

Lesson Five Cake Baking & Decorating

Of all the FCH lessons I teach, cake decorating is the by far the girls' favorite! With a few basic techniques, you can turn a plain cake into a really special one – at a fraction of the cost of a bakery decorated cake.

Before they learn to decorate, the girls need to learn how to bake a cake. While cake mixes are convenient, important skills are learned making one “from scratch.” Many people think these taste better. Two recipes are given; each illustrates a different method of cake making.

Cakes are really a type of Quick Bread, leavened the same way with baking powder and perhaps some baking soda. Review Lesson Three; you will use many of the same skills to make a cake. If your group has not done this lesson, go over the skills in “Learning to Bake Quick Breads”.

In this lesson, the girls will learn to:

- Grease and flour a cake pan
- Make a cake from scratch
- Test a cake for doneness
- Frost a cake

Review:

- Creaming butter or shortening with an electric mixer (Lesson 3)
- Recognizing baking powder and baking soda (Lesson 3)

Give each girl a copy of:

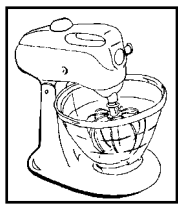
- Learning to Bake Cakes
- Basic Butter Cake Recipe
- Quick Yellow cake Recipe
- Frosting a Cake Skill Page

There are **several different methods of cake making**. This lesson includes two recipes for the most common methods. In the **traditional method**, butter or shortening is creamed, and then sugar and eggs are added. The dry and liquid ingredients are alternately added to this creamed mixture.

Creaming the fat is a vital step in this method. It's important when you make quick breads and cookies, too. But, in cake making, the texture of the cake, and how well it rises, depends on this step. As you beat the butter or shortening, you whip many air bubbles into the fat. This gives the baking powder many spaces in which to expand, making the cake rise and giving it a fine texture.



I demonstrate creaming the shortening with a portable mixer.



Stand mixer

Stand mixers are more powerful than **portable, hand-held mixers**. For creaming ingredients, you will need to use high speed on most hand-held mixers, and medium-high on a stand mixer. Either one does a great job, and certainly is far easier than beating with a spoon like our grandmothers used to do!

The **one-bowl method** uses oil rather than a solid fat. Many of these recipes were developed during WW II when butter was rationed. They are sometimes referred to as “dump” cakes because the ingredients are usually dumped into one bowl and then mixed. The oil produces a moist cake and it’s quick to mix. The leavening expands in the air bubbles you beat into the batter when you mix everything together. One-bowl cakes are very moist, but cakes made with the traditional recipe usually have a finer texture and many people prefer the butter flavor.

Decide **which recipe** you prefer to use. Copy both recipes for the girls. You may want to bake one recipe now and save the other for another lesson to give the girls experience with each method. If not, encourage them to try the other recipe at home. Talk about the advantages (above) of each method of cake making.

Read the student page together “Learning to Bake Cakes”.

Review using an electric mixer safely. Remind the girls to turn off the mixer when adding ingredients and before scraping the sides of the bowl with a spatula. Start the mixer on slow speed and, as the ingredients are blended, increase the speed. With a hand-held mixer, use high speed for creaming the butter, medium-low speed to blend other ingredients. Stand mixers are more powerful; follow the owner’s guide. Remind everyone to keep the beaters down in the bowl to avoid splatters.

Show the girls a **stick of butter**. Most wrappers are marked off in tablespoons to make **measuring** easier. Have the girls count the tablespoons in one stick of butter. One stick = 8 T. or ½ C.

Demonstrate the recipe. If the girls have completed Lesson Three, they should be familiar with the concepts in the first 5 steps of the Basic Butter Cake recipe. However, it’s always helpful to review. Stress the importance of the **creaming the butter** to incorporate lots of air bubbles into it. They should beat the butter at least 2-3 minutes and 5 minutes is better! This also gives everyone a turn using the mixer.

The **dry and wet ingredients are added alternately** to make mixing easier and to help avoid over-mixing, which causes a tough texture.

Pour the batter into prepared pans and put them in the oven. Have an adult put the pans in the oven and rotate them if they are baking unevenly.

There are many different types of **cake pans**. Most bakers prefer aluminum, straight sided pans. Pans with a dark coating absorb heat faster and the cake bakes faster. Cakes bake even faster in glass pans as heat goes through the clear

sides quickly. That's why a lower temperature is recommended for baking cake in glass pans (usually 325 degrees rather than 350).

