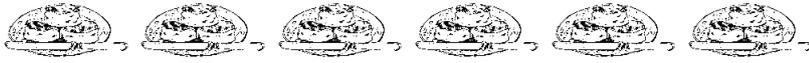
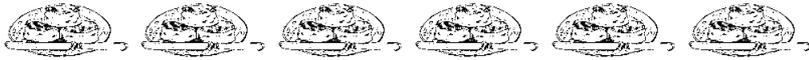


CHAPTER TWO



Scones, Teabreads,
Muffins and Waffles





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17. Blueberry or Raspberry Cornmeal Muffins
18. Double Chocolate Chip Muffins
19. Canadian Crullers
20. German Vanilla Waffles
21. Chocolate Waffles with Chocolate Sauce

Northern, 23, male, graduate, stuck in London, seeks clever girl in similar predicament, brunette, 20–23 with good recipe for scones and life in general. Box No. ...

Private Eye, 1986, advertisement

A batch of scones straight from the oven is a tempting – even seductive – prospect with an appetizing fresh-baked bread aroma, the thin golden crust hiding the soft creamy crumb inside. Served straight away with strawberry jam and clotted cream, scones are the stars of the traditional cream teas of Devon and Cornwall.

I add butter and eggs to my scones, which lighten the mixture and enrich the flavour. And I prefer to use a small crinkle-edge cutter to produce scones that are deep enough to be pulled apart or split easily. Although at their best when freshly baked, scones made a few hours ahead can be revived quite well in a hot oven. But yesterday's scones are better halved and toasted, then spread with sweet butter and jam or jelly.

Originally made on a griddle or hearth-stone using an open fire, scones are one of the oldest examples of home baking. Some versions of drop scones such as Welsh teacakes are still baked on a flat metal plate over high heat, though baking scones in a hot closed oven is an easier alternative.

Teabreads are a splendid example of traditional British baking. The yeast-leavened type are more often produced by commercial bakers, those made with baking powder are usually the province of the home baker. Baked in loaf tins, teabreads are often enriched with sugar, spices, dried fruit or even chopped nuts. Alan Davidson describes such teabreads as the forerunners of today's fruit cakes. A light, rich teabread mixture baked in a round flat shape is usually known as a teacake.

Unsweetened savoury versions of traditional teabreads are ideal for taking to a picnic or for adding to a lunch-box when served sliced and spread with

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

nut butter or a soft cheese. Extra ingredients can include grated vegetables and olives. French home bakers have also taken to savoury teabreads, usually with a batter-base which produces a loaf with a coarser texture. Cut into narrow fingers and served warm, savoury teabreads go well with an aperitif.

Leisurely weekend breakfasts are the time for muffins and waffles. Tasting their best when freshly made, these are also good items for children to prepare, provided help is at hand. Our present-day waffles are related to the wafers of Chaucer's time, still made by cooking a mixture of eggs, milk and flour between two hot metal plates until the mixture has set in the centre under a crisp golden crust. An electric waffle iron makes producing a basket of waffles a simple and easy operation.

High-domed, cushiony muffins baked in paper cases and leavened with baking powder originated in America. Usually sweetened and flavoured with fruit or nuts such as blueberries and pecans, muffins have become popular in Britain and are excellent served warm at breakfast and brunch.

SCONES, TEABREADS, MUFFINS AND WAFFLES

PLAIN SCONES

By some people's reckoning these are not totally plain scones since I include butter, sugar and eggs in my recipe. The result, however, is so much more delicious than the all-too-solid, floury versions often encountered that I've long preferred this version.

Oven: 220°C/425°F/gas mark 7 ♦ Baking time: 12–15 minutes

Equipment: 5 cm/2 in. fluted pastry cutter; baking sheet – lightly floured

Makes: about 12 scones

230 g/8 oz self-raising white flour ♦ 1 tsp baking powder
good pinch salt ♦ 45 g/1½ oz caster sugar ♦ 60 g/2 oz butter
1 egg lightly whisked with milk to make 150 ml/5 fl oz

glaze: egg yolk blended with a little cream or milk

Sift the flour, baking powder, salt and sugar into a mixing bowl. Add the butter in pieces and rub in with the fingertips until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add the egg and milk while mixing with a knife to form a wet, sticky dough.

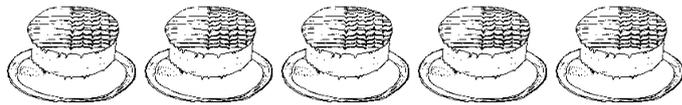
Turn the dough on to a well-floured board and knead lightly into a flat, round shape. Dust a little flour over the dough and pat or gently roll out until 1 cm/½ in. thick. Dip the pastry cutter into some flour and using a firm downward movement, cut out as many scones from the dough as you can. Knead together the trimmings and cut out more circles. Place the scones on the prepared baking sheet and brush the tops with the egg yolk glaze.

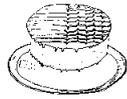
Bake in the preheated oven until well risen with a golden-brown crust. Cool on the baking sheet for 2 minutes then transfer to a cloth-lined plate or basket and serve while still hot.

CHAPTER THREE



Sponge Cakes





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9. Italian Sponge Cake filled with Raspberries and Cream
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16. January Lemon Cake
17. Madeira Cake
18. Coffee Rum Ring
19. Rainbow Ring Cake
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Whether cake making is to be a handicraft for profit or pleasure, the aim should be perfection, and a divine discontent cherished until that end is reached.

Helen Jerome, *Concerning Cake Making*, 1932

Nothing captures the magic of baking quite so vividly as a sponge cake. The simple ingredients – eggs and sugar whisked until as light as snow then dusted with flour, perhaps enriched with a trickle of melted butter – are transformed in the heat of the oven into a fine textured cake with a pale amber crust and springy crumb.

When I ran my cake stall, there were more queries about how to make a good sponge cake than for any other recipe. Small wonder perhaps that village produce shows still give prizes for the best sponge cake exhibited.

Three types of sponge cake are favoured in the English kitchen:

The *Fat-free Sponge Cake* is the lightest type because it contains no butter at all. Whole eggs and sugar are whisked together for several minutes until pale and foamy. In the past this was done by hand but today an electric mixer or hand-held electric beater reduces the time and effort needed for a satisfactory result. When the egg foam is firm enough for the whisk to leave a trail across the surface, plain flour is sifted over the top and gently folded in. Then the mixture is poured into a sponge cake tin and baked.

The *Genoese Sponge Cake* includes melted butter, which adds flavour to the cake and improves its moistness and keeping quality. I find that halving the quantity of butter given for a classic Genoese works well and makes the mixture easier to handle. Sifted plain flour is folded into the egg foam alternately with the melted butter, then the mixture is baked.

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

The *Victoria Sponge Cake* is a butter-rich mixture with an equal weight of butter, sugar and flour. This cake is the easiest sponge cake to make since no whisking is called for. The butter and sugar are blended together until pale and creamy, then whole eggs are beaten in and finally sifted plain flour is gently folded into the mixture.

