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Opening Extract from...

First Cake Decorating

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How to use this book

Cake decorating has changed remarkably over recent years – for instance, sugar crafting was once a work of art only be tackled by experts, but there are now many more tools available now, and with a little know-how, anything is possible. Just remember that when you are making any kind of celebration cake it is important to plan ahead and decide on the type of cake, its size and what type of decoration you want before you even begin to start baking.

Things to consider

- Your skill level and the time available – if you are inexperienced don't be too ambitious. It's better to create a simple design perfectly than a complicated one badly, or to make a design in too much of a rush so you have to cut corners.
- Who the cake is for – they might have a preference for a type of cake, or an interest or hobby that you can use as a starting point for your design.
- The occasion – is it formal or informal? How big will the cake need to be to serve everyone? If there is a theme you may need to fit in with it.
- When and where – can the cake be made some time in advance or does it have to be made immediately beforehand? Will the cake be transported and require last minute assembly?

This book is divided into sections: first we have Getting Started, which explains what you need in the way of basic baking equipment and ingredients, followed by Basic Techniques, which covers essential preparation as well as the recipes for a collection of classic cakes. The decorating part of the book has three sections: Covering Cakes, which details how to cover cakes in various ways along with some simple decoration techniques; Piping, which looks at all types of piped decoration; Modelling, using either sugarpaste (gumpaste), flowerpaste, almond paste (marzipan) or crystallized flowers; and finally Using Chocolate and Sugar, which shows you how to dip, mould shapes and create spun sugar items. Each section finishes with a collection of projects that put into practice the techniques detailed in the chapter. Each of the techniques is numbered and the same reference number is given in the project whenever the technique appears so you can refer back if you need to.

Filled with detailed description, helpful step-by-step instructions, endless pictures and many triple-tested recipes, this book is all you need to discover the joys of creating your own wonderful cakes for all occasions.



Getting started

Not much in the way of specialist equipment is needed for baking, although one or two items in particular – such as a food processor and electric whisk (mixer) – will make life much easier. Remember that kitchen equipment is subject to a great deal of wear and tear, so look for good-quality items.

Basic equipment

❶ Scales (kitchen scale)

Accurate measurement is essential when following most baking recipes. The electronic scale is the most accurate and usually weighs in increments of 1–5g. Buy one with a flat platform on which you can put your bowl or measuring jug. Always set the scale to zero before adding the ingredients and use either metric or imperial measurements; do not mix them.

❷ Measuring jugs, ❸ cups and ❹ spoons

Jugs can be plastic, metal or glass and are available in various sizes marked with both metric and imperial measures. Measuring cups are classically used in American recipes and are usually bought as sets of ¼, ⅓, ½ and 1 cups. It is essential to use calibrated measuring spoons in all baking recipes. Do not be tempted to reach into the cutlery drawer since general spoons used in the kitchen may vary in size, which will affect the accuracy of the recipe. If you don't have any measuring spoons, then go by the rule that 1 tbsp is equal to 15ml, and 1 tsp is equal to 5ml. Measuring spoons can be plastic, ceramic or metal and often come in sets attached together.

❺ Mixing bowls

A selection of small, medium and large bowls are essential for good cake making. Choose bowls in glass, plastic, china or stainless steel with smooth, rounded insides for thorough and even mixing. Stainless steel bowls work best when you need to chill a mixture down quickly in the fridge or heat it up over simmering water (when melting chocolate, for example). Do not use stainless steel bowls in the microwave. Plastic or glass bowls are best if you need to use them in the microwave.

❻ Mixing spoons

For general mixing, the cheap and sturdy wooden spoon is best. The spoon should be stiff, so that it can cope with thick mixtures. A large metal spoon for folding items together is also invaluable.

❼ Spatulas

Essential for scraping out all the mixture from mixing bowls. The best have a silicone head, which moulds easily to the bowl. Also useful for folding ingredients together.

❽ Sieves

A variety of fine wire mesh or nylon sieves are always needed to strain out ingredients or aerate dry ingredients, such as flour, cocoa powder and icing sugar.

❾ Wire whisk

A flexible wire whisk is necessary for whisking all types of mixtures to obtain volume and give smooth consistencies. Generally, the larger the whisk the more efficient it is.

❿ Palette knife (metal spatula)

For basic baking, a simple large straight-bladed palette knife will do most jobs. Ideal for loosening



cakes from tins (pans) and spreading and smoothing icing.

