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Mary Berry



Simple Cakes

Contents

Cover

List of Recipes

Title Page

Dedication

Introduction

Cake-making Methods

Ingredients and Equipment

Chocolate Cakes

Sachertorte

Chocolate brownies

Death by chocolate cake

Chocolate crispies

Cappuccino cake

Chocolate and vanilla marble loaf

Chocolate chip cookies

Chocolate éclairs

The ultimate chocolate roulade

Favourite Cakes

Victoria sandwich

Hokey pokey coffee cake

Cherry cake

American apple and apricot cake
Carrot cake with mascarpone topping
Lemon drizzle traybake
Black cherry Swiss roll
Ginger and treacle spiced traybake
Maple syrup cake
Australian apple and raisin cake
Family fruit teabread
Banana loaf
Classic sticky gingerbread
Celebration cake

Bite-sized Cakes

Orange Scotch pancakes
Devonshire scones
Blueberry muffins
Mini St Clements muffins
Flapjacks
Lavender biscuits
Diggers
Butter shortbread

Meringues, Tarts and Pastries

Meringues
Pavlova
Lemon meringue roulade
Pecan pie
Key lime pie
Banoffi pie
Spiced apple strudel

Blueberry and summer fruit cheesecake
French apple tart

Cakes for Occasions

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List of Recipes

American apple and apricot cake

Australian apple and raisin cake

Banana loaf

Banoffi pie

Black cherry swiss roll

Blueberry and summer fruit cheesecake

Blueberry muffins

Butter shortbread

Cappuccino cake

Carrot cake with mascarpone topping

Celebration cake

Cherry cake

Chocolate éclairs

Chocolate and vanilla marble loaf

Chocolate brownies

Chocolate chip cookies

Chocolate crispies

Classic sticky gingerbread

Death by chocolate cake

Devonshire scones

Diggers

Family fruit teabread

Flapjacks

French apple tart

Ginger and treacle spiced traybake

Hokey pokey coffee cake

Key lime pie

Lavender biscuits

Lemon drizzle traybake

Lemon meringue roulade

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Victoria sandwich

SIMPLE CAKES

Mary BERRY

Step by step to everyone's
favourite cake recipes

BBC
BOOKS

For Abby and Grace, our new twin granddaughters. What joy they have brought to us all. May they grow up to enjoy creating and cooking as much as their dotting granny!



Introduction

There really is nothing to beat a good home-made cake. There is no mystique about making them. You simply need to follow a good, sound recipe meticulously, use the very best ingredients, bake it in the right-sized tin at the advised oven temperature and then enjoy the result. In this book I have chosen the most popular classics, plus a few of my own favourites, and given step-by-step instructions for success with all of them.

Baking is a very straightforward science. The most important thing is to weigh out the ingredients accurately: 50 grams more flour in a cake would make it heavy and dry – unlike a soup or casserole, for example, where a few extra grams of meat or vegetables would not make any difference to the end result. I am often told by people that their granny made the best cakes they had ever tasted but she never weighed anything. However, when you stop to think about it, in the past there wasn't the choice we have now and most likely she only ever made a Victoria sandwich and a fruit cake, using the same tablespoon and cup to measure the ingredients every time. So even if she didn't weigh the ingredients she had an accurate system of measuring, and the recipes were probably handed down to her with the very same spoon and cup!

Fortunately, things are much easier in the kitchen nowadays. Not only do we have accurate scales but most of us also have electric mixers and food processors, so cake making is a doddle.

Cakes aren't just for teatime. Many of the cakes in this book can double up as dessert – for example, Lemon

Meringue Roulade ([see here](#)), Blueberry and Summer Fruit Cheesecake ([see here](#)) and Pecan Pie ([see here](#)). I've included a good selection of biscuits, too, which can be served with ice creams and creamy desserts, added to a lunchbox, or simply enjoyed as a snack at any time of day.

I'm often asked how I manage to eat all these delicious cakes without becoming huge. The answer is to have a small slice, and not too often. Enjoy cakes in moderation, with family and friends, and you won't find the pounds piling on.

Cake-making Methods

All-in-one method

This is so simple and, to my mind, the easiest and best method for most cakes, traybakes and Victoria sandwiches. Simply measure all the ingredients into a large mixing bowl - I usually put the eggs in first and the rest of the ingredients on top. If butter or margarine is being used, it must be soft, at room temperature, so that it blends in easily with the rest of the ingredients. You can soften it in a microwave, if necessary, but take great care. It should be just soft, not overheated and oily. Beat for a short time, just until the ingredients are mixed - this can be done with a hand-held electric mixer, a free-standing mixer or in a food processor. Don't overbeat, otherwise the cake will be close-textured. As the beating time is so short, a little baking powder is added to the mixture in most recipes, even if self-raising flour is being used, to give extra rise.

