

Help! I'm making a wedding cake

I know that making a wedding cake is daunting, for the first time or the fiftieth. And I also know that most couples don't tend to want what's already in existence but instead want to design their own flavours and the order in which they stack. Which doesn't make your job any easier!

I'm now working part time and find it hard to answer in depth emails as well as get work and life all done. So, please read on if you have a query as there might have been someone else with exactly the same question. If not, drop me a line.

Also if the recipe is from BBC Good Food, then you can try calling their Cookery Team on 020 8433 3983 (open Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm) or by emailing goodfoodmagazine@immediate.co.uk.

Finally, if you are looking for all of the recipes and instructions for the stacked rich dark chocolate, lemon and fruit cake, or the Simple Elegance wedding cake, both written for BBC Good Food, then I have included pdfs of the original pages at the end of this document, with the magazine's kind permission. It does help to see the whole process all in one place. Just beware as there is a typo in the chocolate cake recipe and it should be baked at 160C/fan 140C/gas 3 (not gas 4).

Happy baking, and let me know how you get on with a photo over on Instagram with the hashtag #janehornby so I know it's there.

Love,

Jane

Q

Dear Jane

I have been asked to make a naked wedding cake. Do you have any suggestions?

A

Hello, thanks for your query. I use my [Simple Elegance](#) cake recipe, which has three tiers of vanilla sponge. You can follow plenty of tutorials on how to make naked cakes look good online. Make much less buttercream, layer the cakes with this and the jam as instructed in the recipe, but then simply scrape a little more buttercream around the sides with a pastry scraper or palette knife. I then dust with icing sugar, transport, stack (you'll still need to use dowels), and then decorate with fruit etc. The cake at the top is one made for a friend's wedding. It went down brilliantly.

Q

Dear Jane,

I would like to use your easy vanilla cake recipe for the top tier of my daughter's christening cake but the recipe on good food is based on a 7 inch round cake and I am making a 6 inch cake.

Please could you advise how I would need to adjust the quantities.

A

Thanks for your email.

I would keep the recipe as it is, and just fill your 6 inch round tin to two-thirds full and bake it for 1hr 15 mins. Cool and drench with syrup as before. Use the leftover cake mix for a few cupcakes/fairy cakes if you like. This far safer than tweaking the recipe quantities up and down - and exactly what I would do in your shoes.

Q

Hi Jane

I am making one of your cakes (Easy Vanilla Cake) for a friend's wedding this weekend – I'm doing two stacked naked tiers topped with berries. I've done a test run and it was ace so all good – just have to recreate it again this week.

I'm not covering the cakes in icing though and haven't used the sugar syrup. I'll take up the two tiers in cake in boxes on their boards and with dowling in place the day before (going to Lake District in the car) then will stack and decorate with fresh fruit on the day.

Trying to decide whether I can stack and decorate in the morning before the wedding at 1.30pm or whether the cakes will dry out in the hotel air conditioning (won't sit down till about 3-4pm). I could instead stack them before or during the wedding breakfast at about 3pm. Also can't decide whether to put them in a fridge overnight and before I stack them or leave in their boxes on the side in a cool place – the test run was fine in a box for 3 days actually and worry putting them in the fridge would dry them out...?

A

Hello, thanks for your email. When I do 'naked' cakes I layer them up and keep in the fridge or cool place overnight. Stack on the day, before the ceremony and as long as not by a radiator or sunny window they will be fine and dandy.

Q Hi, I have been searching for your recipe for your chocolate wedding cake. I am new to baking and I wondered if you could give me the recipe in smaller quantities as I would like to try it for my new grandsons first birthday. I'm looking at an 8 inch or 10 inch cake. Hope you can help?

A Hello, thanks for your email. We had lots of similar requests when the recipe first came out, so when I put the GoodFood cookbook together I added a few notes to the recipe. These were as follows:

'Due to popular request, we have calculated quantities for smaller versions of the chocolate tier of the cake. To make a 23cm/9 inch cake, use half the quantity of the ingredients and bake it for 2 hours. Quarter the recipe for a 18cm/6 inch cake and bake it for 1 3/4 hours. For all sizes, use deep cake tins and grease and line them fully, according to instructions.'

So, I recommend that you make the recipe as stated here for the 9 inch cake. If your 8 inch pan is a round pan, then fill it to no more than 2/3 full and discard any leftover batter (there won't be masses). If the pan is

8 inch square, then use all the batter, as a square pan has a larger volume due to the corners. I wouldn't recommend going for the 10 inch pan as your cake will be too thin. Bake the cake at 160C/fan 140C/gas 3.