If you do not have enough **cake pans** for your group, ask the girls to bring an 8" or 9" round pan from home. Use a magic marker to write the girls' initials on the outside of their pan. If necessary, you can use **foil pans**, but they must be greased and floured well to get into all the creases. Decrease oven temperature by 25 degrees. Because foil pans are thinner, the cake will bake quicker. Check for doneness 5 minutes earlier than the recipe states.

The **baking times** in both recipes are given for plain, aluminum pans. Remember that ovens vary greatly, so always check your cake a few minutes before the lowest time stated in the recipe.

I serve my demonstration cake for the girls' snack and have them **take their cake home** to share with their family. Each girl puts her cake on a large, disposable plastic plate, then frosts and decorates it.

If you have a large group, each round cake can be cut in half. I had to do that one year and the girls decorated their semi-circle to make rainbows, umbrellas (cutting one strip off the bottom for the handle), and a hill! They thoroughly enjoyed the creative challenge! You can also use pot-pie pans; there is enough batter for 5-6 pans of that size. Decrease the temperature and baking time (see above). Cupcakes are another possibility; the recipe yields about 2 dozen. Baking time: 18-22 minutes.

What You'll Need for this lesson:

Ingredients for Basic Butter Cake (2 layers per recipe)

½ C shortening
1 C sugar
2 eggs (large)
2 C All-Purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
salt
2/3 C milk
1 teaspoon vanilla

Ingredients for Quick Yellow Cake (2 layers per recipe)

1 ½ C All-Purpose flour
1 ½ C sugar
3 t. baking powder
½ t. salt
1 Cup milk
2/3 C vegetable oil
3 eggs
2 t. vanilla

For both recipes:

Extra shortening and flour
to grease & flour the pans

Supplies for Basic Butter Cake (Traditional Method)

Cake pans, 8" or 9"

Paper towels or waxed paper to grease the pans

Electric Mixer

Large bowl (to cream butter & then add other ingredients)

Medium bowl (to measure and mix dry ingredients)

Small bowl or custard cup to crack eggs into

1 C. measuring cup for dry ingredients

Measuring cup for liquids

Measuring Spoons

Table knife (to level flour)

Large Spoon

Rubber Spatula

Whisk, optional, but very helpful for mixing dry ingredients thoroughly

Cooling Rack(s)

Toothpicks to test cake

Styrofoam or sturdy plastic plate for cooled cakes

Supplies for Quick Yellow Cake (One-bowl Method)

Cake pans, 8" or 9"

Paper towels or waxed paper to grease the pans

Electric Mixer

Large bowl

Small bowl to crack eggs into

1C and 1/2 C. measuring cups for dry ingredients

Measuring cups for liquids

Measuring Spoons

Table knife (to level flour)

Whisk

Large Spoon

Rubber Spatula

Cooling Rack(s)

Toothpicks to test cake

Sturdy plastic or Styrofoam plate for cooled cakes

For Frosting and Decorating:

Canned or homemade frosting (1 can should cover 2 layers, but buy an extra can or two. Kids love icing!)

Waxed paper strips (to put under cake edges while icing the cake)

Knife or cake decorator's spatula to spread icing

Decorator's Icing – purchased in tubes, or recipe in Extending the Lesson

Decorator's bag, coupler and tip(s)

Candies, cookies or anything else to decorate the cake

Name:

Learning to Bake Cakes

We often celebrate special occasions with a cake, and they're always a favorite dessert. There are **many types of cakes**: rich, dense pound cake, light high-rising angel food cake, devil's food cake, carrot cake, pineapple upside-down cake, and butter cake, to name a few.

Whatever type you choose, you want a delicious, tender, moist cake that tastes as good as it looks. We'll make a basic yellow cake "from scratch". There are many delicious cake mixes, but it's not difficult to make a cake with ingredients you probably have on hand.

There are different ways to make a cake. In the **traditional method**, you cream butter or shortening with sugar and eggs and then add the other ingredients. This method yields a fine textured, tender cake.

The **one-bowl method** is quicker and uses oil rather than butter so the creaming step is eliminated. All of the liquid ingredients are added at once to the dry ingredients, and then you beat everything together - but only for one minute. If you beat the batter too long, the cake will be tough. This type of cake is delicious, too, but will have a somewhat coarser texture.

