

# ICINGS AND TOPPINGS

Icings and toppings complement cakes. Butter cream is rich, appearing as the filling, coating and decoration of many European cakes. Soft icings are more classical, notably fondant which offers a mirror-smooth background for decorations of nuts, sugared or almond paste flowers or piped writing. Alternatives are 2I1 almond paste or spectacular royal icing coating.

Simple whipped toppings are more frivolous and may also double as fillings. Others include pastry cream thick custard, ricotta and cream cheese. With the exception of whipped or Chantilly cream, icings and toppings are usually added ahead so flavours mellow.

The function of a icing or topping is to highlight the cake it-self. Flavours should be lively; otherwise a finished cake can taste unpleasantly sweet and rich. Colouring should be added with a light hand for soft pastel shades. Nuts, shredded coconut or chocolate shavings may provide a final decorative touch.

## BUTTER CREAM

The most common butter cream is made with egg yolks beaten with hot sugar syrup to a light mousse, then mixed with creamed butter. A lighter version uses egg whites. Flavourings vary from coffee and chocolate to liqueurs and fruit purees. Use un-salted butter and beat thoroughly for lightness. It may also be lightened by folding in an equal volume of pastry cream to make pastry butter cream (Fr. *creme mousseline*).

To make 375 g butter cream

100 g sugar  
6 tbsp water  
L egg yolks  
250 g unsalted butter  
½ tsp vanilla essence

1. In a small saucepan, heat the sugar with the water until dissolved, then boil until the syrup reaches the soft ball stage, 239°F/115°C on a sugar thermometer.
2. Meanwhile, beat the egg yolks until just mixed. Gradually pour in the hot syrup, beating constantly. Beat as fast as possible until the mixture is cool and forms a thick mousse, about 5 minutes.
3. Cream the butter and gradually beat it into the cool yolk mixture. Beat in the vanilla.

### Butter cream variations

1. White butter cream : Makes 375 g butter cream. Following the recipe, substitute Italian meringue made with 2 egg whites, 100 g sugar, and 60 ml water, for egg yolk mousse. Cream the butter and gradually beat in the cooled Italian meringue.
2. Chocolate or coffee butter cream : Melt 175 g chopped plain chocolate or dissolve 2 tbsp instant coffee in 2 tbsp hot water, cool slightly and beat into 375 g butter cream.
3. Orange or lemon butter cream : Beat grated rind of 2 oranges or lemons, 60 ml orange or lemon juice and 45 ml Grand Marnier into 375 g butter cream.
4. Praline butter cream : Beat praline, made with 90 g whole un-blanched almonds and 90 g sugar, into 375 g butter cream.
5. Raspberry butter cream : Puree 250 g fresh raspberries, strain and beat into 12 oz/375 g butter cream.

## Butter icing

This is a domestic version of butter cream, consisting simply of equal weights of creamed butter and sugar thoroughly beaten together. Icing sugar gives a smooth filling, granulated sugar adds crunch, while brown sugar has more taste. Flavourings are the same as for butter cream. For fruit and vegetable cakes, cream cheese may be substituted for the butter.

## SOFT ICINGS

Soft icings vary in complexity from a simple glaze of icing sugar and water to the shimmering density of fondant, the favourite of European pastry chefs. The aim is a thin sugar coating, smooth enough to shine and soft enough to slice easily. Maintaining the correct temperature, so that coarse crystals do not form, is the key to smoothness, assisted by stabilizers such as glucose, golden syrup, cream of tartar and lemon juice. A glaze is thinner than icing, giving a semi-transparent coating; it may be added after baking or baked with the batter, as for some buns.

## Types of soft icing

1. Glace icing : Makes 250 ml icing. Sift 200 g icing sugar into a bowl. Stir in 6-7 tbsp water with  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp vanilla essence, adding enough water to make a soft paste. Lemon or orange juice may be substituted for water.
2. Honey glaze : Makes 250 ml glaze. In a saucepan mix 100 g sugar, 60 ml milk, 60 g butter and 4 tbsp honey. Heat gently, stirring until melted, and bring just to the boil. Spread on batter or dough for baking.
3. Chocolate sachertorte icing : For a 9 in cake. In a heavy saucepan combine 250 g sugar and 125 ml water. Bring just to the boil and leave to cool. Melt 175 g chopped plain chocolate and gradually stir into the sugar syrup. Cook in a water bath over low heat, stirring, for 5 minutes. Take from the heat, stir in  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp vegetable oil and allow to cool, stirring gently until just warm and of coating consistency.