A modern variation of the classic version is the *Quick-mix Victoria Sponge Cake* which employs an all-in-one-mix method with softened butter and self-raising flour. I recommend this cake to novice bakers since it is easier, speedy and virtually foolproof.

In home-baking the Victoria Sponge Cake is the mother recipe to hundreds of adaptations. A certain amount of extra flour can be added to the mixture though this will, of course, affect the flavour of the cake and reduce the fine springy nature of the crumb in the original recipe. However, the addition of more flour produces a mixture that will support other ingredients such as fruit and nuts.

Further variations on all three types of sponge cake are possible if you separate the eggs, adding the yolks and stiffly whisked egg whites at different stages. In fact, the egg yolks are omitted altogether in a pure white Angel Cake while only yolks are included in the mixture for a Golden Cake.

A well-made sponge is the basis of numerous cakes and gâteaux; try adding lemon or orange zest, or strong black coffee, or use muscovado sugar rather than golden caster to produce a range of different sponge cakes from the same basic recipe. Or simply adapt a basic recipe by changing the filling, icing or frosting of one cake for another to broaden your repertoire.

The aim is to produce a sponge cake with the two elements of the cake and the filling or frosting in harmony. If, for instance, I plan to use a cake filling of whipped cream, possibly enlivened with liqueur, I usually prefer to bake a fat-free sponge cake rather than a Victoria sponge since it is a better foil for the rich high-fat cream. For a Swiss roll, for example, which contains a high proportion of filling to cake, the best choice is usually a fat-free sponge cake. But of course there are always exceptions when, say, a buttery cake supports an even richer filling and is for serving in small portions at the end of a meal.

SPONGE CAKES

FAT-FREE SPONGE CAKE

Possibly the earliest form of sponge cake, known in France as *biscuit de Savoie*. At its best when served freshly baked, this cake is popular just sandwiched with jam and thick cream. Omit the cream if you wish the cake to remain fat-free.

Oven: 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 ♦ Baking time: 20–25 minutes

*Equipment: two 18–19 cm/7–7½ in. sponge sandwich tins
– buttered and base-lined*

Makes: 8-portion cake

4 eggs ♦ 120 g/4 oz caster sugar

½ tsp vanilla essence (optional) ♦ 120 g/4 oz plain flour

filling:

2 heaped tbs raspberry jam, sieved

150 ml/5 fl oz whipping or double cream ♦ 2 tsp caster sugar

Whisk the eggs with the sugar and vanilla essence until thick and foamy and the whisk leaves a trail over the mixture. This is achieved most easily in a food mixer or using a hand-held electric beater. If you are making the cake by hand, using a balloon whisk or an egg beater, it is helpful to place the mixing bowl over a pan of simmering water while you whisk the mixture, then remove the bowl from the heat.

Place the flour in a large sieve and tap the side to give a dusting of flour over the top of the egg foam. Use a balloon whisk to fold in the flour gently. Repeat until all the flour has been incorporated.

Divide the mixture between the prepared cake tins. Bake in the preheated oven until the cakes are golden-brown and just starting to shrink from the tins. Cool the cakes in their tins for 2 minutes then turn out on to a wire rack and peel off the baking paper.

When the cakes are cold, spread the sieved jam in one layer. Whisk the cream until thick and glossy and spoon over the jam. Place the other cake on top and sprinkle with caster sugar. Set the cake in a cool place until ready to serve.

CHAPTER FOUR



Fruit Cakes





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24. Plum and Blackberry Crumble Cake
25. Dutch Apple Cake
26. Autumn Fruit and Nut Upside-Down Cake

The adjective 'home-made' is one which rings of the highest praise when used in connection with cakes... it conjures up many lovely pictures in our minds – the wonderful aroma in the kitchen while baking is in progress, the tea-table laden with good things – from the oven-fresh scones to the finger of plum cake, and finally the glamour of icing, and the iced cake.

Margaret Bates, *Talking About Cakes*, 1964

For centuries our fruit cakes have been prepared with dried vine fruits, usually raisins, sultanas and currants and possibly candied cherries and citrus peel too. This is the traditional British fruit cake, either dark, rich and moist such as a Christmas Cake, or lighter in colour and texture, maybe decorated with a layer of toasted almonds as in a Dundee Cake. The expense of the ingredients and the time taken to prepare and bake such cakes have ensured that they have acquired the status of a luxury, reserved for special occasions such as a marriage, a christening or an anniversary. Part of the pleasure in eating a slice of rich fruit cake is that it is not an everyday event.

Less heavily fruited cakes such as a Genoa have long been served throughout the year – at a weekend tea party or even at the end of lunch. 'It was fashionable at one time to have a good sultana cake on the luncheon table and it was eaten at the end of lunch. This habit still prevails in some old-fashioned houses in London and in the country,' wrote Mrs C.F. Lyle in *Cakes of England* (1936). Now that packed lunches have become popular, the custom of eating a slice of light fruit cake at the end of the meal is returning.

Cold winter days heighten the appeal of cakes made with dried fruits, their concentrated flavours an enduring reminder of summer harvests. Besides the well-known and popular dried vine fruits of the past there are now packets of

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

dried pears, peaches, apricots, figs, prunes, banana, blueberries and cranberries to enliven our winter fruit cakes. Some fruit is labelled pre-soaked or ready-to-eat and can be added to a cake mixture without further preparation.

Dried fruit should be moist and flavourful, and tasty enough to nibble on its own. Fruit that has been stored too long tends to dry out and shrink. If the natural sugar has crystallized, the fruit benefits from a quick rinse in warm water. Drain well and dry the fruit on kitchen paper before adding to the mixture. When possible, I like to steep dried fruit in 2–3 tablespoons fruit juice or wine for a few hours. Cover the bowl and leave in a warm place for an hour or two until all the liquid has been absorbed by the fruit. Fresh orange juice, sherry or a liqueur all work well and contribute a delicate extra flavour to the cake.

When the warm balmy days of summer arrive, we are lured by the scent and flavour of oven-hot cakes oozing with juicy fresh fruit. Though apple cakes have been baked in West Country cider regions for generations, cakes rich with raspberries, apricots, peaches and figs are a welcome feature of home baking today. Many of these fresh fruit cakes are adapted from the *kuchen* and *galettes* of continental Europe and they often take the place of the traditional fruit pies and tarts of the English kitchen.

The simplest version of a fresh fruit cake is made with a layer of sweet shortcake pastry gently pressed into a shallow tart tin, covered with a thin layer of ground almonds or hazelnuts and topped with the prepared fresh fruit – halved figs, sliced nectarines, stoned cherries or whole raspberries. Sprinkle with powdered sugar and bake, then serve straight from the oven with thick cream or ice-cream. Perfect for pudding or tea-time.

FRUIT CAKES

HARVEST CAKE

Ever since I published my mother's recipe in *Cake Stall*, readers have written to tell me that this good, simple fruit cake has become such a firm favourite that it is now baked and appreciated in many other countries too.