Here are some important **cake baking tips** to remember:

Grease the cake pan with solid vegetable shortening (not margarine, butter or oil). Use a paper towel or piece of waxed paper to spread the shortening evenly over the sides and bottom of the pan. Look at the pan carefully to be sure you haven't missed any spots. Then **flour the pan**. Put 1-2 T. flour in the pan and gently shake and tap it all around to cover the bottom and sides of the pan. Tip out the excess flour and discard. Your cake will come out of the pan easier if you do this step correctly.

Baking powder is the leavening in our recipe that makes the cake rise. If you keep it dry and store it tightly covered, it should work well for at least 6 months. After that, it's a good idea to buy a fresh supply. If you want to test it, put 1 teaspoon of baking powder into a half cup of warm water. It should fizz. If it doesn't fizz, throw it out; it will not leaven your cake.

We will use **All-Purpose flour**. In cake baking, it is especially important to measure accurately. Too much flour makes a dry cake. Some recipes call for **cake flour**. This type of flour is lower in protein; so it makes more tender cakes and pastries. These cakes may crumble easily, so frost it very carefully. If you have a recipe that uses cake flour, you can substitute all-purpose flour as follows:

1 Cup cake flour = 1 Cup **minus** 2 T. all purpose flour



The girls take turns mixing cake batter with a portable mixer.

Be sure to read labels carefully and use **baking powder**, not baking soda.

When you use the **traditional method** to make a cake, you will cream the butter by beating it with an electric mixer until it is light and fluffy. Real **butter** gives the best flavor. Shortening, especially butter-flavored, also gives good results. Stick margarine may be substituted, but not tub margarine. Set butter out ahead of time to soften; do not melt it!

When the butter is fluffy, gradually add the **sugar**. Continue beating; 4 or 5 minutes is not too long! Beating creates many tiny air bubbles that make your cake rise well.

Crack **one egg** at a time into a small bowl or custard cup and check to be sure there are no bits of eggshell in it before adding it to the batter.

Preheat the oven, allowing at least 20 minutes for the oven to reach the correct temperature. When the pans are ready to go into the oven, be sure to leave an inch or two of space between them so the hot air can circulate and the cakes bake evenly. The hottest part of the oven is the back. Keep a close watch on any pans in the back and rotate them to the front if they are getting too brown. The top rack is hotter than the lower one. Use the lower rack if possible.

Try not to open the oven door during the first 20 minutes of baking time. This is a critical time while the cake rises. Opening the door reduces oven temperature and may affect the rising of your cake.

Check the baking time in your recipe. Usually a time range is given, such as 30-35 minutes. **Set a timer** for the lower time (30 minutes). In fact, you can check your cake a few minutes before that. Ovens vary; some bake faster than others. If you have several pans in the oven, it may take a little longer to bake than baking just one.

The cake is done when a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. If dough or crumbs stick to the toothpick, return the pan to the oven for a few more minutes and re-check with a clean toothpick. Watch the cake carefully; over-baked cakes turn out dry.

When the cake is done, **set the pan on a cooling rack** so air can circulate around the bottom of the pan, too. Allow cake to cool 15 minutes. Then remove it from the pan and allow the cake to cool thoroughly before frosting. Or you may leave the cake in the pan and frost and serve it from the pan. Just be sure it has cooled thoroughly before frosting or decorating. Enjoy!

Always ask adult permission before using the oven!
Use sturdy hot pads or oven mitts to protect your hands.

Name:

Basic Butter Cake Traditional Method

Ingredients:

1 Cup shortening or butter, softened
1 Cup sugar
2 eggs
3 Cups All-purpose flour
3 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/3 Cups milk
2 teaspoons vanilla



Frosting our Basic Butter Cakes

Method:

Yield: two 8" or 9" layers, or one 9" x 13" layer

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour the bottom and sides of pan(s).
2. Cream the **butter or shortening** until it is fluffy, (high speed on a hand-held mixer). Use a spatula to scrape the sides of the bowl, turning the mixer off first.
3. Slowly add the **sugar**, turning the mixer off as you add it. Beat the mixture 4-5 minutes.
4. Add **eggs**, one at a time. Beat till light and fluffy.
5. In a separate bowl, mix together the **flour, baking powder** and **salt**. Set aside.
6. Measure the **milk**. Leave it in the measuring cup. Add the **vanilla** to the milk.
7. Add about a third of the dry ingredients to the butter mixture. Stir just enough to blend.
8. Add about a third of the liquid ingredients and stir.
9. Continue adding the dry and wet ingredients alternately, stirring only enough to mix everything together.
10. Pour batter into two prepared 8" pans. Spread evenly with spatula.
11. **Bake 28-32 minutes** or until toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
12. Set the pans on a wire rack to cool for 15 minutes. Remove cakes from pans and cool thoroughly before frosting.