Another great recipe for an 8 inch round pan is Angela Nilsen's ultimate chocolate cake, which you will also find here bbcgoodfood.com .

Hope this is helpful. I've just finished writing a step by step baking book in my 'What to Cook and How to Cook it' series for Phaidon press. Look out for it in the Autumn as it has loads of recipes great for people beginning their baking journey!

All the best, Jane

Q

I've been looking at your 3 tier wedding cake and I can't find the recipe for your lemon tier, which I thought would be nice for the 6 inch. Would be so grateful if you could email me it. I am covering the cakes with sugar paste do you think these will be suitable? Apparently a dense cake is good?

A Hi, thanks for your query. Here are some ideas:

<http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/4576/wedding-cake-zingy-lemon>

<http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/4578/creating-your-wedding-cake>

If you read the comments below the recipes online you'll find that other readers have made just about every other combination of cake shapes and flavours with these three recipes, but unfortunately I only made the lemon cake as a 23cm (and that was a long time ago!!). So best to go with the whole recipe, use a smaller tin and make cupcakes with the leftovers.

You'll see all the cakes are covered with sugar paste and there are instructions for it there.

Best of luck and thanks for your interest!

Jane

Q Jane, hello,

I have, or rather my wife has, a problem regarding the size of Baking Tins required for the recipe for your Rich Dark Chocolate Cake.

My wife is a competent cook/baker, and the Cake itself presents no problem to her, however the size of the Baking Tins do. Although your excellent recipe shows the diameter of Tins, it does not show the depth dimensions.

Is it possible to let me know so I can pass the info to her.

She is making a three tier Cake, so this info would be great for her.

Kind Regards

P.S.

Do you have a specific recipe for the Chocolate Cake and Lemon Cake filling and the picture on the sheet shows what appears to be a round Tin for the Fruit, and a Square Tin for the others is this correct?

A

Hi. Thank you for your message.

I have attached a pdf copy of the original magazine feature, which I think will help, as all of the relevant recipes are in one place for all three tiers. It's quite hard to see exactly what you need from the website, I agree.

The tins are standard deep tins, by which I mean about 4 inches or so - the kind of depth you'd want for a Christmas cake, if that makes sense - or the kind your wife might hire from a cake decorating shop.

If your wife already has tins but is worried they aren't quite deep enough, then I'd recommend that when she lines them, she leaves about 1 inch of the lining paper sticking up above the top of the tin. That way, if the cake mix is too large for the tin, it will have somewhere to go!

All of the cakes in this recipe are round. I find that it's most economical

to cut celebration cakes in a grid pattern rather than into wedges, so that everyone gets an even piece and it goes a really long way. Perhaps the shape of the slices in the picture were confusing, without the context of the rest of the recipe. This is all explained in the pdf in case you're not sure.

With all best wishes,

Jane

Wedding cake

Create a dream

Jane Hornby's wedding cake is our simplest ever. And each tier is flavoured differently, so there's something for everyone

PHOTOGRAPHS MYLES NEW

Beautiful centrepiece.
Also doubles as
dessert



Time plan

UP TO A MONTH AHEAD

- Make the fruit cake and cover with marzipan.
- Make the chocolate and lemon cakes if freezing – they will freeze for up to 1 month (although they are best made fresh if you can).

UP TO 4 DAYS AHEAD

- Make the chocolate and lemon cakes if making fresh – keep well wrapped in baking parchment and cling film in a cool place.
- Make the chocolate and lemon buttercream and keep in the fridge.

UP TO 3 DAYS AHEAD

- Fill and cover the chocolate and lemon cakes with buttercream and cover all of the cakes and the board with icing.
- Insert the dowelling rods.

UP TO 2 DAYS AHEAD

- Frost the rose petals.

ON THE DAY

- Stack the cakes and decorate with petals once the cakes are in place.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

YOU'LL NEED

- 15cm, 23cm and 30cm deep-round cake tins
- plenty of greaseproof paper
- thick 35cm diameter silver cake drum (base)
- thin 15cm, 23cm and 30cm diameter silver cake boards
- long serrated knife
- palette knife
- cream, ivory and dusky pink food colouring pastes
- long rolling pin
- 6 standard plastic dowelling rods
- strong kitchen scissors
- 1m ivory ribbon, 15mm wide
- medium artist's paintbrush
- cooling rack
- string for measuring
- 20cm, 25cm and 33cm cardboard cake boxes with lids (if transporting the cake)

First bake your cakes

Stick to either metric or imperial measurements throughout the recipes. All recipes use large eggs



‘I’m getting married next year and no, I’m not going to make my own cake. But if I was, this would be it – simple, stylish and, designed to suit all tastes. Best of all there’s no fiddly decorations’ JANE HORNBY

The top tier: Light fruit cake

This is totally different to traditional dark fruit cakes, but if you have a special family recipe, bake that in a 15cm tin and feed with alcohol or fruit juice in the month leading up to the wedding.