⓫ Brushes
For general glazing, brushes are available in many sizes with bristle or silicone tips. Take care as bristle brushes can moult when they get old, or become stiff if not cleaned properly.

⓬ Rolling pin
Essential for even rolling of pastry, dough, sugarpaste (gumpaste), and so on. Rolling pins come in different lengths, thicknesses and materials. Wooden varieties are generally cheap and universally effective, whereas silicone pins are more costly but ideal if rolling lots of pastry or sugarpaste, as they give a more even appearance.

⓭ Ruler or ⓮ tape measure and ⓯ scissors (kitchen shears)
Accurate measurement during cake baking and decorating is essential to guarantee good results. Sharp kitchen scissors are frequently needed for cutting out cake tin (pan) lining papers, templates, florists wire, etc.

⓰ Vegetable peeler
Choose one that fits your hand comfortably, either swivel-headed or y-shaped.

⓱ Graters
Either box or hand-held, graters are mostly used in baking for grating citrus zest or chocolate. Look for sturdy models that are comfortable to hold, as they will need to withstand pressure. Graters give coarse, medium-coarse or fine results.

⓲ Cake tins (pans)
The right cake tins are invaluable when it comes to baking all types of cakes. They vary in the quality and thickness of the metal, the finish, the sizing and the depth, so care must be taken when choosing them – try to buy the best quality you can afford. Tins may be single-piece, loose-bottomed or springform. Always measure the tin with a ruler across the base to ascertain its size. Never be temped to use a different shape or size of tin than the recipe states, otherwise the baking time, texture, depth and appearance of the cake will be affected.

⓳ Baking trays/baking sheets
These have many uses in baking and either have a lipped edge or are completely flat. Choose ones that are large (but which fit comfortably in your oven) to avoid having to bake in batches. Buy the best you can afford to avoid any warping when in contact with heat.

⓴ Wire racks
Available in different sizes and shapes, with wide or narrow mesh.

㉑ Knives
Small, medium and large knives with straight and serrated blades are needed for preparing ingredients and cutting cakes into layers.

㉒ Papers
There are a variety of papers, such as greaseproof (wax), non-stick baking parchment, waxed paper, rice paper and brown paper, which all have their uses. Greaseproof paper is suitable for lining cake tins (pans). Non-stick baking parchment is ideal for meringues, spreading melted chocolate, drying moulded or cut-out sugar decorations – in short, ensuring nothing sticks. Waxed paper is fine and flexible and is ideal for icing run-outs and to trace over designs for piped decorations. Rice paper is used for biscuits and macaroons; it adheres to the mixture, can be baked and is edible. Brown paper is used to fit around the outside of cake tins to protect the cake during long periods of baking.

㉓ Other useful bakeware
Loaf tins (pans), tart tins (fluted and plain), sandwich tins, pie tins, muffin tins. Reusable, non-stick, silicone baking mats and liners, muffin trays and cupcake moulds.

Decorating equipment

㉔ Palette knives (not shown)
Small straight and crank-handled palette knives/metal spatulas are ideal for lifting and transferring small and fragile icing decorations, spreading royal icing on to cakes and smoothing to the edges.

㉕ Piping (decorating) bags
Indispensable for piping icings and meringues. The most convenient are the disposable type – try to buy ones with added grip. Alternatively, use the nylon type, but make sure that you wash it very thoroughly in hot soapy water after each use.

㉖ Piping (decorating) pumps
Icing pumps are usually sold as part of an icing set, complete with nozzles (tips). They are made of metal or polythene and consist of a large tube with an interchangeable screw nozzle at one end and a plunger at the other end. The plunger unscrews for easy refilling and the pump dismantles for hygienic cleaning. The disadvantage of the icing pump is that you cannot 'feel' how the icing is reacting to the pressure applied to the plunger – this may result in too little or too much icing being pushed through the nozzle at the other end. Also, it is essential that the consistency of the icing is correct for good results.

㉗ Piping nozzles (tips)
Basic piping work can be achieved with just a few nozzles (check the recipe for the size of nozzle needed – often numerical). More sophisticated piping will require a large selection of piping nozzles, with varying tip sizes and shapes.

㉘ Cake boards
Available in many shapes, sizes and colours, cake boards give a professional finish to your cake. The larger the cake, the thicker and more substantial the board needs to be.