Oven: 160°C/325°F/gas mark 3 ♦ Baking time: 1½–1¾ hours
Equipment: 20 cm/8 in. round or square tin – buttered and lined
Makes: 16-portion cake

230 g/8 oz butter, softened
230 g/8 oz caster or light muscovado sugar
4 eggs ♦ 350 g/12 oz plain flour ♦ 1 tsp baking powder
450 g/1 lb mixed dried fruit – seedless raisins, sultanas, currants
120 g/4 oz dried or glacé cherries, quartered
60 g/2 oz candied peel, quartered

Measure the ingredients into a warmed mixing bowl and stir well until you have a stiff mixture. That's all there is to it. Spoon the mixture into the prepared cake tin and smooth level.

Bake in the preheated oven until the cake is cooked, when it will be slightly firm to the touch and a wooden skewer comes out clean from the centre. Cool in the tin for 45 minutes then turn on to a wire rack to cool. When cold, wrap in greaseproof paper and keep in an air-tight plastic container in a cold place until needed. The cake keeps well, in the fridge or the freezer, for 2–3 weeks.

Variation: add ½ tsp mixed spice to the mixture and sprinkle halved or slivered blanched almonds over the top of the cake before baking.

CHAPTER FIVE



Chocolate Cakes





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7. Triple Chocolate Marble Cake
8. Chocolate Hedgehog Cake
9. Chocolate, Almond and Amaretto Cake
10. Chocolate Cracker Cake
11. Total Chocolate Devil's Food Cake
12. Dark Chocolate Mousse Cake
13. Tyrolese Schokolade Torte
14. Chocolate Velvet Cake with Cherry Compote
15. Gudrun's Norwegian Chocolate Raisin Cake
16. Chocolate Rum Truffle Cake
17. Rum, Banana and Chocolate Cake
18. Children's Chocolate Cake
19. Chocolate Cup Cakes
20. Chocolate Honey Fudge Squares
21. Chocolate Nut Slices
22. Canadian Brownies

On those tea-party days, pulling myself up the staircase step by step, reason and memory already cast off like outer garments, and myself no more now than the sport of the basest reflexes, I would arrive in the zone in which the scent of Mrs Swann greeted my nostrils. I felt that I could already behold the majesty of the chocolate cake, encircled by plates heaped with little cakes, and by tiny napkins of grey damask with figures on them, as required by convention but peculiar to the Swanns.

Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 1913

Almost everyone likes chocolate cakes; dark intense chocolate cakes, moist almond-rich ones, coffee-flavoured mocha ones, fudge-like brownies, sticky cup cakes, triple-chocolate marble cake, even an orange chocolate biscuit cake that a child can make. This book could, in fact, have been devoted solely to chocolate cakes.

Apart from the recipe, the most important factor is the quality of the chocolate itself. Bars with approximately 50–70 per cent cocoa solids are now widely available and which brand you use is a matter of taste, though I usually prefer the darkest kind that can be sweetened accordingly.

Converting solid chocolate to a liquid for adding to a cake mixture is done by melting it in a heat-proof bowl that can be scraped clean. If your oven is already hot, simply break the chocolate into pieces and place the bowl in the centre of the oven for a few minutes until the chocolate has liquified. Remove from the heat and allow the chocolate to cool slightly before adding to the other ingredients. Alternatively, place the bowl of chocolate over a pan of gently simmering water until melted or heat the chocolate in a microwave oven for 1–2 minutes. Resist the temptation to stir the chocolate while it is melting because this can cause it to thicken. As it cools, melted chocolate

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

sets hard again. When necessary, hot melted chocolate can be thinned with a modest amount of butter, cream, water or liqueur. This should be done carefully with the minimum of mixing.

Some cakes call for crushed chocolate rather than melted. Depending on the hardness of a chocolate bar this can be done by grating – using a metal box grater, or with a sharp potato peeler. The easiest method is to chop the broken chocolate pieces in a food processor, though this will result in a mixture of fine chocolate dust and larger gravel-like pieces – this may be ideal for some recipes. A low-technology way is to tip broken pieces into a strong, clear plastic bag before sealing it. Then hammer the pieces with a rolling pin or a wooden mallet – this is often best done outside or on a solid stone floor – until you have the right size fragments. The final alternative is to use bought chocolate chips or *'pepites'* instead.

Powdered cocoa replaces melted chocolate in some recipes, for instance a fat-free sponge cake or Swiss roll. Again, use the best cocoa powder you can find. I prefer the dark, organic kind and either add the cocoa to the mixture by pressing through a fine sieve to remove all lumps, or blend it with warm water until smooth before stirring into the cake. If you wish to make a chocolate version of any cake, cocoa powder can replace some of the flour in the recipe – though too much cocoa changes the balance of ingredients, making the baked cake rather dry, whereas melted chocolate contributes moistness to a cake mixture due to the fat it contains.

CHOCOLATE CAKES

FAVOURITE CHOCOLATE SPONGE CAKE

Derived from one of the most popular recipes in the original *Cake Stall*, the sponge cake is sandwiched with whipped cream and topped with shiny chocolate frosting.

Oven: 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 ♦ Baking time: 30–35 minutes

Equipment: two 20 cm/8 in. sponge sandwich tins – buttered and base-lined

Makes: 8-portion cake

60 g/2 oz cocoa ♦ 6 tbs hot water ♦ 175 g/6 oz butter
175 g/6 oz light or dark muscovado sugar, sieved
175 g/6 oz self-raising flour ♦ 1 tsp baking powder
pinch ground cinnamon ♦ 3 eggs

filling:

150 ml/5 fl oz double cream

frosting:

90 g/3 oz icing sugar ♦ 30 g/1 oz cocoa powder
60 g/2 oz pale muscovado sugar ♦ 60 g/2 oz butter ♦ 2 tbs water

In a mixing bowl, blend the cocoa with the hot water until smooth. Add the butter in pieces and all the remaining ingredients: sugar, flour, baking powder, cinnamon and eggs. Mix together for 2–3 minutes, ideally using a hand-held electric beater, until completely smooth.

Divide the mixture between the prepared cake tins and smooth level. Bake in the preheated oven until the middle of the cake is springy to the touch and just starting to shrink from the tin. Cool in the cake tins for 3 minutes then turn the cakes out on to a wire rack to cool.

The cream filling: is made by whisking the cream until thick but still glossy. If you wish to sweeten the cream stir in a teaspoon of caster sugar. Spoon the cream over one of the cakes and place the other on top.

To make the chocolate frosting: sift the icing sugar and cocoa into a bowl. Measure the muscovado sugar, butter and water into a small pan and stir over

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

low heat until dissolved, then bring to the boil. Remove from the heat, cool for half a minute, then pour on to the sugar/cocoa mixture and beat until smooth. Pour the frosting over the cake allowing it to trickle down the sides. Leave the cake in a cool place for 2 hours to set.

