



Exploring 4-H at Home



Sustainable Agriculture
and Food Security

Pillar: Sustainable Agriculture and
Food Security

Project: Cake Decorating
Unit 1

Activity: Icing a Cake



**Cake Decorating
Unit 1**

Reference and Activity
Guide

Icing a Cake

Supplies

- Prepared round or square cake (can be stacked or single layer)
- At least 4 cups of icing (thin consistency)
- Icing colours*
- Parchment paper*
- Cake board* and serving dish/tray
- Extra bowls
- Turntable*
- Flat metal spatula* or butter knife

Supplies marked * are optional

Instructions

Some cakes are more crumbly than others. For any cake, putting it in the refrigerator for several minutes makes it less crumbly when you ice it.

Crumb Coat

Use thin consistency icing. (Icing that is too stiff grabs at the cake more and pulls up crumbs.) To ice a cake without any crumbs showing (cookies and cream appearance), a crumb coating is done first. This is a thin layer of icing, covering the entire cake. You will still see the cake through the icing, but it will help seal in the crumbs. Set the cake aside till it is dry to the touch. This helps to keep crumbs from loosening and coming into the next smooth layer of icing. Even if you plan to make fluffy, purposefully uneven icing, a thin crumb coat will prevent crumbs from showing through.

Final Icing Coat

Using a flat spatula or table knife, plop icing on the top of the cake and use it for the top and sides. Some prefer to ice the top first, while others like to do the sides first. If you happen to catch any crumbs on your spatula, scrape those off onto the side of your bowl and be sure you have enough icing to cover your crumb coat. You do not want to see the cake through the icing. Placing the cake on a turntable will help you turn the cake without having to lift off the spatula when you coat the sides. A longer spatula or knife works better than a shorter one.

Tricks to help smooth the icing

- Water – Dip your flat spatula in a glass of warm water and tap it or shake it gently to remove the drips. Hold the spatula as flat to the top or edge of the cake as possible while you gently drag the spatula over the icing to smooth it. Dip the spatula back in your glass of water *Cake Decorating Basics Reference and Activity Manual Unit One* } 39 when it starts to grab the icing. Use water sparingly, because it will take a long time for the cake to “set” (dry enough that when you gently touch it with your fingers, no icing sticks to them), if you have used a wet spatula. Too much water will pool on the top of the cake.
- Finger tips or spatula – When the icing is almost smooth and has “set” (dry enough that when you gently touch it with your fingers, no icing sticks to them), lay a piece of wax paper, parchment paper or paper towel over top of it and very gently use your fingers, palm or a spatula to pet or rub it smooth. Do the cake sides too.

The icing will take on the texture of the paper towel, and you may or may not like this effect. If you are using something with texture, double check the sides and top of your iced cake to be sure you did not miss adding texture to any parts of the icing.

Your cake does not have to be perfectly smooth. You'll get better with practice. Your decorations can be put over imperfections and that is what people will be looking at later.

What about the top and side "corner"?

This takes practice and a spatula held almost flat against the side or top you are working on. Chefs like to use the offset (bent handle spatula, looks like a long, narrow egg-flipper) for this. Extra icing you scrape off as you work on this corner? Be sure to put it back in the bowl so you aren't just dragging it around every time you work on the corner.

After you ice the top and sides almost smooth, use your spatula, held as flat to the cake top as possible. With an arched motion, sweep from the outside edge where the little bit of extra icing is, towards the middle of your cake top. Do this all the way around and the final "extra" icing should be spread on your top instead of at this corner. Cover it with a border later. You will notice that many iced cakes have a border piped over this hard-to-perfect edge.

Alternatively, if you do not want a smooth cake base, you can use special tools made for adding designs to your cake or find household kitchen tools such as a fork that will add dimension to your base cake. This is a great trick to use when you just can't get the smooth finish you are looking for whether due to heat or humidity (both of these problems tend to happen during Saskatchewan summers).



Images sourced from:

<https://www.lifeloveandsugar.com/how-to-frost-a-smooth-cake-with-buttercream/>