㉙ Cake smoothers
These help to smooth the surface of sugarpaste to obtain a satin-smooth finish and to eliminate cracks or imperfections.

㉚ Sugarpaste (gumpaste) modelling tools
Cutting knife, cone, bone and ball tools all have a purpose when working with sugarpaste, and for experimental cake decorators are well worth buying.

㉛ Sugarpaste (gumpaste) mats
These non-stick mats often come with pre-marked circles and grids for accurate, mark-free rolling. Textured mats are also available.

㉜ Fine brushes
Fine artist's brushes are available in many different shapes and sizes and are useful for painting with food colourings. Also useful when making run-outs.

㉝ Foam pads (shaping foam)
Cheap to buy and essential for supporting sugar, gum- and flowerpaste decorations and enabling them to dry in the correct shape.

㉞ Run-out film
This fine transparent plastic film can be used for making accurate run-out decorations, which slide easily off the film when they are dry. It may not be easy to source, however.

㉟ Scribing needle
Used for etching lines onto the surface of iced cakes in order to transfer designs from templates.

㊱ Crimpers
These tweezer-style tools have decorative end pieces that imprint various designs on the surface of sugarpaste.

㊲ Small acrylic rolling pin
Great for smoothly rolling out small quantities of icing and creating frills, petals and waves.



Piping

Piping is one of the most traditional skills, used to decorate all types of cakes. It takes some practice to master, but the skill will come in useful frequently when decorating cakes. Just by varying the pressure, angle and nozzle (tip) shape and size you can produce many different designs with quite simple equipment.

Piping decoration

The only equipment you need is a piping (decorating) bag and a good set of nozzles (tips). Make up a batch of royal icing and start practising by piping on boards, around cake tins (pans) and on to plates – that way you can reuse the icing time and again until you are competent. Try simple piping first with basic nozzles, then as your skill and consistency improve, proceed to a larger selection of nozzles and techniques.

20 Making a paper icing bag

Reusable and disposable icing bags are widely available, but it's just as easy to make your own from greaseproof (wax) paper. Often delicate piping work is easiest achieved with a homemade icing bag, which can be snipped to a fine tip or used in conjunction with a piping nozzle (tip). Once you've mastered the technique, make a batch of bags so that you have some ready and waiting. The bag can simply be disposed of once you have finished with it – just remember to rescue any piping nozzles first.



1 Cut out a rectangle of greaseproof (wax) paper measuring about 25.5 × 20.5cm/10 × 8in – for smaller bags, cut a proportionally smaller rectangle. Fold in half diagonally, then cut along the crease. Use one of the triangles to continue.



2 Put the paper on the work surface with the apex of the triangle nearest to you. Bring the top left-hand point round to line up with the bottom point. Hold in place with your thumb and index finger.



3 Bring the right-hand point over and round the back, meeting at the bottom point. Pull together slightly to tighten the point. Fold over the points of the paper nearest to you to secure the bag.

4 To use, fill with icing and fold the paper over to seal. Snip the point off the bag (either straight across or at a slant), or fit with a metal nozzle (tip) before filling for more intricate designs.

Piping techniques

It is essential to have the buttercream, royal icing or whipped cream at the correct consistency – when a wooden spoon is drawn out it should form a fine sharp point. If the icing is too stiff, it will be difficult to pipe; if too soft the icing will run too freely, be difficult to control and lose definition. The larger the nozzle (tip), the stiffer the icing needs to be; for a fine writing nozzle, the consistency needs to be looser.

21 Filling a piping bag

1 If using a nozzle (tip), snip off the tip of the piping (decorating) bag and drop in a nozzle. If not using a nozzle, then leave the tip intact. If using a plastic piping bag, fold the top over to make a collar.

2 Hold the piping bag in your hand or stand it in a bowl or jug to support it. Fill half to two-thirds with icing. If using plastic, unfold the collar and twist to tighten to the level of the icing. Snip the tip if needed (either straight across or at a slant) and squeeze the bag gently to remove air bubbles and start the icing flowing. If using paper, fold over the open end until you hit the icing, then snip the tip if needed and squeeze the bag gently to remove air bubbles and start the icing flowing.



3 Never over-fill a piping bag, as it will become difficult to handle and as you squeeze, the icing will ooze out of the top. A good rule to remember is the smaller the piping nozzle, the smaller the piping bag and the less icing you require.