Creaming

This is beating the fat (usually butter or margarine) and sugar together at room temperature until light and fluffy, then beating in the eggs and lastly folding in the flour by hand. I rarely use this method now, as I get quicker and consistently better results with the all-in-one method.

Whisking

Most whisked cakes contain no fat, and are therefore known as fatless sponges. The Black Cherry Swiss Roll [here](#) is made by this method. The eggs and sugar are whisked together with an electric whisk (or by hand) until the mixture is thick and has greatly increased in volume. It should be thick enough to leave a trail on the surface of the mixture in the bowl when drizzled from the whisk. The flour

is then carefully folded into the mixture with a plastic spatula or a large metal spoon. I was taught to use plain flour for fatless sponges but I find self-raising is better and foolproof.

Rubbing in

I've only used the rubbing-in method for scones and pastry in this book. The fat is diced and then rubbed into the flour with your fingertips, or with a food processor or electric mixer, until the resulting mixture looks like a crumble.

Melting

Traditionally this simple method is used for gingerbread (see Classic Sticky Gingerbread [here](#)). Usually golden syrup and/or treacle, sugar and fat are melted in a pan (it's important not to overheat them), then added to the other ingredients and mixed together. The mixture is then poured into the tin and baked.

Making pastry

Pastry can be made by hand or in a food processor. Be sure to have the fat at room temperature so it is easy to rub in. Most flan cases are 'baked blind' before the filling is added, otherwise the pastry would not be cooked in the time it takes to cook the filling. To bake blind, prick the base of the uncooked flan case with a fork and line it with baking parchment. Fill with baking beans or rice to weigh it down and then bake in a pre-heated oven until the pastry is nearly cooked. Remove the beans and baking parchment and return the pastry to the oven for 5-10 minutes to dry out. The cooked pastry case is now ready for the filling.

Ingredients and Equipment

INGREDIENTS

Below is a guide to the ingredients used in this book. Always buy the very best you can afford, and keep an eye on the use-by dates on dry ingredients such as flour and baking powder – they don't keep indefinitely.

Baking powder

Baking powder is a mixture of bicarbonate of soda and an acid powder, usually cream of tartar, plus a starch filler such as cornflour or rice flour. It is used when you need extra raising agent in a plainer cake mixture (e.g. scones) and with self-raising flour for the all-in-one method. In some recipes, such as gingerbread and some American and Canadian cakes, bicarbonate of soda is used on its own.

Bought pastry

I never make puff pastry and if I am in a hurry I might buy shortcrust or sweet pastry, too.

Butter

Butter is the best fat to use for baking when you can really taste the flavour. For shortbread it is a must. If using it for the all-in-one or creaming method, it should be at room temperature. I love to use unsalted butter for baking, although it is more expensive than salted. To get butter to room temperature when taking it straight from the fridge, microwave it for a few seconds, until soft but not oily.

Chocolate

Cocoa powder gives a true chocolate flavour in most cakes, but avoid the sweetened cocoa used for milk drinks. I like

to 'cook' the cocoa powder in most recipes by mixing it to a paste with a little boiling water before adding it to the other ingredients. If a recipe calls for plain chocolate, I use Bournville and melt it slowly. Remember, chocolate can melt in a child's pocket so only a little heat is needed! Milk chocolate is difficult to melt and does not give a good flavour in cakes. When using white chocolate, buy a good-quality Continental one and take care when melting - if it gets too hot it will become grainy. Pure chocolate chips in white and dark chocolate are easy to melt and good to use in recipes.



Clockwise from top: dark chocolate, almond extract, vanilla extract

Dried fruit

The dried fruits I use most in baking are sultanas, currants, raisins, apricots and cherries. I am not a fan of candied peel and angelica. Most fruit now comes ready washed. It can dry out in the packet, once opened, so rewrap it in another polythene bag. If you know that you will not be making fruit cakes for some time and have dried fruit in the cupboard, freeze it in the polythene bag and it will keep for a couple of years.



Clockwise from top: currants, pecans, almonds, walnuts, mixed fruits, apricots and candied peel (centre)

Eggs

Large eggs are used for all the recipes in this book. For most recipes, and especially meringues, they should be at room temperature, as they then give a greater volume when beaten. If storing separated eggs in the fridge, keep the whites in a container covered with cling film and write in marker pen on the cling film the number of whites in the pot. They should keep for a week. Leftover yolks need to be kept in a small container. Spoon over a little cold water to prevent a skin forming on the yolks, then cover with cling film and write the number of yolks in the pot on the cling film. Use yolks for lemon curd or for caramel custard or crème brûlée.