## COATING WITH SOFT ICING

Soft icings and glazes are used while warm so that they set on contact with the cool cake. A cake with sloping sides is easier to coat than one with straight sides.

1. Set the cake on a rack with a tray underneath to catch the drips. Brush the cake with apricot glaze (Pastry and Biscuits) so that crumbs are not picked up by the icing. Leave until cool, about 5 minutes.
2. Warm the icing in a bain-marie until tepid and just thick enough to coat a spoon. If too thin, beat in sifted icing sugar (or more stiff fondant if using). If too thick, add a little water (or sugar syrup for fondant).
3. Pour the icing over the cake so that it drips down the sides.
4. At once spread the top smooth with a metal spatula.
5. Smooth the sides, if necessary patching gaps with more icing. Bumps can be smoothed with a metal spatula dipped in hot water.

## ROYAL ICING

Royal icing is made of icing sugar beaten to a smooth paste with egg white and a little lemon juice for whiteness. It holds a crisp, stiff shape that makes it above all a decorator's tool, the medium for virtuoso displays of ribbons, roses, lattice, basket and geometric designs. They may be white or delicately tinted to show clearly against a plain white background of royal icing. A wide range of special small piping tubes (below) is used, and complicated designs are composed in stages to allow the icing to dry. Royal icing is also handy for writing on soft coatings.

To make 500 ml icing  
1lb icing sugar  
2 egg whites  
1 tsp lemon juice

Sift the icing sugar. Beat the egg whites until frothy and beat in the sugar a tablespoon at a time. Beat in the lemon juice and continue beating at least 8 minutes until the mixture forms 50ft peaks.

Note Lengthy beating makes the icing more flexible. If keeping the icing, beat again before using.

Chocolate royal icing : Add 125 g cocoa powder to the icing sugar before adding three egg whites and finishing off as for royal icing.

Biscuit icing : Sift the icing sugar and add 1 tsp lemon juice and enough egg white to make icing with a thin consistency for dipping biscuits.

## WHIPPED FROSTINGS

Frosting is an apt name for these light toppings. The most common whipped frosting is Italian meringue , made by adding hot sugar syrup to whipped egg whites. This stabilizes the egg whites so the frosting can be kept for two to three days. Americans are particularly fond of whipped frostings, such as boiled fudge frosting made by boiling chocolate with sugar and milk, or seven-minute frosting, beaten until thick in a double boiler. Whipped frosting sets on standing so it must be spread in freeform swirls and peaks while still warm. Vanilla is commonly used as a flavouring, though chopped nuts or raisins may be folded into the icing just before spreading. Whipped frosting can be used as both filling and topping.

## COATING WITH WHIPPED FROSTING

Shredded coconut is often pressed into the surface of a smooth coat of whipped frosting. In Italy, a favourite practice is to pipe the frosting in rosettes then brown it quickly in the oven.

White mountain frosting Add 1 tbsp golden syrup when making sugar syrup in Italian meringue and 1 tsp vanilla essence just before using.

Sultana or nut frosting Fold 75 g sultanas or chopped (slivered nuts into Italian meringue ) before using.

American fudge : Boiled frosting : In a heavy saucepan, combine 60 g chopped unsweetened chocolate with 300 sugar, 125 ml milk, 60 g butter, 1 tbsp golden syrup and a pinch of salt. Boil 1 minute, stirring constantly Cool and add 1 tsp vanilla essence and beat until thick.

Seven-minute frosting : In the top of a double boiler, mix 150 g sugar, 2 tbsp water, 1 tbsp light golden syrup, pinch of salt and 1 egg white. Beat by hand for 1 minute, set over boiling water and beat until stiff peaks form, about 6 minutes. Remove from the heat and continue beating until thick enough to spread. Can be flavoured with vanilla, coffee, shredded coconut or chopped nut.