Piping tips

- Pipe small amounts of cream at a time – over-handling in the piping (decorating) bag can cause it to curdle. Use larger nozzles (tips) to pipe cream.
- Keep your work area clean to avoid crumbs, dirt or blemishes appearing on your finished cake.
- Plan your pattern and prick out a design with a pin to give you a template **24** to follow when piping.
- Pipe intricate designs onto silicone paper to dry, then fix onto the cake with a dab of royal icing.
- Cover a bowl of icing with damp kitchen paper (paper towels), cling film (plastic wrap) or a tea towel to prevent it drying out.
- Practise first – a board, cake tin (pan) or upturned plate make good surfaces.

22 Piping designs

1 Lines
Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a plain or star nozzle (tip) – the smaller the hole, the finer the lines. Hold the piping bag at a 45-degree angle and 5mm/¼in above the surface, then pipe towards you, securing the beginning of the line to the surface with a little pressure. Raise the bag slightly as the icing flows on to the surface in a straight or curved line. Press the piping bag to the surface lightly to secure the line, then pull away sharply to finish.

2 Beads
The size of bead depends on the nozzle (tip) used and the pressure applied to the piping (decorating) bag. Start with icing of slightly softer consistency so there are no sharp points on the ends of the beads. Hold the nozzle upright just above the surface, then squeeze out some icing onto the surface to make a bead (keeping the nozzle still). Pull up sharply to break the icing. Make another bead next to the first one to make a chain. Smooth off the beads with a damp finger if necessary.

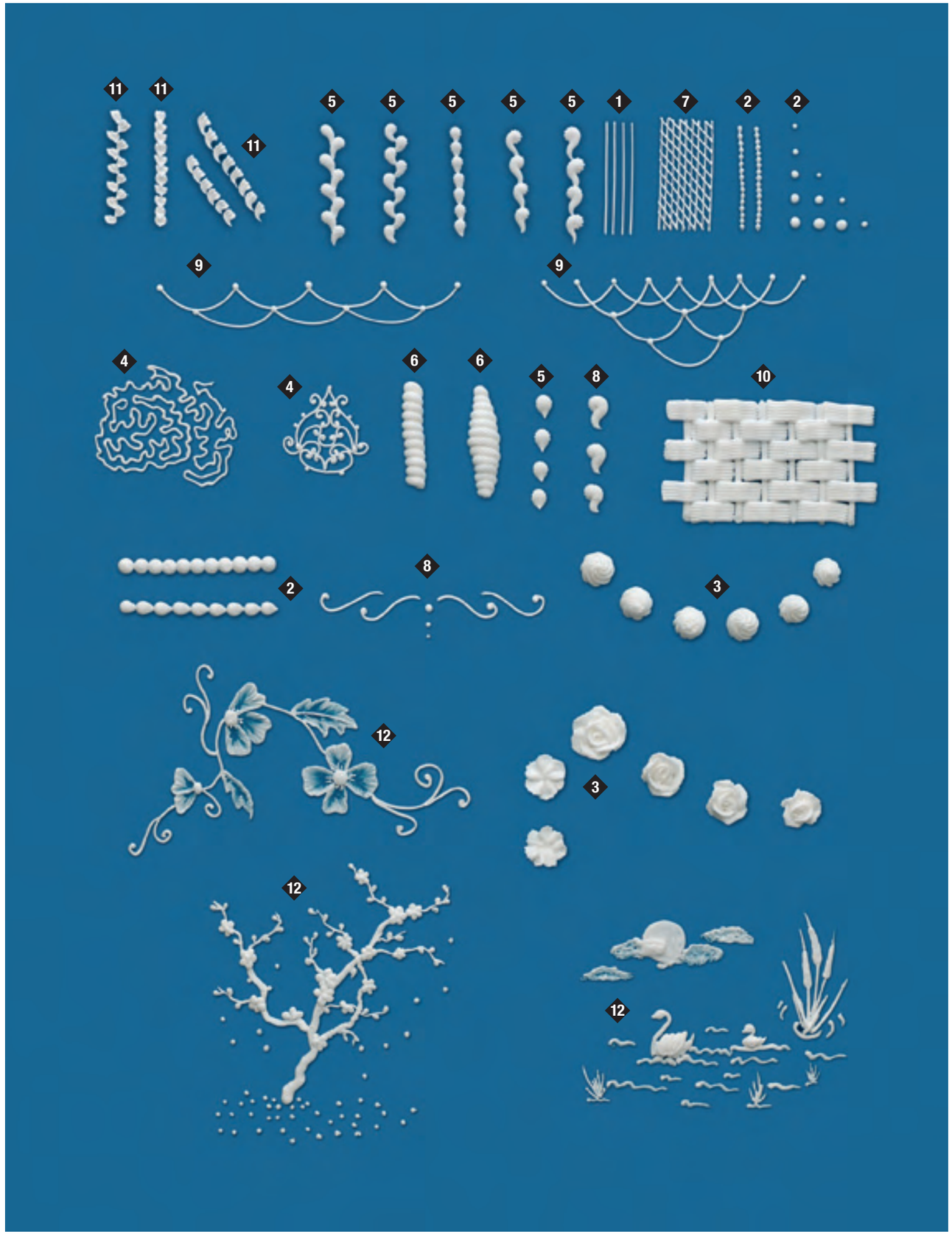
3 Rosettes/roses
Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a star nozzle (tip). Hold the piping bag straight above the surface, with the nozzle just touching the surface. Press out some icing to the size of the rosette you want, lifting the bag slightly to give the rosette space. Stop pressing, then pull up sharply to break the icing. Repeat next to the first rosette to make a border.

