

Cake decorating

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Buttercream swirls are piped onto the sides of cake.

Cake decorating is one of the [sugar arts](#) that uses icing and other edible decorative elements to make otherwise plain cakes more visually interesting. Alternatively, cakes can be molded and sculpted to resemble three-dimensional persons, places and things.

In many areas of the world, decorated cakes are often the focal point of a special celebration such as a birthday, graduation, bridal shower, wedding, or anniversary.

The art of cake decorating dates back to mid-[17th century](#) in Europe and has since flourished in many regions and countries, including Northwestern Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and South America.

Cake decorating can be a hobby or a job.

Styles of cake decorating

Decorating a cake usually involves covering a cake with some form of [icing](#) and then using decorative sugars, candies, chocolate or icing decorations to embellish the cake. But it can also be as simple as sprinkling a fine coat of icing sugar or drizzling a glossy blanket of [glaze](#) over the top of a cake. Icing decorations can be made by either piping icing flowers and decorative borders or by molding gum paste, [fondant](#), or [marzipan](#) flowers and figures.

The precursor to most styles of cake decorating is the European style, which entails covering a cake with a smooth layer of icing, either [royal icing](#) or rolled fondant, and then using royal icing to pipe flowers, borders and decorative stringwork to adorn the cake. Traditionally, the [wedding cake](#) is a graduated multi-tiered cake stacked in [Victorian](#) style or separated by pillars with flowers and other decorations applied to each tier.

The Lambeth Method uses intricate dimensional overpiping of borders on a fondant covered cake. Scrolls, scallops and stringwork are piped, one layer of icing on top of another, until a very dimensional effect is achieved.

The Australian Method also uses intricate royal icing piping over fondant-covered cakes, but then adds delicate lacework and detailed extension and curtain work.

The Wilton Method uses buttercream icing to both cover the cake and then pipe flowers and decorative borders. Buttercream, although much tastier than either royal icing or rolled fondant, is much less refined making for heavier and less intricate decorations. The Wilton course in cake decorating covers The Basics (Level I), Assorted Flowers & More (Level II), and Rolled Fondant & Tiered Cakes (Level III). Wilton has also popularized the quick and easy approach to cake decorating where a cake is baked in a shaped pan and then colored buttercream icing is piped to color in the design, one star at a time.

Wedding cake styles have evolved over the years from the traditional white iced cake with icing flowers and a plastic groom and bride on top to highly artistic designs that mirror the tastes and style of the wedding couple.



"Cake in White Satin" is a beautiful example of why fondant is such a popular wedding cake choice.

Cake decorators like Jay Ellis, owner of Cakes by Jay in New York, report that current trends call for more sugar detailing and fresh flowers and prices per slice range from \$4 for the inexpensive to the average \$7 to \$10 per slice.

Novelty cakes depicting a favorite hobby, sport, pet or object are in high demand when it comes to making a groom's cake, retirement, or birthday cake.

Cake decorating classes

Cake decorating techniques are sometimes taught at culinary schools, while cake decorating classes can be found at many large crafts stores across North America.

Cake decorating can also be learned in one's own home by following the step-by-step instructions provided in cake decorating books and DVDs.

Cake decorating how-to books, as well as books featuring works of art by cake decorating masters, are readily available at book stores around the world.

Several cake artists offer cake decorating classes and workshops, which can be booked online from their home websites. Free resources for learning cake decorating skills are also available, such as how-to articles on Websites.

History

While the history of cake dates back to ancient Egyptian times when cakes were more bread-like, the art of cake decorating has a relatively short history that dates back to the mid-17th century when cake pans made their debut in kitchens across Europe.

For the next two hundred years, elaborately decorated cakes were mainly displayed at banquets hosted by Europe's aristocracy. It wasn't until the mid-19th century, when the French began including dessert as a separate sweet course served at the end of a meal, that decorated cakes began making regular appearances on tables throughout France and then across Europe.

During the 1840s, the advent of temperature-controlled ovens and the production of baking soda and baking powder made baking cakes much easier.

Much of the cake decorating in the colonized regions of South Africa, North American, New Zealand and Australia, evolved from the Lambeth Method, an old English method that uses intricate, dimensional overpiping of borders on a cake covered in rolled fondant. Scrolls, scallops and stringwork are piped, one layer of icing on top of another, until a very three-dimensional effect is achieved.

In 1929, Wilton Enterprises began as a cake decorating school for interested chefs and caterers. Five years later, Joseph Lambeth published a book illustrating his decorating style, *The Lambeth Method of Cake Decoration and Practical Pastries*, which included step-by-step photographed instructions for piping embellished borders, flowers and figures. Lambeth popularized the techniques of overpiped designs, runouts and stringwork that became the foundation of American style cake decorating.

By the 1960s, the Wilton Method was a well-recognized method of instruction.



"Retro Elegance" was created with pink and brown chocolate fondant.

Cake decorating continues to thrive today as an integral part of the sugarcraft industry and as a popular art form, with unique styles being developed in North America, North Western Europe, Australia and South Africa.

Even though baking from scratch decreased during the latter part of the 20th century in the United States, decorated cakes have remained an important part of celebrations such as weddings, anniversaries, birthdays and other special occasions.

Wilton

Wilton Industries was founded in 1929 when a pulled sugar artist by the name of Dewey McKinley Wilton began a small cake decorating business in Chicago. During the lean years of the, the family business flourished by creating wedding cakes for famous hotels and clubs.

Building on the reputation they earned by catering to the rich and famous, the Wiltons opened a cake decorating and candy-making school for caterers and chefs. The Wilton Method grew in popularity, and in 1947, the Wiltons began marketing cake decorating products. Wilton continued to grow when, in 1983, Wilton merged first with Copco, a kitchenware company, and then in 1991, with Rowoco, to form Wilton Industries.