Serves 24 MODERATELY EASY (but no need to) **PREP 30 mins plus cooling COOK 2 hrs 15 mins**

2 tbsp orange flower water (we used English Provender Co)
zest and juice 1 orange
zest and juice 1 lemon
140g/5oz unsalted butter, softened
140g/5oz golden caster sugar
2 eggs, beaten
175g/6oz plain flour
100g/4oz undyed glacé cherries, halved
100g/4oz dried apricots, roughly chopped
100g/4oz mixed peel, chopped (we used Sundora)
100g/4oz golden sultanas
50g/2oz shelled pistachios, left whole
50g/2oz (3 balls) stem ginger from a jar

1 Heat oven to 160C/fan 140C/gas 3. Grease and double-line the base and sides of a deep, 15cm cake tin. Wrap a double layer of greaseproof or brown paper around the outside of the tin, too, then secure with string.
2 Using an electric whisk or a tabletop mixer, cream the butter and sugar together until fluffy and light. Beat in the eggs gradually. In a small bowl, mix the orange flower water with the zest and juice of the orange and lemon. Fold the flour, then dried fruit, pistachios and ginger into the creamed mix, followed by the juice and zest mix.
3 Spoon the mix into the prepared tin and bake for 30 mins, then turn oven down to 150C/fan 130C/gas 2 and bake for another 1 hr 45 mins until risen, golden and an inserted skewer comes out clean. Leave to cool for 15 mins before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely. *The cake will keep well wrapped in a cool place for up to 1 month.*

PER SERVING 157 kcalories, protein 2g, carbohydrate 24g, fat 7g, saturated fat 3g, fibre 1g, sugar 18g, salt 0.06g

The middle tier: Zingy lemon syrup cake

This cake gives a real citrus hit and the drenching of lemon syrup keeps it beautifully moist.

Serves 30 MODERATELY EASY **PREP 30 mins plus cooling time COOK 2 hrs**

350g/12oz unsalted butter, softened
350g/12oz golden caster sugar
6 eggs, beaten
140g/5oz plain flour
280g/10oz self-raising flour
zest of 4 lemons, juice of 3 (about 100ml/3½fl oz)
FOR THE SYRUP
zest and juice 2 lemons
100g/4oz golden caster sugar

1 Heat oven to 160C/fan 140C/gas 3. Prepare the inside and outside of a 23cm tin, as before. Cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy, then gradually beat in the eggs a little at a time. Add a tbsp of the plain flour if it starts to split. Fold in the flours and a pinch of salt, followed by the lemon zest and juice.
2 Spoon the mix into the tin and bake for 1 hr 15 mins until well-risen and golden and a skewer inserted comes out clean. Meanwhile, make the syrup by heating the sugar, lemon zest and juice in a small pan until the sugar dissolves. Set aside.
3 Once the cake is out of the oven, leave to cool until it's just warm, then use a skewer to poke holes down to the bottom all over the cake, right. Pour the syrup over, letting it completely soak in after each addition. Leave to cool completely, then either wrap or fill and ice the cake.

The unfilled cake will keep well if you wrap it with baking parchment and cling film for up to 4 days, or in the freezer for up to a month.

PER SERVING 269 kcalories, protein 4g, carbohydrate 33g, fat 14g, saturated fat 8g, fibre 1g, sugar 20g, salt 0.17g



The bottom tier: Rich dark chocolate cake

Simply melting ingredients together makes for a decadently rich chocolate cake that's perfect for dessert with a splash of cream. It's also far easier than beating all that butter, sugar and 10 eggs.