If you wish to replace the frosting with melted chocolate, melt 100 g / 3½ oz chocolate and pour over the cake then set aside until dry.

CHOCOLATE ORANGE RING CAKE

This attractive ring cake depends on that great marriage of chocolate with orange. I prefer dark, smooth orange-flavoured chocolate for the frosting and cream – if you have the kind containing small chips of orange or almond it will need to be melted and sieved before use. This cake produces 12 neatly-cut portions, making it ideal for a party or for fund-raising.

Oven: 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 ♦ Baking time: 25–30 minutes

Equipment: 24 cm/9½ in. ring tin – buttered

Makes: 12-portion cake

60 g / 2 oz cocoa powder ♦ 6 tbs hot water ♦ 1 sweet orange
175 g / 6 oz butter ♦ 175 g / 6 oz dark soft brown sugar ♦ 3 eggs
150 g / 5 oz self-raising flour
2 tbs Orange Curaçoa or orange-based liqueur (optional)
2 tsp caster sugar

frosting:

200 g / 7 oz dark smooth orange-flavoured chocolate
150 ml / 5 fl oz single cream

Measure the cocoa into a warm mixing bowl and blend with the water until smooth. Halve the orange, cut a thin slice from each half and set them aside for decorating the cake later. Squeeze the juice from the orange into a cup, and grate the zest into the mixing bowl. Add the butter and sugar and use an electric beater to blend the mixture together until light and fluffy. Beat in

CHOCOLATE CAKES

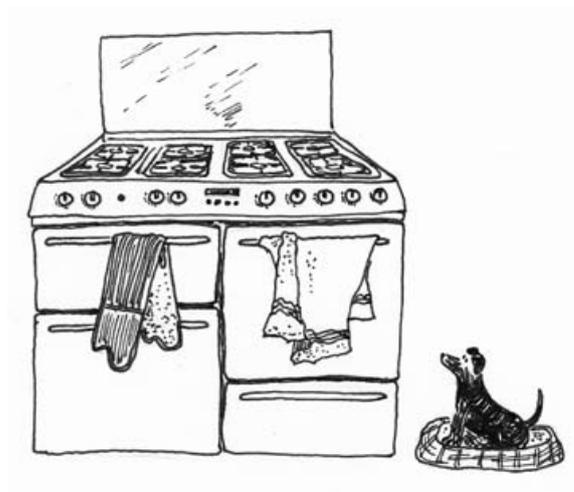
the eggs one at a time. Gradually mix in the sifted flour until well combined. Spoon the mixture into the prepared cake tin and smooth level.

Bake in the preheated oven until a wooden skewer comes out clean from the cake. Rest the cake in the tin for 2 minutes then turn out on to a wire rack.

When the cake is almost cold, place it back in the cake tin. Stir the orange liqueur and the sugar into the reserved orange juice. Spoon half the mixture over the cake and leave until absorbed. Then trickle over the rest of orange mixture and set aside for 1 hour.

To make the frosting: break the chocolate into pieces and melt with half the cream in a microwave or a warm oven. Stir gently until smooth, then use a palette knife to spread two-thirds in an even layer over the cake.

Stir the rest of the cream into the remaining chocolate and stand the bowl in a little cold water to cool the mixture. Use an electric beater to whisk the cream until pale and thick. Spoon the chocolate cream into a piping-bag and pipe 12 rosettes of cream on top of the cake; pipe the remaining cream around the base of the cake. Cut the reserved orange slices into 12 triangular segments and place each one on a rosette of cream. Chill the cake before serving.



CHAPTER SIX



Spice Cakes and Nut Cakes





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12. Angelica and Almond Cake
13. French Coffee Walnut Cake
14. Coconut and Cranberry Loaf
15. Honey, Pistachio and Yoghurt Cake
16. French Almond Cake
17. English Almond Cake
18. Hazelnut Cake with Port Wine Cream
19. Orange, Polenta and Almond Cake
20. Walnut Layer Cake with White Frosting
21. Pine Nut, Honey and Lemon Cake
22. Macadamia Nut Coffee Cake

He swallowed the tiny portion of almond cake which a maid had put in front of him and filled his pipe.

Georges Simenon, *Maigret Stonewalled*, 1931 (the first food enjoyed by the Chief Inspector in the earliest Maigret novel)

Could it be the chilly, damp climate of Britain that accounts for our fondness for spice? Sweet-tasting, warm-scented cinnamon, fragrant flecks of freshly-grated nutmeg or the heady, comforting flavour of cloves added to the mixing bowl that all transform the flavour of a cake to make it beguiling.

Our love affair with spices is long established, and gives many of our traditional cakes their particular character. The spiced and gilded gingerbread of medieval times was so highly valued it was awarded as a prize in jousting tournaments. In the past, when spices were costly, their use in cooking was an indicator of wealth; now, almost all spices are easily affordable. Saffron is the exception, remaining the world's most expensive due to the labour involved in collecting the flower stamens of *Crocus sativa*.

Spices are an essential ingredient in much of Britain's best-loved baking – from Easter biscuits to rich fruit cakes. Most fragrant when freshly ground, spices can be bought ready-ground for immediate use or whole for grinding at home in a mortar or electric coffee mill. Two exceptions are cinnamon bark and dried ginger root – both notoriously difficult to grind at home – so for use in baking I buy these ready-ground by the professionals.

As a way of imparting the allure of spices to the simplest of recipes, I recommend topping a plain cake with a spice-flecked crust and serving it warm on a winter day. In summer, this streusel mixture can be sprinkled over a fresh fruit cake full of cherries or apples. To make a *Streusel* crust, melt in a bowl or a pan 2 tablespoons of butter and remove from the heat,

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stir in 3 tablespoons light brown sugar, 1 tablespoon plain flour, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon and half a teaspoon of ground allspice. Stir together until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs, then scatter over the cake or over an open fruit tart.

'Nuts,' wrote Alan Davidson, author of *The Oxford Companion to Food*, 'are festive, mysterious, symbolic, and supremely versatile.' Like spices, nuts were once an expensive ingredient only used in the cooking of the court. These days, a wide range – from brazils to pecans, pistachios to macadamia nuts – are easily available, with the best choice often to be found in health food stores.

For the best flavour and food value, nuts should be fresh. If they are left too long at room temperature, they can become rancid due to their high fat content. Use either freshly bought nuts, or store them in a freezer to maintain their flavour and prevent any deterioration.

Nuts in various forms, ground, slivered, chopped or whole – either blanched or toasted – contribute not just taste but also a rich moistness to a cake due to their oils. Almonds and hazelnuts are essential to the character of certain cakes from France and Austria, imparting their unique flavour and texture. When used in their ground form, they may partly or wholly replace the flour in a mixture. Moreover, the transformation in flavour that develops when blanched nuts such as almonds and hazelnuts are grilled or toasted is a quality that can be used to considerable advantage in cake-making.

