RECIPES

1. Plastic Icing (Uncooked).
   1 lb. icing sugar.
   2 tablespoonfuls glucose.
   1 egg white.
   1 teaspoonful copha.
   Flavouring as required.

   **Method:**
   1. Sift icing sugar into bowl.
   2. Add glucose, melted copha (not hot) and egg white in a well in centre.
   3. Gradually work in enough of the icing sugar to make a firm paste which will hold its shape.
   4. Turn on to a board and knead until smooth.
   5. Knead in the flavouring and any colouring used.
   6. Keep covered until ready to use.

2. Plastic Icing (Cooked).
   1 cup of sugar.
   4 tablespoonfuls of water.
   Juice of half a lemon (strained).
   1½ to 1¾ lb. icing sugar.
   1½ teaspoonfuls of gelatine soaked in 2 tablespoonfuls of water.
   1 level dessertspoonful copha or butter. Essence.

   **Method:**
   1. Moisten sugar with water and heat very gently until sugar is dissolved.
   2. Bring to boil and boil quickly for three minutes.
   3. Remove from stove. Add soaked gelatine, copha or butter and about ½ lb. of icing sugar.
   4. When this is cool enough to handle pour into a basin containing the remainder of the icing sugar.
   5. Work in the icing sugar until the mixture is firm but still pliable.
   6. Add colouring and flavouring.
   7. Cover until required.
   N.B.—If the icing is for a white cake omit the butter.

   4 oz. granulated sugar.
   4 oz. liquid glucose.
   ¼ cup water.
   1 teaspoonful gelatine.
   3 tablespoonfuls cold water.
   2¼ lb. icing sugar.

   **Method:**
   1. Place sugar, glucose and ¼ cupful water into saucepan.
   2. Heat slowly until the sugar is dissolved.
   3. Boil to 238° F.
   4. Remove from fire. Add gelatine, which has been soaked in the 3 tablespoonfuls cold water.
   5. Sift icing sugar into a bowl.
   6. Add some of the icing sugar to the syrup mixture.
   7. When cool pour the syrup into the remainder of the icing sugar.
   8. Gradually work in enough icing sugar to make a firm pliable paste.
   9. Cover until needed.
   N.B.—A sugar thermometer is necessary for this icing. The thermometer from a fruit bottling outfit may be used if a sugar thermometer is not available.
DECORATIONS

Some decorations can be made from the plastic icing used to cover the cake. If you intend to use a coloured base, keep a little plastic icing back before colouring and this may be used for the decorations required and coloured to suit.

Plastic icing can be moulded into fruits, flowers or animals according to your design. Most of these take some time to model, so if you want to make flowers quickly try this method.

Take a small ball of the icing and roll it out until it is 1/16in. thick. Cut into circles, using the top of an old lipstick container as the cutter. As lipsticks are available in different sized containers, you can easily vary the sizes of your flowers.

With a fine knitting needle or skewer, crimp the edges in four or five places to resemble petals; put a hole in the centre and lift one side slightly to give a more interesting shape.

These little flowers may be turned out very quickly and provide effective decorations. Roll only a small piece of icing at a time as the icing dries quickly when it is in a thin sheet and may crack when it is being shaped.

To make leaves, use a very small scone-cutter. First cut out a circular piece of icing and then cut off a half-moon shaped piece by altering the position of the cutter. Mark in the veins with a sharp-pointed knife and curl the leaf slightly while still soft.

Allow the decorations to dry for a few hours before handling them and then attach them to the cake with a dab of royal icing.

Royal Icing.

1 egg white.
6 to 8oz. icing sugar.
1 small teaspoonful glucose.
Few drops of lemon juice.

Method:
1. Beat the egg white slightly.
2. Gradually beat in icing sugar until the mixture is just stiff enough to hold its shape or stand in small heaps when the spoon is pulled away.
3. Add glucose and lemon juice.
4. Beat the icing thoroughly. The more beating this icing receives the higher gloss it develops.
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Fig. 5.—Some simple icing decorations using various nozzles. In the two top rows a No. 2 pipe is used for writing and lattice, also for dots, loops and other designs. In the next three rows an eight-star No. 8 pipe lends itself to a number of different designs.

Below a No. 34 pipe is used to give a fluted ribbon. The forget-me-nots are made with a No. 28 nozzle; the small leaves with a No. 17 and the shell-patterned bar with a No. 12.
DECORATING WITH ROYAL ICING

To use royal icing for decorations you will need a metal icing syringe or a soft forcing-bag equipped with metal piping tubes. The metal tubes give a daintier finish than the plastic types. If no tubes are available a good substitute can be made from paper as will be described later.

To obtain uniform results use an even pressure. For roses or dots, keep the nozzle perpendicular and start with the tip of the tube close to the surface of the cake. When the required size of decoration is reached pull the nozzle away sharply at the same time releasing the pressure. For lattice work or ribbons and leaves, slope the pipe a little, then apply an even pressure and pull the nozzle towards you at the same time.

If adding a second row of decorations wait until the first one has dried out for a few minutes. When mistakes are made they can be rectified if the icing is scraped off while still wet without harming the surface of the cake.

Before commencing to pipe a design, plan it out on a piece of paper the same size as the cake. By placing the paper over the cake the main lines in the design can be pricked through on to the icing.

GENERAL HINTS

1. Keep all icings covered with a damp cloth before using them as they harden quickly when exposed to the air.
2. Avoid using flavourings which are too highly coloured. Too much vanilla flavoured in white icing makes it look dingy. Almond essence is good flavouring to use as it is colourless and concentrated.
3. A drop of blue colouring makes white icings whiter.
4. Colourings may be mixed to give variations of tint. The mixture of pink and yellow will give an apricot toning.
5. Use highly concentrated colourings and flavourings as the addition of too much liquid makes the icing soft and difficult to handle.
6. An eye-dropper is useful for adding colourings or flavourings as the "crust" which settles on the rims of the bottles may then be avoided.
7. Icing sugar should be rolled and sifted three times before using, especially for royal icing.
8. If the liquid glucose is too hard, stand the jar in a saucepan, containing sufficient water to reach half way up the jar and heat gently. Don't add heated glucose directly to an egg white as it may cause the egg white to solidify. Allow it to cool first.
9. To remove solid glucose from a jar use a wet spoon or wet the fingers.
10. Plastic icing will keep indefinitely in an airtight tin or rolled in a piece of plastic material.
11. If the plastic icing is too hard after storage, warm it slightly on a plate over a pan of water and knead until soft. A little water may be added if the icing appears too dry.
12. Decorations made from plastic icing or royal icing keep well and can be made some time in advance.
13. After making plastic icing, allow it to stand for two or three hours to mature. This makes it easier to handle.
14. Use a fine artist's brush to paint the colours upon decorations such as fruits or leaves when deeper shades are required.
15. Use liquid glucose in preference to powdered glucose in icings. This is usually obtainable from a grocer or chemist.

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Take a piece of paper 12in. square (lunch wraps are quite useful for this work) and fold the paper diagonally to form a triangle as shown in the diagram. Roll point C over to meet B so that the line CD lies on BD.

Hold in position and wrap AD round to hold the cone in shape.

Fold the top peak over to keep the top firm. The last fold may be held in position by a strip of cellulose tape.

Cut a small piece for the point to make a hole about 1/16in. in diameter. This will be suitable for writing, lattice work or dots.

To make a nozzle for piping roses cut a few small serrations at the point of the cone. The larger the hole, the larger the rose and more serrations will be needed.

To make leaves cut the peak to form sharp points.
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