Serves 50 MODERATELY EASY **PREP 40 mins plus cooling COOK 2 hrs 30 mins**

650g/1lb 7oz unsalted butter
650g/1lb 7oz plain chocolate (70% cocoa), broken into pieces
100ml/3½ fl oz very strong coffee – espresso is ideal
3 tsp vanilla essence
650g/1lb 7oz plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
950g/2lb 2oz light soft brown sugar
10 eggs
2 x 284ml soured cream

1 Heat oven to 160C/fan 140C/gas 4. Butter, double-line and wrap the sides of the 30cm cake tin as before. Put the butter and chocolate into a medium saucepan, then stir over a low heat until melted and smooth. Stir in the coffee and vanilla.
2 Sift the flour, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda into the biggest bowl you have. Add the sugar, breaking down any lumps with your fingertips if necessary. Beat the eggs and soured cream together in a jug or bowl and pour into the flour mix. Pour in the melted chocolate mix as well, then stir with a wooden spoon until you have a thick, even chocolaty batter.
3 Pour into the prepared tin and bake for 2½ hrs – don't open the oven door before 2 hrs is up, as this will cause the cake to sink. Once cooked, leave in the tin to cool completely. *The unfilled cake will keep for up to four days, wrapped as before, or frozen for a month.*

PER SERVING 274 kcalories, protein 3g, carbohydrate 30g, fat 16g, saturated fat 9g, fibre 1g, sugar 20g, salt 0.23g

Now cover & decorate them

1 Cover the fruit cake with marzipan

WHAT YOU NEED

half a 454g jar apricot jam (you'll use the rest later)
500g pack natural marzipan

HOW TO DO IT

1 Boil the apricot jam with 2 tbsp water and sieve into a bowl. Brush the 15cm cake board with a little of the apricot jam. Cut off the rounded top of the cake and turn upside-down onto the board. Measure across the top and sides of the cake with string, cut to length and set the string aside. Brush the cake all over with a thin layer of apricot jam.
2 Dust the work surface with icing sugar and roll the marzipan into a circle big enough to cover the cake top and sides, using the cut string as a guide. Lift over the cake and smooth with your hands. Trim the marzipan to the base of the cake (so you can't see the board) and leave to dry for one day if time. If not, the cake can be iced straight away. (see step 3)

2 Fill & cover the chocolate & lemon cakes with buttercream

Adding good-quality lemon curd or silky chocolate ganache transforms simple buttercream into an indulgent filling.

WHAT YOU NEED

500g/1lb 2oz unsalted butter, softened
1kg/2lb 4oz icing sugar, sifted
jar good-quality lemon curd
142ml carton double cream
200g bar plain (70% cocoa) chocolate, broken into pieces

HOW YOU DO IT

1 First make the buttercream. Beat the butter until creamy, then gradually beat in the sifted icing sugar. Weigh 600g/1lb 5oz of the mix and stir 5 tbsp of the lemon curd into it.
2 In a small pan, bring the cream just to the boil, then pour over the chocolate. Leave to stand for 2 mins, then stir until smooth. Once cool but still liquid, fold into the remaining basic buttercream.
3 Once each cake is completely cool, level off

the top using a long serrated knife. Spread a little of the corresponding buttercream over the matching thin cake board. Turn cake upside down onto the board and brush all over with a thin layer of the sieved apricot jam – this helps to prevent stray crumbs getting into the buttercream.
4 Cut into three layers horizontally – don't worry if you cut the layers unevenly as it won't affect the finished cake. If it's a hot day or warm in your kitchen, refrigerate the cakes for a while – it will firm them up and make cutting and lifting much easier. Lift off each layer as you cut it, and set it aside so that when you re-stack the layers they are in the right order.
5 If you've made the buttercream in advance and it has hardened slightly, warm in the microwave on Defrost for 10 secs and beat well. Using a palette knife, spread approx ¼ of the buttercream over the first layer of the cake. For the lemon cake, swirl another tbsp or so of lemon curd over the icing. Stack the remaining layers this way, spreading all of the remaining icing over the top and sides of the cake, smoothing it down to meet the cardboard cake base. Smooth all over with your palette knife and set aside. The cakes are now ready for covering with ready-to-roll icing. *Filled with buttercream and iced, the cakes will keep for up to 3 days.*

Layer and fill the cake with buttercream



3 Cover all the cakes with ready-to-roll icing

The next stage is to subtly colour the different tiers with the ivory, dusky pink and cream colouring pastes.