Flour-free cakes may be of interest to coeliac sufferers. But since some people are dangerously allergic to nuts in any form, it is essential when serving or selling any cake to state clearly the nature of the ingredients.

SPICE CAKES AND NUT CAKES

DEVONSHIRE HONEY SPICE CAKE

In his student days my son used to make this cake for friends' birthdays. It is indeed very simple to prepare and can be mixed in a saucepan. A fellow bee-keeper gave me the recipe years ago. The Continental spice mixture I've added makes the cake reminiscent of French *pain d'épices*. However, the cake is still good even without the spices, or the icing.

Oven: 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 ♦ Baking time: 45 minutes

Equipment: 18–20 cm/7–8 in. tin – buttered and base-lined

Makes: 8-portion cake

150 g/5 oz butter ♦ 90 g/3 oz light muscovado sugar

175 g/6 oz honey ♦ 1 tbs water

2 eggs ♦ 200 g/7 oz self-raising flour

½ tsp mixed sweet spices, ideally a French, Dutch or German blend

icing:

120 g/4 oz icing sugar ♦ 1 tbs clear honey ♦ 1 tbs water

In a medium-size saucepan, gently heat the butter, sugar and honey with the water until the butter has melted. Immediately remove from the heat and beat in the eggs and the flour sifted with the spice. Pour the mixture into the prepared cake tin.

Bake in the preheated oven until the cake is just starting to shrink from the tin. Cool the cake in the tin and ice while still warm. Or turn the cake on to a wire rack and leave until cold.

To make the icing: sift the icing sugar into a bowl. Stir in the honey and water and mix until smooth. Trickle the icing over the cake in a trellis pattern.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Small Cakes and Pastries





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5. Butter Tarts
6. Florentines
7. Marzipan Tartlets of Summer Fruits and Flowers
8. Éclairs
9. Butterfly Cakes
10. Richmond Maids of Honour
11. Meringues
12. Coconut Pyramids
13. Chocolate Dreams
14. Lemon Drops
15. Custard Tarts
16. Palmiers
17. Almond Macaroons
18. Walnut and Lemon Squares
19. Queen of Hearts Tarts
20. Date and Orange Oat Squares
21. Congress Tarts
22. Mince Pies and Two Mincemeats

The little cakes were delicious. The tea, one of Madame's few self-indulgences, was of the finest in all Europe, or even China.

M.F.K. Fisher, *Sister Age*, 1983

From madeleines to éclairs, meringues to curd tarts, small individual cakes have great charm. Arrayed on cake-stands at the Ritz and Claridges, where afternoon tea is still taken seriously, these are the miniature versions of grander confections. Such delightful morsels rarely fail to enchant; the best exhibit a degree of finesse and precision. As an example of baking expertise, small cakes resemble the perfectly executed doll's-house-size chairs or cupboards once made by apprentice cabinet makers.

Cup cakes – single-portion cakes baked in a paper-lined patty or bun tin, and which in Britain were once known as fairy cakes – have become immensely popular. Easy to make and highly profitable to sell, cup cakes naturally appeal to children, and even adults have been known to buy a single cup cake to enjoy as a secret indulgence. A good one has a balanced proportion of cake to decoration, yet some produced commercially are so sparing with the cake and overloaded with frosting that they are just an excuse to eat sugar.

The flavour of a small cake should be quite distinctive, each dainty mouthful a pleasure to savour. If you enjoy decorating cakes, then making a small cake look irresistible – almost an edible jewel – is a happy challenge.

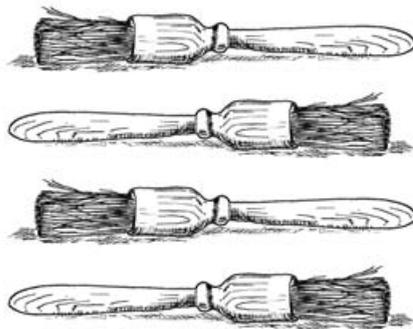
And if you wish to explore doll-size cakes even further, try making more diminutive versions of small cakes and pastries for serving on a pretty plate as *petits fours* at the end of a meal.

One of the merits of small cakes is that most of them freeze perfectly, but reach room temperature in less time than it takes to bake another batch. Moreover, if you keep several kinds in separate containers in the freezer, a plate of assorted marvels can be assembled quite quickly.

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

Individual sweet pastry cases can be baked and stored in the freezer until needed. By the time you've filled each of them with cream and fresh fruit, the pastry will have defrosted nicely. And trays of plain cup cakes also freeze well; they can be iced or covered with frosting just before serving.

A particular small favourite of my childhood that I remember with affection and almost Proustian clarity was known as a 'Kunzle' cake, after the name of the company who produced them. These were the only cakes my mother was prepared to buy – everything else was home-made. Their defining characteristic was the chocolate case containing sponge cake overlaid with rich butter cream. 'Reconstitution of the past is a delicate pleasure of which one should not be deprived,' wrote Pierre de Pressac. Nostalgia has led me to create my own version of the little 'Kunzle' cake of long ago; I have called them Chocolate Dreams.



SMALL CAKES AND PASTRIES

MADELEINES

It is possible that the legendary little cakes baked by Françoise and offered the young Marcel Proust by his aunt Léonie at Combray were made to this recipe from the popular nineteenth-century cookery book, *La Cuisinière de la campagne et de la ville* by Louis-Eustache Audot. It's an appealing notion because this version is both simple and delightful. Serve the madeleines freshly baked – with lime tea, of course.

Oven: 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 ♦ Baking time: 15 minutes

*Equipment: madeleine tin with shell-shaped moulds, preferably non-stick
– brushed with clarified butter*

Makes: 24 cakes

60 g/2 oz butter ♦ 150 g/5 oz caster sugar

½ lemon, finely grated zest ♦ 3 eggs, separated ♦ 1 tsp orange flower water

120 g/4 oz plain fine white cake flour, preferably French

1 tbs clarified butter, melted for brushing cake tins

Cream the butter in a warmed bowl and gradually beat in the sugar with the lemon zest. Beat in the egg yolks with the orange flower water. Whisk the egg whites until stiff and fold into the mixture alternately with the sieved flour.

Brush the shaped moulds of the cake tin with clarified butter. Place a rounded teaspoon of the mixture in each and smooth fairly level.

Bake in the preheated oven until golden and the little cakes are just starting to shrink from the tin. Cool in the tin for 1 minute, then transfer to a wire rack. Wash the tin with hot water only, dry and brush with more clarified butter and make the second batch of cakes with the remaining mixture.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Biscuits and Cookies





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3. Digestive Biscuits
4. Easter Biscuits
5. Pecan and Cranberry Cookies
6. Almond Tuiles
7. Butterscotch Biscuits
8. Hazelnut Macaroons
9. Coffee Maryses
10. Anzacs
11. Lemon and Raisin Refrigerator Cookies
12. Fruit and Nut Flapjack
13. Chocolate Crunch Cookies
14. Parliament Cakes or Parlies
15. Gingerbread People
16. Smilers, Whirligigs and Chequerboards
17. Brandy Snaps
18. Chocolate Paddington Bears
19. Cinnamon Stars
20. Christmas Cookies

It is a pleasant contrast to have biscuits as well as cakes on the tea-table and a tin of home-made biscuits is always useful ... a stand-by for unexpected visitors or for days when there just isn't enough time to make a cake.