Tip: After Step 6, re-read the ingredient list to be sure you haven't forgotten anything!

Name:

Quick Yellow Cake One-Bowl Method

Ingredients:

2 1/2 Cups All-Purpose flour
1 1/2 Cups sugar
3 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 Cup milk
2/3 Cup vegetable oil
3 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla

Method:

Yield: two 8" or 9" layers, or one 9" x 13" layer

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 8" or 9" cake pans.
2. In a large bowl, combine the **flour, sugar, baking powder** and **salt**. Whisk thoroughly.
3. Measure the **milk**; add the **vanilla** to it. Set aside.
4. Crack the **eggs** into a small bowl. Check for eggshells.
5. Measure the **oil**.
6. Add **milk, vanilla, eggs**, and **oil** to the dry ingredients.
7. Beat for 1 minute on medium speed with a hand-held mixer.
Do not over mix!
8. Pour batter into prepared pans. **Bake 27 – 32 minutes** or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
9. Cool cake in pans on wire rack for 15 minutes. Remove cake from pans and cool thoroughly before frosting.

Name:

Frosting a Cake

Your Notes

Most of the time, we like frosting on our cakes. However, some cakes, like pound cake, may be served plain because the cake itself is very rich. Others, like angel food cake, are light and airy and could be weighted down with too much icing. A bundt cake, baked in a ring-shaped pan, is often served plain, or drizzled with a glaze (a type of thinned frosting).

For a quick finish on a cake, simply sprinkle it with powdered sugar. Put the powdered sugar (also called confectioner's sugar) in a sieve and lightly sift it onto the cake. To create a design, place a paper doilie on top of the cake first, then sift powdered sugar over the cake surface, and carefully lift the doilie straight up, off the cake. This shows up best on a dark cake.

Cool your cake thoroughly before frosting it. You may want to leave it in the pan and just frost the top, or remove it from the pan(s) so you can decorate the sides, too. Cool cake in the pan for 15 minutes before removing from the pan. Then invert the cake onto a cooling rack. When the cake has cooled, place it onto a plate or cake board.

Place strips of waxed paper under the edges of your cake to keep the plate clean while you frost the cake. Gently brush off any loose crumbs. Use a thin, easily spreadable icing. Canned icing works fine or use the recipe on this page.

If you are making a layer cake, place the bottoms of the layers together, with a layer of icing in between. Then use a metal spatula to ice the sides. With a large amount of icing on the spatula, spread the icing on the sides of the cake. Be sure the spatula does not touch the cake; it should touch only the icing. Otherwise, you will get crumbs in your icing. If that happens, wipe your spatula on a paper towel and start again with fresh icing. Then ice the top of your cake. Remove the waxed paper strips.

Want a smooth look? After frosting the cake, dip the spatula in a glass of water and gently smooth the icing with the wet spatula. If you do this, be sure to allow time for the frosting to dry before adding any decorations.

For other effects, swirl the icing with the spatula. Press lightly so you don't get crumbs into the frosting. Or, take a fork or cake comb and gently create lines across the cake. You can quickly decorate the cake by sprinkling crushed cookies, candy, or nuts on your cake. This also helps hide any crumbs that may have gotten into your icing.

Basic Butter Icing

½ Cup butter or margarine
4 Cups powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
2+ Tablespoons water or milk

Beat softened butter or margarine. Slowly add some of the powdered sugar. Add vanilla and water or milk. Gradually add remaining powdered sugar. Beat till fluffy and smooth. Add just enough additional water or milk to make a spreadable consistency.

Chocolate variation: Add ½ Cup unsweetened cocoa and 1-2T. more water.

Makes enough to frost 2 layers or a 9" x 13" cake.

Hint: Keep an extra box of powdered sugar on hand. You may need to adjust the icing consistency if you add too much liquid, or you may want to make more icing.

Decorating Shortcuts

After you've frosted the cake, you may want to decorate it. The next four pages, show you how to decorate like a pro! If you don't have decorator's tips, or if time is short, you can try some simple shortcuts to create a special cake.

Candies and cookies make wonderful decorations. Use life-savers around the base of candles, or press the candles into gumdrops and set them on the cake. Flatten gumdrops with your fingers and shape into flowers. Sprinkle flattened gumdrops with sugar to make them less sticky and cut with scissors to create petals.