4 Filigree
Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a writing nozzle (tip). Hold the piping bag with the nozzle like a pen, between thumb and index finger. Pipe a thread of icing onto the cake in the desired pattern. Keep the flow constant and work in all directions without breaking the thread for as long as possible. Re-join the icing where the break finished to keep the design constant.

5 Shell
Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a star nozzle (tip). Hold the piping bag at a 45-degree angle and 5mm/¼in above the surface. Pipe a small blob of icing and secure to the surface with a little pressure, then bring the bag slowly up, over the blob a little, then towards you and down again – almost like a rocking movement. Pull away sharply to finish off the shell. Pipe the next shell over the end of the previous one to make an edging.

6 Rope/barrel
Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a star nozzle (tip). To pipe a rope, hold the piping bag at a 45-degree angle and 5mm/¼in above the surface. Pipe a line in a continuous spiral motion. To make a barrel shape, gradually increase the pressure on the bag as you reach the middle of the line and then decrease the pressure towards the end.

7 Lattice/trellis
Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a fine, plain nozzle (tip). Pipe parallel lines about 5mm/¼in apart, keeping them as even as possible. Over-pipe parallel lines (keeping the spacing the same) at 90-degrees to the initial lines. A third layer of piping can be piped diagonally to the initial layers for an intricate finish.



Ballet Cake

Cuts into about 16 slices
(or more for little mouths!)

Preparation time: 1½ hours
Cooking time: about 1½ hours, plus cooling, setting and drying

Unsalted butter to grease
1 × 18cm/7in round cake tin (pan)
quantity Madeira Cake mixture (see page 29)
100–125g/3½–4oz white sugarpaste (gumpaste)
Pink food colouring paste
Lustre dust (optional)
Edible glue (optional)
500g/1lb 2oz buttercream (see page 32)
400g/14oz vanilla frosting (see page 35)
Pink sugar crystals (optional)

4 short lengths of pale pink satin ribbon
1 cake stand
Piping (decorating) bag and petal leaf nozzle (tip)

PER SLICE: 463 cals; 20g fat (of which 11g saturates); 73g carbohydrate; 0.4g salt

1 Preheat the oven to 170°C (150°C fan oven)/325°F/Gas mark 3. Grease and line **1** a deep 18cm/7in round cake tin (pan). Fill the tin with the Madeira cake mixture and bake for 1¼–1½ hours until the cake is golden on top and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean **3**. Leave to cool for 10 minutes in the tin, then cool completely on a wire rack.

2 While the cake is cooling, tint the sugarpaste (gumpaste) to light pink (ballet slipper colour). Divide the sugarpaste in half and roll one half into a sausage shape. Using your fingers, press into the top of the shape to form a slipper, leaving the cap of the shoe in place. Make the slipper narrower in the middle and as delicate as possible. Brush the slipper with lustre dust and, with the help of a small knife, insert two short lengths of ribbon in place (alternatively, stick the ribbon to the outside of the shoes with edible glue). Put onto a sheet of greaseproof (wax) paper or baking parchment. Repeat with the other slipper and leave to dry for at least 3 hours (or make the day before and allow to dry overnight).