George and Cecilia Scurfield, *Home-made Cakes and Biscuits*, 1963

Cakes are convivial. To my mind, the pleasure they bring is intended for sharing, whereas a delicate almond tuile, a crisp brandy snap or a square of chewy flapjack is often best enjoyed in solitude, in a comfortable chair with tea or coffee, when the biscuit's flavour and texture can be properly appreciated.

What is the difference between a biscuit and a cookie? I'm sometimes asked. Neither word is originally English – biscuit is clearly French, meaning twice cooked, yet until the eighteenth century we spelled it bisket, while cookie is a more recent introduction, derived from the Dutch word *koekje* which became cookie in North America. Biscuits are usually thinner and smaller with a definite shape, and a cookie is often larger with a more chewy consistency. But the distinction can easily blur – there are crisp cookies and chewy biscuits.

Though it's easy enough to mix the dough, roll it out and shape, or arrange spoonfuls on the tray, once you've slid the baking sheets into the oven total vigilance is necessary. 'Timing in cooking is essential,' says the talented chef Angela Hartnett.

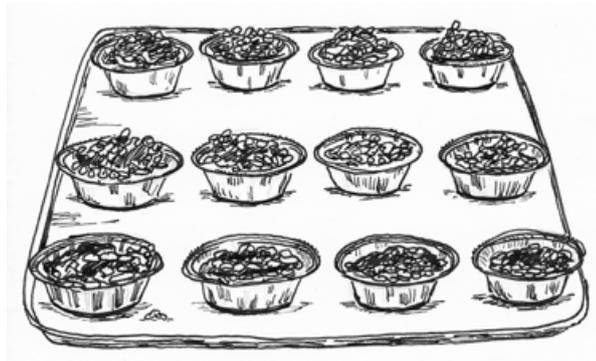
While cakes may give you a little leeway on timing, baking a biscuit is particularly exacting. There is a stage when a shortbread biscuit reaches a peak of perfection and its flavour and texture cannot be improved. But a little too long in the oven and the sugar caramelizes, the biscuit darkens, the flavour becomes intense rather than subtle – and that precious moment is lost for

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

ever. In baking, the eye is as important as the hand and the palate. But take heart, practice does make perfect and you will soon discover that a flawless shortbread biscuit is truly a triumph of home baking.

A convenient aspect of making your own biscuits and cookies is that – given the chance – they store well. Baked and cooled then sealed in plastic box or bag, they will maintain their flavour in the freezer for weeks, or in a refrigerator for a fortnight. When stored at room temperature, however, their oven-fresh buttery taste can deteriorate.

I find home-made biscuits and cookies – arranged on a plate or in a pretty box – make especially welcome gifts to those who are elderly or who live alone and who might not feel up to baking. And when presented in this way, biscuits and cookies fly off a fund-raising stall in no time at all.



BISCUITS AND COOKIES

SHORTBREAD BISCUITS

Simple and good – the queen of home-made biscuits.

Oven: 160°C/325°F/gas mark 3 ♦ Baking time: 15–17 minutes
Equipment: 6 cm/2½ in. fluted pastry cutter; baking sheet – buttered
Makes: about 20 biscuits

120 g/4 oz butter ♦ 60 g/2 oz caster sugar
175 g/6 oz plain flour ♦ 1 tbs caster sugar for the end

In a warmed mixing bowl, beat the butter until soft. Add the sugar and cream together. Gradually add the sieved flour and continue beating until the mixture binds together in a lump. On a floured board, roll out the dough until 5 mm/¼ in. thick. Use the pastry cutter to cut out rounds of dough. Place on the prepared baking sheet and prick each biscuit a couple of times with a fork.

Bake in the preheated oven until just changing colour at the edges. Do not overcook or the subtle buttery flavour will be lost. Cool on the baking sheet for 3 minutes then transfer to a wire rack and sprinkle with the extra caster sugar.

Variations

Orange Shortbread Biscuits – add ½ tsp finely grated zest of orange and / or 30 g/1 oz finely shredded candied orange peel to the sieved flour.

Lemon Shortbread Biscuits – add ½ tsp finely grated zest of lemon and / or 30 g/1 oz finely shredded candied lemon or citron peel to the sieved flour.

Ginger Shortbread Biscuits – add 45 g/1½ oz finely chopped preserved or candied ginger to the sieved flour.

Cherry Shortbread Biscuits – add 45 g/1½ oz chopped dried cherries to the sieved flour – glacé cherries can be used instead but they are rather sweet.

Rosemary Shortbread Biscuits – add ½ tsp finely chopped fresh young rosemary leaves to the butter.

Lavender Shortbread Biscuits – add ½ tsp finely chopped fresh lavender flowers or young leaves to the butter.

CHAPTER NINE



Festive Cakes





THE CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

1. Simnel Cake
2. Easter Nest Cake
3. Gâteau Madeleine
4. Passion-fruit Cloud Cake
5. Marzipan and Macaroon Cake
6. Praline Cream Gâteau
7. Fresh Strawberry Gâteau or Le Fraisier
8. Gâteau Paris-Brest
9. Hot Limoncello Cake with Cool Lemon Cream
10. Hazelnut and Muscovado Meringue Cake
11. Swiss Roll with Spiced Prunes and Port Wine
12. Rose Petal Cake with Rosé Champagne Cream
13. Gold Vanilla and Silver Almond Cakes
14. Wilma's Birthday Flower Hat
15. Chocolate Letter or Number Cake
16. Roundabout Cake
17. Mocha Meringue Tower
18. Guy Fawkes Bonfire Cake
19. Festive Ring
20. Panforte
21. Glacé Fruit and Nut Celebration Cake
22. Bûche de Noël
23. Traditional Christmas Cake
24. Marzipan
25. Royal Icing

'It's fruitcake weather! Fetch our buggy. Help me find my hat.'... Tomorrow the kind of work I like best begins: buying. Cherries and citron, ginger and vanilla and canned Hawaiian pineapple, rinds and raisins and walnuts and whiskey and oh, so much flour, butter, so many eggs, spices, flavorings: why we'll need a pony to pull the buggy home...

Truman Capote, *A Christmas Memory*, 1956

Man is born to celebrate was my mother's maxim. No event was too trivial or commonplace to warrant a special cake: learning to swim or ride a bike, the first melons or French beans from the garden, the arrival of friends, were all marked by a display of her baking talents. Astonishing birthday cakes were launched at our parties; decades before they became standard fare on supermarket shelves, my brothers and I enjoyed trains with trucks, cars with passengers, forts with soldiers, magic forests and princess castles, gleaming with icing and glowing with lit candles.