Many colors of decorating gel and tubes of decorator's icing can be purchased in the baking aisle of most supermarkets. The gels can be squeezed directly from the tube without special tips. They come in especially vivid colors. Tubes, and aerosol cans of decorator's icing, can be purchased with tips to fit that create effects similar to those found in the next section on cake decorating.

Some of my students used these decorating shortcuts to create the beautiful cakes below. Their efforts were awarded with ribbons at the county fair!



After the cake was frosted, candy corn & fudge-striped cookies were pressed on top to create a beautiful turkey.



A small circle cake for the head was attached to the body with icing and then the entire cake was frosted with red icing. Peanut butter cups for the ladybug's spots & black gel for the lines & eyes added the finishing touches.



The smiley face was made with black gel on yellow icing. The plate was then edged with yellow rick-rack for a sunny happy face cake!

Extending the Lesson ... Cake Decorating

Birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, and holidays – we celebrate many of life's events with a special cake. Purchasing a decorated cake can be quite expensive. With a few basic techniques, you can turn a plain cake into your own creative masterpiece fit for any celebration!

Every year, the favorite activity of all the girls I teach is cake decorating. We've used the same techniques to decorate cookies, and I've even used larger tips to pipe mashed potatoes into decorative shapes. Learn the basics, and let the creativity flow!

Cake decorating supplies are available at many craft stores, and I've purchased much of what I need at Wal-Mart. Check your yellow pages for cake decorators; they may also sell supplies.

Wilton Enterprises is the leader in cake and candy supplies. Be sure to visit their website, www.wilton.com. You'll find loads of wonderful ideas, pages of illustrated directions, and online videos to show you exactly how to decorate. The Wilton Yearbook is another great source of decorating ideas and products. You can call Wilton at 1-800-794-5866.

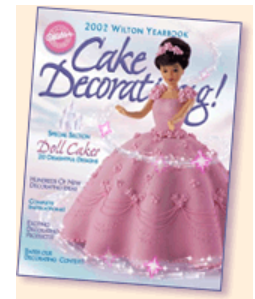
To get started, you'll need at least one cake decorator's bag, a coupler, and some tips. **Bags** come in different sizes and types. I prefer a **12" Featherweight bag** and find this also works well for the girls. It's strong yet easy to squeeze, and washable. Clear plastic, **disposable bags** are available from Wilton in packages of 12 and 24. They are very convenient, especially if you want to decorate with many different colors. Fill each bag with a different color of icing and discard when you're done.

There are many **tips** to choose from to achieve all kinds of special effects. I recommend starting with a **star tip, a writing tip, and a leaf tip**. You can do all of your decorating with just a star tip, but adding the other two gives you many more creative options. Each tip is numbered, and each comes in different sizes. You can select the sizes you prefer; I like the #21 star tip, #4 writing tip, and a #69 leaf tip.

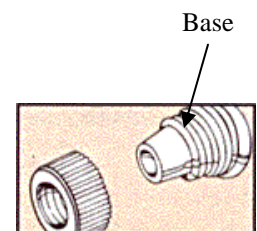
A **coupler** fits inside the bag and has a ring that screws on the outside, holding your tip in place. By simply unscrewing the coupler, you can change tips.



A beautiful sunflower cake won a ribbon at the county fair.



A Wilton Yearbook



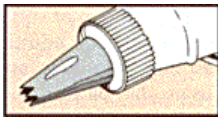
A coupler



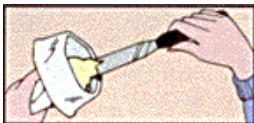
Let's get started! Unscrew the ring from the coupler. Insert the base of the coupler all the way down into the narrow end of the bag. Push it in as far as you can. New bags must be trimmed to fit the coupler. Mark the bag where you can feel the bottom ring of the coupler. Push the coupler base back up into the bag. Cut across the mark you made on the end of the bag.



Push the coupler base back down through the bag opening so it fits snugly.

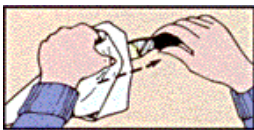


Place your tip over the coupler base and screw the ring onto the base, securing the tip in place.

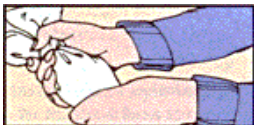


When you want to change tips, simply unscrew the coupler ring and remove the tip. Put the new tip on and screw it in place

You're ready to **put the icing into the bag**. Fold the top half of the bag down. Use a metal spatula to put several tablespoons of icing into the bottom of the bag.