An *Austin Chronicle* report notes that the Wilton Method was unparalleled until the 1980's when Martha Stewart appeared on the scene. She advocated made-from-scratch cakes that taste as wonderful as they look, thus challenging the Wilton Method that often included using cake mixes and vegetable shortening.

However, Wilton continues to enjoy sweet success according to Hoover's November, 2006 business report that documents Wilton Industries reported \$325 million in sales for 2005.

For the past 75 years, Wilton has provided a wide variety of cake decorating classes throughout United States and Canada, including the Wilton School of Cake Decorating in northern Illinois. Wilton's method instructors have helped introduce the intricate European way of cake decorating to North America, attracting nearly 200,000 students annually from around the world. Major retailers in 150 countries sell Wilton products, ranging from books to decorating tools and more, worldwide.

And thousands of cake decorators in North America have participated in Wilton's annual *Your Take on Cake* contest. Winners have received \$5,000 in cash and an all-expenses-paid trip to attend The Wilton School's two-week Master Course for Cake Decorating in the Chicago suburb of Darien, IL.

ICES

The International Cake Exploration Society (ICES) was founded in 1976 in Monroe, Michigan at the National EXPLO Cake Show sponsored by Betty Jo Steinman.

Dedicated to the promotion and advancement of the sugar arts, ICES meetings are held around the world with an annual convention organized each summer with a different chapter hosting the event. ICES promotes the art of cake decorating by awarding one or more annual scholarships to applicants deemed most likely to develop and promote the art form.

ICES members are men, women, and children who share the love of cake decorating and the confectionery arts. Membership is represented by beginner to professional level cake decorators, ranging from homemakers who occasionally bake cakes for their families to professional bakers, caterers and exhibitors.

Cake Decorating in the Media

Since the early 1990s, lifestyle media have become increasingly popular, especially those focused on food.

Cake artists are regularly featured on popular television shows. For example, [Colette Peters](#) has been featured on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, *This Morning*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, The Discovery Channel, CNN, and Lifetime Television.

Cake decorating as an art

Cake decorating attracts artists from many different mediums. Several current cake artists were trained in other fine arts before turning to cake making.

Colette Peters was a former painter, Ron-Ben Israel of New York was a former dancer, Duff Goldman of Maryland was a graffiti artist, Judy Uson of the Philippines has

a degree in Fine Arts, and Bonnie Gordon of Toronto was a student of art history and is the daughter of Shirley Gordon, a well-known Canadian fashion designer.

For some other decorators, such as Roland Winbeckler (Washington), Earlene Moore (Texas) and Lindy Smith (Great Britain), cake is their first medium.



Cakes can be molded, sculpted and decorated to resemble just about anything.

Cake designers can spend days - even weeks - designing, building and decorating their cakes.

Cake decorating terms

Airbrushing: A quick way to cover a scene or background on the cake's surface with food coloring using an artist's paint gun used with an air pump (compression).

Border: A continuous ribbon of icing used to decorate the top, sides and bottom edges of a cake.

Buttercream: A rich icing made by combining either butter or shortening (or a bit of both) with icing sugar and beating until smooth. Buttercream is an easy all-purpose icing that can be used to both ice and decorate a cake.

Decorating Bags: Small triangular shaped bags made from cloth, plastic or parchment paper which are fitted with decorating tips and filled with icing and used to pipe decorative items such as icing flowers, borders, scrollwork and lacework designs.

Decorating Tips: Sometimes called nozzles. These tips are used to create decorative items such as icing roses, shell borders, basketweave patterns and more. These come in various shapes and are used with an icing or pastry bag so that when the bag is squeezed the icing or cream is piped out in the shape of the tip, which may or may not be the final shape desired. For example, drop flowers are created with a single squeeze, while rose petals are created with skilled maneuvering.

Flower Nail: Shaped like a nail with an oversized head, this is used for piping royal icing and buttercream flowers onto before transferring to the cake.

Frosting: Americans tend to use the term frosting when referring to covering a cake with a creamy, sugar substance, while those in other English speaking countries tend to use the word "icing". In America, frosting often refers to icing that is spread in a freehand way over the cake while icing more often refers to decorating icing, such as piped borders and icing roses.

Fondant: Also called sugar paste, fondant is an icing sugar dough which can be manipulated much in the same way as pie dough and rolled into smooth sheets and draped over cakes to provide a flawless finish.



This "American Bandstand" cake is decked out for the Fourth of July in red, white and blue fondant.

Ganache: A velvety smooth icing made by melting chocolate (either white or dark) and combining with heavy cream.

Gumpaste: Edible clay-like dough made by combining glycerin, gum Arabic and icing sugar and used to mold edible flowers and figures. Gum paste can also be rolled extremely thin and used to make intricate ribbons and lacework as well as delicate flower petals.

Marzipan: A palatable almond substance made from the same ingredients as almond paste; however marzipan has more sugar, less almonds and is milled to a smoother consistency. It's often used for modeling cake decorations and as a base covering underneath fondant.

Piping: A decorating technique where a decorating bag or tube fitted with a decorating tip and filled with icing is gently squeezed to produce shaped dots and ribbons of icing to decorate cakes and other baked goods.

Royal Icing: A sweet white icing made by whipping fresh egg whites (or dried egg whites, meringue powder) with icing sugar. Royal icing produces well-defined icing edges and is ideal for piping intricate writing, borders, scrollwork and lacework on cakes. It dries very hard and preserves indefinitely if stored in a cool, dry place, but is susceptible to soften and wilt in high humidity.