Extracts and flavourings

Vanilla and almond extracts are stronger and far more authentic than essences. I avoid flavourings such as lemon or orange in bottles, preferring to use fresh lemons and oranges.

Flours

Most of the recipes for cakes in this book use self-raising flour. Plain flour is used mainly for pastry. In an emergency, you can use self-raising flour for everything. I rarely sift flour, although I do for fatless sponges made by the whisking method, as it combines with the eggs and sugar more easily. I also sift the flour to remove any lumps if there are other dry ingredients with it, such as cocoa powder or spices. Some supermarkets sell a soft cake flour but I have not suggested using it as it can be difficult to find and I have always had success with self-raising flour. Wholemeal flour gives a closer texture and nutty flavour. For cakes and scones, I find it best to use a self-raising wholemeal flour.



Clockwise from top: flour,
puff pastry and baking
powder



Clockwise from top left: egg, butter and margarine

Margarine

Margarine is very good for baking and the flavours have greatly improved over recent years. However, many of the baking margarines in tubs, such as Blueband and Stork SB, have disappeared from the supermarkets now, and you have to be sure you are buying a margarine and not a spread. It is easy to confuse the two, since they are packaged in a similar way. All the spreads contain a higher proportion of water and less fat than margarine and butter. The brand name is on top and the word 'spread' often appears on the bottom of the tub in small letters. When baking, you need fat in order to keep a cake moist, and if you use a spread that has had water added - some of them contain as much as 50 per cent - it will affect the keeping quality of the cake and the results will not be as good.

Nuts

Keen bakers use whole, flaked and ground almonds, plus walnuts, pecans and more. I always keep nuts in the freezer in one big bag, each type in its own small bag. Whole nuts keep for years well wrapped and frozen and you know that they will taste fresh. They go rancid after a few months on the larder or kitchen shelf.

Oil

Some American and Canadian cake recipes - carrot cake, for example - use oil instead of butter or margarine. Only use vegetable, sunflower or nut oil, not olive oil, which is far too strong in flavour.

Sugars and sweeteners

I use unrefined caster sugar, golden granulated, light and dark muscovado, and demerara sugar in the recipes in this book. White caster sugar is finer than granulated and therefore perfect for cakes. Some brown sugars have added colouring, so I prefer to use natural brown sugar, which is always stated on the label. When muscovado sugar becomes hard in the packet through long storage, microwave it for a few moments to separate the grains. Icing sugar is best for icing and dusting over cakes to give an attractive finish.

Golden syrup, black treacle, maple syrup and honey are also good to have on the larder shelf for cake making.



Clockwise from top left: granulated, light muscovado, dark muscovado, caster and demerara sugars

EQUIPMENT

I keep my baking equipment to a minimum – below is a list of the items I use most frequently.

Bowls

A set of Pyrex or Duralux bowls that fit one inside the other takes up less room in the cupboard. An extra, really large bowl is handy for making a celebration cake or a large amount of any mixture. Failing this, use a clean washing-up bowl or a large preserving pan.

Cake tins

Always choose good, solid cake tins. Use non-stick ones if you like, but I always grease cake and sandwich tins, then line the base with a disc of non-stick baking parchment for cakes such as Victoria sandwich, cherry and light fruit cakes. When making rich celebration cakes, I line the sides as well, so it doesn't matter whether the tin is non-stick or not. Then you can easily remove the cake from the tin. I prefer to use non-stick muffin and bun tins because you do not need to line them before putting the mixture in.

I've always washed my tins rather than just wiping them after use. The important thing is to dry them well and store in a dry cupboard to prevent them going rusty.

[See here](#) for more about lining cake tins.

Tins used in this book

- loose-bottomed, deep, round 18 cm (7 in) cake tin
- loose-bottomed, deep, round 20 cm (8 in) cake tin
- loose-bottomed, deep, round 23 cm (9 in) cake tin
- two loose-bottomed 20 cm (8 in) sandwich tins, 4 cm (1½ in deep)
- loose-bottomed 23 cm (9 in) fluted flan tin
- 900 g (2 lb) loaf tin, 17 × 9 × 9 cm (6½ × 3½ × 3½ in) base measurement

- 30 × 23 × 4 cm (12 × 9 × 1½ in) traybake or roasting tin
- 33 × 23 cm (13 × 9 in) Swiss roll tin
- three baking trays
- deep 12-hole muffin tin
- two 12-hole mini-muffin tins

Additional tins

You might like to have the following tins for other recipes or for baking small quantities:

- two 450 g (1 lb) loaf tins instead of one 900 g (2 lb) tin – perhaps to make one cake to eat straight away and one to freeze
- two 18 cm (7 in) sandwich tins for a three-egg quantity instead of four
- two 12-hole bun tins for mince pies
- 20 cm (8 in) and 23 cm (9 in) springform tins to use for cheesecakes, Key Lime Pie and Banoffi Pie, if preferred

Flexible plastic spatula

This is used to get every last bit of mixture out of the bowl. The white ones are best, but avoid putting them in the dishwasher as they eventually become sticky.