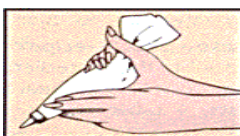


Hold the bag on the outside between your thumb and fingers and pull the spatula out of the bag. Squeeze the bag as you pull the spatula out so the icing remains in the bag. Repeat this step until you have about half a cup of icing in the bag. A word of caution: Everyone tends to overfill the bag! It is much easier to work with a small amount of icing, and it's less likely to ooze out the top if the bag is not so full.



Twist the bag closed, forcing the icing down into the bag. Squeeze a little icing out of the tip, back into the bowl to squeeze out any air in the bag.

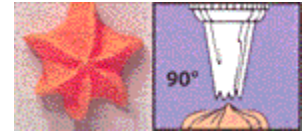
You're ready to decorate! Practice first on waxed paper, or an inverted cake pan. Refill the bag as needed. I encourage the girls to spend a lot of time practicing before they start decorating their cake. Have them unscrew the coupler and change tips. They will enjoy discovering the different effects they can achieve with each tip and you'll be surprised how quickly they learn the technique.



Be sure to tightly twist the bag closed. Hold the twist in the V between your thumb and fingers. Steady the tip of the bag with two fingers of your other hand.

To achieve different effects, you will hold the bag either straight up and down at a 90-degree angle, or slightly sideways at a 45-degree angle.

Let's experiment with a **star tip**. This tip is so versatile! To make stars or shells, use a medium consistency icing (see next page). Hold the bag straight up with the tip about ¼" above the surface, as shown. Squeeze the bag to form a star. Stop squeezing, then pull the tip straight up and away. Stars will be neatly formed only if you stop squeezing before you pull the tip away.



A **star border** is an attractive edge to any cake. Try to pipe a row of stars all the same size.



The same **star tip** can be used to make **shells** (above). Hold the bag at a 45-degree angle slightly above the surface. Squeeze hard, letting the icing fan out as it lifts the tip, but do not lift the bag. Gradually relax your pressure as you lower the tip and pull it to one side. Stop the pressure and pull the tip away. It will take a little practice. Shells in a row make another type of attractive border.

Change to a **leaf tip** such as #67 or #69. Use a thin icing for leaves. Hold the bag at a 45-degree angle, touching the surface. The wide opening should be parallel to the surface. Squeeze to build up the base of the leaf; lift the tip slightly and pull the bag to one side, relaxing the pressure as you go. Stop squeezing and pull the bag away.



Use the same tip to make ruffles. Start as you would for a leaf. Then move the bag back-and-forth, overlapping slightly. Ruffles make pretty borders!

The right consistency of icing is important when decorating. Flower petals will need a stiff consistency to stand up. For writing or outlining, you'll need a thin consistency so the icing flows smoothly. For stars and shells, use a medium consistency.

Basic Decorator's Icing – Stiff Consistency

1 Cup solid white vegetable shortening
1 pound (about 4 Cups) sifted powdered sugar
2 Tablespoons water
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Beat shortening till light and fluffy. Add remaining ingredients and beat on medium speed until well mixed. Makes 3 cups.

This icing may be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator up to two weeks or frozen up to four months. Bring to room temperature before decorating.

Medium Consistency – Into 1 Cup of stiff icing, mix 1 teaspoon of water. Use for stars, shells, rosettes, zigzags, and dots.

Thin Consistency – Into 1 Cup of stiff icing, mix 2 teaspoons of water. Use for writing and outlining.



Black decorating gel created the lines for the free-hand shapes in this beautiful stained glass cake. Each shape was then filled in with blue, green, yellow or red gel & the gel was spread with a knife. This cake won a first place ribbon at the county fair!

Add more water if the icing seems too stiff. As you work, the icing tends to get a little thinner as the warmth of your hands affects the shortening.

Use white shortening, rather than butter, for your decorator's icing. You'll get truer colors. To **frost the cake**, use your favorite icing recipe or use the one above and replace half the shortening with butter. Add enough water or milk to achieve a spreadable consistency.

To color the icing: Do not use liquid food coloring for icing intended for decorating. It thins the icing too much and tends to yield pale colors. Most supermarkets also carry gel food coloring, with the 4 basic colors in a box. This gives more vibrant colors and should not thin the icing significantly.

Wherever cake decorating supplies are sold, you can purchase **paste food color** in tiny jars. A little of this goes a very long way! Swirl a clean toothpick into the paste, then into your icing and mix. Repeat until the desired color is achieved. Paste comes in every color imaginable and can be ordered from Wilton Enterprises.

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