3 Slice the cooled cake into three even layers **4**. Dye the buttercream to a darker shade of pink. Sandwich the cake layers back together using some of the buttercream. Put the cake on a turntable. Lightly spread buttercream on the sides **5**, then cover the top generously and neatly. Leave to set for 30 minutes, then transfer to a cake stand.

4 Dye 350g/12oz vanilla frosting pale pink. Fit a piping (decorating) bag with a petal leaf nozzle (tip) and fill with the frosting **21**. Holding the bag nearly vertical so that the tip (narrow end facing outwards) is by the base of the cake, create a ruffle **22** by squeezing the bag while making a 2.5cm/1in wide quick back and forth motion, at the same time moving the nozzle up the side of the cake. Finish the ruffle at the top edge of the cake, pulling off as neatly as possible. Repeat ruffling all around the cake.

5 Sprinkle pink sugar crystals, if using, over the top of the cake. Dye the remaining frosting with a hint of pink and pipe a border **22** around the top edge of the cake, then position the slippers and ribbons. Leave to dry.

Making ruffles

Inspired by the many layers of a ballerina tutu, this cake is sure to delight any young girl. You will need a petal nozzle (shaped like a narrow teardrop) to create these dramatic ruffles.





Toadstool

Cuts into 12 slices

Preparation time: 1½ hours
Cooking time: 40 minutes, plus cooling

Unsalted butter to grease
1 × 3-egg quantity of Victoria Sponge mixture (see page 22)
700g/1½lb white sugarpaste (gum paste)
Brown, red, green and yellow food colourings
½ × quantity of buttercream (see page 32)
Cornflour (cornstarch) to dust
Sugar flowers, dolly mixture sweets (candies) and butterfly decorations

1 large rectangular cake board
Piping (decorating) bag and small, fluted nozzle (tip)

PER SLICE: 433 cals; 10g fat (of which 6g saturates); 87g carbohydrate; 0.3g salt

1 Preheat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven)/375°F/Gas mark 5. Grease a 900g/2lb food can and a 1.1 litre/2¼ pint pudding basin and base-line **1** with baking parchment. It doesn't matter how big the basin is, as long as it holds at least 1.1 litres/2¼ pints. A wide, shallow cake makes a better-looking toadstool.

2 Make the cake mixture according to the instructions on page 22. Half-fill the food can and put the remaining mixture into the pudding basin. Bake for about 30 minutes for the 'stalk' in the food can and 40 minutes for the 'mushroom cap' in the pudding basin **3**. Transfer both to a wire rack and leave to cool.

3 Take 350g/12oz sugarpaste (gumpaste). Colour a walnut-sized piece with brown food colouring and the rest red. Colour 125g/4oz green and leave the remaining 225g/8oz white. Roll out the green icing and cut into a kidney shape as a 'grass' base. Fix to a cake board with a little water **12**. Unmould the cakes. Using the food can that the stalk was baked in as a template, cut a semi-circle from one side of the grass.

4 Reserve 50g/2oz white icing. Colour the rest yellow and roll out into a long oblong to fit the stalk. Trim the edges. Spread buttercream **5** thinly around the stalk cake then, holding the cake by the ends, set it at one end of the icing. Roll up the icing around the stalk and press the seam together. With a dab of buttercream, fix the stalk upright in the cut-out semi-circle in the green icing. Spread the top with buttercream.

5 Roll out the red icing to fit the mushroom cap. Set the cake flat on the work surface. Cover the upper surface thinly with buttercream. Lay the red icing over the cake **11**. Smooth in place and trim around the base. Dust the work surface lightly with cornflour (cornstarch) and carefully turn the cake upside down.

6 Colour the remaining buttercream dark brown. Insert a small, fluted nozzle (tip) into a piping (decorating) bag. Fill the bag with the buttercream **21**. Mark a circle in the centre of the base of the mushroom cap, where the stalk will fit. Pipe lines **22** of buttercream radiating from this, to look like the 'gills' of a toadstool. Cover the sponge and red icing join. Turn the cake the right way up and set on top of the stalk. Roll out the reserved white icing and the brown icing. Cut the white icing into dots. Arrange on top of the toadstool, using buttercream to fix them. Cut the brown icing into windows and a door and fix to the stalk in the same way. Decorate the 'grass' with flowers, sweets (candies) and butterflies.