Festive cakes are a great British custom, marking the seasons and celebrations in our lives. A tiered wedding cake, for example, has long been imbued with such importance that during the Second World War, when food was rationed and ingredients were scarce, a cardboard model often decorated the table. In *How We Lived Then*, Norman Longmate writes, 'One could borrow from many bakers a splendid cardboard cover, looking like the most expensive type of traditional iced cake.' Yet, such is our longing for celebratory cakes, that inedible replica sometimes concealed a sad little sponge cake made with dried eggs in place of the traditional fruit-rich wedding version.

When setting out to create a celebration cake for a birthday, particularly for children, I usually start by baking some sponge cakes that can be cut or carved into the desired shape. When my grandsons were three and five years

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

old they were each given a bicycle at a joint birthday party. I baked two chocolate sponge cakes in round tins and another in a swiss roll tin. Cutting the rectangular cake to make the frame, handlebars and saddle I assembled a bicycle cake, covered in chocolate frosting and decorated with Smarties. I piped a name on each wheel, and one was decorated with three candles, the other with five, so that each child could blow out his own.

Of course, baking a cake in a specially shaped tin – such as a large letter or number – simplifies the operation. Unless you make a great many of this kind, it may be sensible to rent or borrow rather than buy the cake tin from a kitchenware shop.

If you enjoy baking, festive cakes are fun to make though they normally take longer to prepare. This chapter includes a selection of my favourites, from the English Simnel Cake of Mothering Sunday, to the French *Bûche de Noël*, or a Rose Petal Angel Cake, and the choux-pastry *Gâteau Paris-Brest*, whose circular shape commemorates the inauguration of the famous cycle race.

There's an inevitable air of anticipation about a festive cake. Even if just rumoured or, indeed, known to exist, unveiling the confection should be an exciting theatrical moment which only enhances the cake's allure. Celebratory events are usually well-planned, yet some still sneak in unheralded. So a shrewd home baker needs a few tricks up their sleeve in order to respond to surprises. I keep spare candles and a packet of sparklers in a kitchen drawer. An angel cake or discs of baked puff pastry, stored in the freezer, can be sandwiched with thick cream and fresh fruit in a trice. Or a box of tiny meringues can be transformed into a towering Instant Celebration Cake shining with chocolate sauce. Bravo!

FESTIVE CAKES

SIMNEL CAKE

Traditionally associated with Simnel Sunday, the mid-Lent date in the Christian calendar. Simnel derives from the Latin for fine flour – the kind used by pastry cooks. In Victorian times, it was customary for girls in service to return home on Mothering Sunday bearing a Simnel cake. Today this lovely cake with its characteristic layer of marzipan is usually reserved for Easter itself.

Oven: 150°C/300°F/gas mark 2 ♦ Baking time: 2¾ – 3 hours

Equipment: 18 cm/7 in. cake tin – buttered and lined

Makes: 8–10-portion cake

175 g/6 oz butter ♦ 175 g/6 oz pale muscovado sugar ♦ 3 eggs
finely grated zest of 1 lemon or orange ♦ 230 g/8 oz plain flour
1 tsp baking powder ♦ 1 tsp mixed spice
230 g/8 oz sultanas ♦ 175 g/6 oz currants ♦ 60 g/2 oz seedless raisins
60 g/2 oz glacé cherries, quartered ♦ 60 g/2 oz chopped candied peel
2 tbs milk ♦ 450 g/1 lb marzipan (recipe on p. 291)

decoration:

1 tbs of apple jelly or sieved apricot jam ♦ 1 tsp of beaten egg
60 g/2 oz icing sugar, sieved ♦ 2 tsp warm water
about 12 sugar flowers or fresh edible flowers

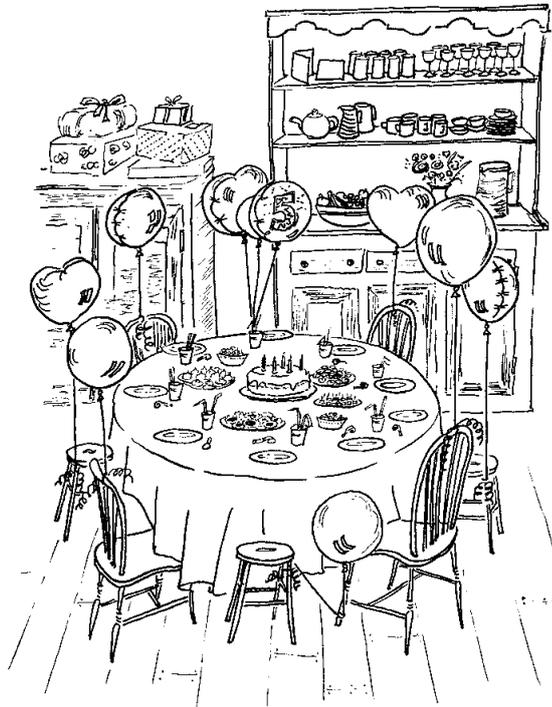
Cream the butter with the sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, with the grated lemon or orange zest. Sieve the flour, baking powder and spices on to a plate and add to the mixture a little at a time, alternately with the dried and candied fruit. Mix in the milk.

Spoon half the cake mixture into the prepared cake tin. Divide the marzipan and roll out one half to make a circle the same size as the cake tin. Gently place the marzipan on top of the mixture, and cover with the remaining mixture and smooth level.

Bake in the preheated oven until the cake is cooked and a wooden skewer comes out clean from the centre. Cool in the tin for 45 minutes then turn out on to a wire rack.

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The decoration: when the cake is cold, roll out the rest of the marzipan to make a 18 cm / 7 in. circle. Brush the top of the cake with the jelly or jam and carefully place the marzipan on top. Roll lightly with a rolling pin. Press the prongs of a fork around the edge to make an attractive border. Brush the marzipan with the beaten egg and place under a high grill for a few minutes to give an attractive toasted golden crust. The cake is very pleasing left like this. But if you wish to prettify it further, mix the icing sugar with the water until smooth, and pour into the centre of the marzipan, leaving the border un-iced. Arrange the flowers around the edge of the icing, and tie a ribbon around the side of the cake.



CHAPTER TEN



Decorating Cakes





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1. Chocolate leaves
2. Chocolate shapes
3. Piped chocolate motifs
4. Chocolate shavings
5. Grated chocolate
6. Marzipan letters and numerals
7. Miniature meringues
8. Whipped dairy cream
9. English butter cream: vanilla butter cream; coffee butter cream; orange butter cream; lemon butter cream; chocolate butter cream
10. French butter cream or *crème au beurre*: basic recipe; vanilla butter cream; coffee butter cream; praline butter cream
11. Chocolate butter cream
12. Glacé icing: basic recipe; coffee glacé icing
13. Butter icing: vanilla butter icing
14. Lemon frosting
15. Chocolate frosting
16. Fudge frosting
17. Cream cheese frosting
18. Vanilla yoghurt frosting
19. Seven-minute frosting
20. Chocolate ganache
21. Marzipan
22. Vanilla essence
23. Praline

Leaving a cake plain, just the way it emerges from the oven with its appetizing golden crust, is often the nicest way of serving it. A light dusting of caster or icing sugar may be all that's called for; or clear honey brushed over the surface and set aside until dry. For a shallow chocolate cake with a level top, a delicate layer of sieved cocoa powder can provide the finishing touch. If the top of the baked cake is not level, then adopt the French method of simply turning it over. The flat side of the cake that has been in contact with the baking tin provides an easily decorated surface.