Food processor

A food processor is handy for rubbing-in mixtures, making pastry, bread and batters and chopping nuts. It is not suitable for making meringues, as the bowl is enclosed and does not hold enough air to give the meringue volume.

Take care when using a food processor for making cakes. They are extremely fast and mix the ingredients in moments, so watch like a hawk and stop the machine the minute the mixture has combined, as overbeating means the cake will be too close-textured once baked.

Free-standing electric mixer

Keen bakers would not be without one of these. They usually have a whisk for cake making and meringues, and a dough hook for kneading bread. They have the great advantage that while they are mixing you are free to do something else. The disadvantage is that they take up space on the worktop. I keep mine on a rise-and-fall shelf in a cupboard below the worktop, which I lift out to use the machine, then tuck away again afterwards.

Hand-held electric whisk

One of the most frequently used pieces of equipment in my kitchen. Hand-held electric whisks are surprisingly reasonable in price and very quick and efficient to use. When beating egg whites for meringues, always choose a large bowl and move the whisk all over the base to incorporate as much air as possible.



Above, left to right: roasting tin with rack, baking sheet, Swiss roll tin and loose-bottomed fluted flan tin



Clockwise from top: balloon whisk, flat spatula, measuring spoons, timer, rectangular wire cooling rack, palette knife, muffin tray and piping bag

Measuring jug

Glass measuring jugs are best, as you can see at a glance the level marked on the side. Always stand the jug on a flat surface rather than holding it in the air at eye level.

Measuring spoons

A set of spoons from 2.5 ml ($\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon) to 15 ml (1 tablespoon) is needed for measuring small amounts of liquids, flour and spices. When measuring dry ingredients, all spoonfuls should be level unless otherwise stated in the recipe.

Metal baking trays

Choose really thick, rigid, solid baking trays in the largest size that fits your oven. If you can, store them vertically in cupboards, as they take up less room that way.

Non-stick liners

Silicone non-stick baking parchment is excellent for lining cake tins and baking trays but you do have to throw it away after use. Baco Glide and Lift Off paper, which is thicker and longer lasting, are both very good to use as a liner; simply wash and use again and again. The sheets can be cut to fit the base of cake tins, Swiss roll tins and baking trays.

Nylon piping bag

If you are in a hurry, it is perfectly all right to shape meringues in blobs with a spoon rather than piping them. However, you do need a piping bag for éclairs. Smaller bags are useful to pipe icing. The advantage of nylon piping bags is that they can be rinsed and then washed in the washing machine. I use a 1 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) plain nozzle for piping meringues and éclairs and a rose nozzle for piping cream - both plastic and metal are good to use.

Oven

Ovens can vary considerably, whether they are gas, electric or fan assisted. Fan-assisted ovens cook more quickly, so you need to reduce the temperature by about 20°C (check with your oven handbook). The recipes for this book were tested in a conventional electric oven. I thoroughly recommend buying an oven thermometer if you are a keen baker, then you can be exact. Put the thermometer on the centre shelf of the oven when it is set at the temperature you require and adjust the setting accordingly.

Don't open the door of the oven once the cake is baking. Wait until halfway through the cooking time, or look through the glass door, then gently open the door and check how it is doing. If the cake is getting a little darker than you would like but is not yet cooked through, cover it loosely with foil. Make a note on the recipe to cook it at a slightly lower temperature next time.

Baking in an Aga is easy once you've mastered the technique. Refer to the book that comes free with the Aga, or write to Aga Rayburn, PO Box 30, Ketley, Telford, Shropshire TF1 4DD (www.agarayburn.co.uk).

Palette knife

These should be bendy and flexible, one large and one small. Use for spreading icing and other mixtures. The large one is handy for lifting biscuits off baking trays once cooked.

Pastry utensils

Rolling pin

A wooden rolling pin without handles is the most practical. If all else fails, you can use a glass milk bottle!

Pastry brush

Instead of buying pastry brushes, buy a good untreated paintbrush, about 5 cm (2 in) wide. This is usually better and cheaper than a pastry brush.

Plain and fluted cutters

These are used to cut out scones and biscuits. The best are made of metal and are fluted at one end, plain at the other (these are often sold in sets in tins). Before cutting out, always dunk the cutter in flour so the mixture won't stick. If you don't have any cutters, use an appropriate-sized glass (upside down) instead.