The simplest way to produce an even layer of icing sugar or powdered cocoa is to spoon a little into a fine-mesh sieve. Hold the sieve above the cake, and as you move it across the surface tap the side with a teaspoon to release a fine drift of the powder.

For a more stylized effect, place a stencil on top of the cake, then dust with sieved icing sugar or cocoa powder. Remove the stencil to reveal the decorative design. Plain strips of paper evenly spaced across the top of the cake before adding sieved icing sugar produce a striped effect on top of the cake when they are removed, or if the strips overlap diagonally a pleasing diamond pattern results. Children enjoy making their own stencil – start with a piece of paper the same size as the cake and fold in half. Then repeat two or three times to produce a dart shape, before cutting small pieces from the folded edges. Unfold the stencil, place on top of the cake, dust with sugar and carefully remove – to a small child the decoration that results seems like magic.

Should you want a name or greeting on top of a cake and wielding an icing nozzle does not appeal, letter and number stencils can work surprisingly well.

Paper stencils can be as simple as a paper circle cut in half with a wavy line: place the stencil on the cake and remove one half, dust the cake with sieved icing sugar and cover with its stencil, remove the other half and dust with sieved cocoa or brush the surface with clear honey and sprinkle with chopped nuts. Remove both stencils, and hey presto! a two-tone cake decoration.

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

Another easy technique is to trail glacé icing or melted chocolate over the top of a cake by drizzling a spoonful of a fairly liquid mixture quite quickly back and forth across the cake, starting at one side and working across the surface to leave a fine tracery of parallel lines.

Even the least practised cook can spoon thick cream over the top of a cake then sprinkle with toasted flaked almonds, grated chocolate or fine shreds of citrus peel.

Although usually reserved for special cakes such as Simnel and Battenberg, a thin layer of marzipan is an attractive and delicious decoration, made with either ground almonds, hazelnuts or pistachio nuts, left in their natural state or subtly tinted with a food colouring. Remember to first brush the surface of the cake with sieved apricot jam before covering with the marzipan. Then, you should use a rolling pin to gently press it into place. If the fancy takes you, small marzipan decorations – moulded by hand or cut to shape – can be applied to this foundation, using a thin layer of beaten egg white as an adhesive. Alternatively, a lightly toasted finish is attractive: brush the marzipan with beaten egg yolk and place under a hot grill until just changing colour, remove immediately and set aside to cool.

Large shallow cakes full of fresh fruit might be decorated with a layer of toasted meringue just before serving. Whisk two egg whites until stiff, then gradually fold in 2–3 tablespoons of golden caster sugar. Pile spoonfuls of the meringue over the cake and place in a moderate oven or under a hot grill – though not so close that it scorches – until set and golden brown. Serve the cake within 30 minutes.

Occasionally, the appearance of an iced or frosted cake does not come up to expectations. In that case, a rapid disguise is called for before the icing sets: sprinkle over some chopped nuts – toasted or tinted with a drop of food colouring, crumbled meringues or amaretti biscuits, or grated chocolate. If time is short, resort to chocolate vermicelli. Children love decorating cakes with small sweets – dolly mixture, chocolate buttons, hundreds and thousands, Smarties and Barbie sprinkles. A charming summer decoration is easily made by scattering small edible flowers or their petals over the top of a cake.

If you are a dab hand with a piping-bag, then decorating a cake can be very quick. But take care not to overdo it – leave parts of the iced cake plain so that the contrast is pleasing.

DECORATING CAKES

When you need to cut a cake into layers before filling and decorating, use a very sharp or a finely-serrated knife with a long blade in a gentle sawing action across the cake to cut it into even layers. When cutting a slab of cake into pieces for decorating, use a smaller knife and, if necessary, check the cutting lines with a ruler. It's worth bearing in mind that it is easier to spread icing or cream over the smooth baked surface of a cake rather than across a cut surface, whose uneven crumb will also absorb the filling.

Readers who specialize in decorated cakes or who bake for a cake stall may wish to give their work an additional distinctive flourish with home-made motifs such as marzipan letters and chocolate leaves. Since this kind of cake decoration is enjoyable but time-consuming to prepare, it is sensible to make a supply well ahead whenever possible.

CHOCOLATE LEAVES

The mature leathery leaves from a rose bush are best, due to their strong vein pattern. Choose clean dry leaves from an spray-free plant, hold each leaf by the stem, and brush the underside with melted chocolate. Place the leaves, chocolate side up, on a sheet of baking paper – leave some leaves flat and curve others over a wooden spoon. Chill the leaves until the chocolate is set, then gently peel off the green leaf to reveal the chocolate version. Store these on crumpled kitchen paper in a lidded plastic box placed in the fridge.

CHOCOLATE SHAPES

Pour melted chocolate to a depth of 5 mm / ¼ in. into a Swiss roll tin lined with baking paper, then chill until set hard. Turn the sheet of chocolate on to a flat surface and use a ruler and knife to cut out small squares and triangles. Use small, sharp petit-four pastry cutters to cut out numerals, letters and other shapes. Store the shapes between layers of baking paper in a lidded plastic box in the fridge.

GERALDENE HOLT'S CAKES

PIPED CHOCOLATE MOTIFS

Spoon some melted chocolate into a piping-bag fitted with a small plain writing nozzle. Pipe the chocolate on to a sheet of baking paper into pretty motifs such as figures of eight, music clefs, and other twirly shapes. Chill the chocolate until set hard, then gently lift the motifs from the paper and store between layers of baking paper in a lidded plastic box in the fridge.

CHOCOLATE SHAVINGS

Slightly warm a bar of chocolate, then shave along the longer edge with a sharp vegetable knife or a potato peeler to produce long decorative curls. These are best used straight away since they are fragile. To produce longer, cigar-shaped chocolate curls known as chocolate caraque, turn to the recipe for Gâteau Madeleine on pages 244–5.

GRATED CHOCOLATE

Chill a bar of chocolate, then draw the edge of the bar downwards against one side of a box grater to produce small shavings that can be stored in a lidded plastic box.

MARZIPAN LETTERS AND NUMERALS

Use natural-coloured marzipan or marzipan tinted with food dyes. On a pastry board dusted with a little cornflour, roll out the marzipan until 5 mm / ¼ in. thick. Use small, sharp petit-four cutters to make miniature letters and numerals. Store the shapes in a lidded plastic box.

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