WHAT YOU NEED

Fruit cake 500g/1lb 2oz white ready-to-roll icing, cream food-colouring paste

Lemon cake 1 kg/2lb 4oz white ready-to-roll icing, dusky pink food-colouring paste

Chocolate cake 1.7kg/3lb 10oz white ready-to-roll icing, ivory food-colouring paste

For the board 800g/1lb 12oz white ready-to-roll icing, ivory food-colouring paste

HOW TO DO IT

1 For the marzipanned fruit cake only, first lightly brush with cooled, boiled water to help the icing stick. For all the cakes, dust the work surface with icing sugar and knead the icing until pliable. Add a few specks of the food colouring with a toothpick or the end of a skewer – be very sparing as a little goes a long way. Work the colour in until you have an evenly coloured, smooth paste. Add more and knead again if you want the colour to be more intense.

Knead the colour into the icing



KNOW HOW

- Avoid moving the cakes when the icing is still soft. If you do need to move a cake before it's dry, lever a palette knife under the icing and cardboard base and lift from underneath.
- Smooth any marks with your hands – or cover imperfections with rose petals.
- Never put an iced cake into a fridge, even if it's a hot day, as water will condense onto the icing, softening and spoiling your hard work.



Lift over the cake

2 Lightly dust the work surface again and roll the icing into a circle large enough to cover the sides and top of the cake, with a little excess. Use string to measure as before. Lift the icing over the cake, using your rolling pin to help you.



Smooth with your hands

3 Smooth the icing around the cake with your hands, then trim off the excess with a sharp knife. Leave overnight to dry. Once iced, keep for 3 days.
4 Once you've iced the cakes, cover the 35cm base. Lightly brush with cooled, boiled water and cover with ivory-coloured icing. Trim and leave overnight to dry.

4 Stack the cakes

Dowels give stability and strength to tiered cakes. By measuring and cutting the dowels to the same length, you're providing an even platform for the next cake to sit on, even if your cake is a bit wonky. For this cake, the tiers are stacked like steps, just off centre.

WHAT YOU NEED

200g/8oz icing sugar

1 egg white

HOW YOU DO IT

1 In a large bowl, gradually beat icing sugar into the egg white until thick and smooth. Cover with cling film until ready to use.

2 Starting with the chocolate cake, insert three dowelling rods in a triangle, slightly offset to one side and no wider than the base of the lemon cake that's going to sit on top. With a permanent pen, lightly mark where the top of the icing comes to on the dowel.

3 Carefully pull out the dowels and line up on the work surface. Using a ruler, re-mark each rod to the highest point. Score the dowels with scissors around the new marks and snap the plastic cleanly.

4 Re-insert the rods in their original holes, rounded end down. Cut the thin ivory ribbon to fit around the thick base board, securing at the back with glue or double-sided tape. To stack the cakes, spoon a little royal icing over each of the dowel

Insert dowels for stability



holes. Carefully lift the chocolate cake onto the covered board, then stack cakes on top of one another, positioning each cake and gently lowering one side of it onto the base or cake below. Slide your palette knife under it at this point and gently lower the cake down. Slide the knife out at the last minute. (If you're moving the cake to the venue, put the cakes into their boxes and take the icing with you.)

The finishing touches

Frosting the rose petals

It's easiest to frost rose petals that are thicker and more waxy, so go for tight roses rather than old-fashioned, more delicate tea roses. Before you buy all your roses, buy a single head and frost a few of the petals to check that the variety you've chosen holds up well. If you're using edible petals, do the same. If they are too delicate, simply sprinkle the petals over as they are.

WHAT YOU NEED

6 roses in cream or pink, or a mixture of both (or more if you want)
1 egg white
100g/4oz white caster sugar

HOW YOU DO IT

1 Gently pull the petals from the roses. Lightly beat the egg white with a fork then, one by one, lightly brush the petals with egg white all over on both sides.
2 Sprinkle with caster sugar and set on a cooling rack to dry. They will dry and harden within 2 hrs. Keep the dried petals safely in one layer in a cool

place (not the fridge). A large tray is ideal for this. *Frosted petals can be made up to 2 days ahead.*

On the big day

If you haven't done already, stack the cakes with the royal icing. Sprinkle the frosted rose petals over the cakes, arranged so they're tumbling down.

KNOW-HOW

How to cut a wedding cake

The secret to cutting a wedding cake is to cut it in a grid rather than wedges. This will give you the maximum number of evenly-sized servings from each cake and, as the cakes are rich, makes cutting small slices really straightforward. Cut across with a sharp knife, wiping the blade after each cut.

For dessert, the chocolate tier will serve approx 50 and the lemon cake 30, when cut into 5 x 2.5cm slices. The fruit cake will cut into 24 x 2.5cm square pieces. Cut the sponge cakes slightly smaller if you just want to serve bites with some coffee.

DON'T FORGET

- Check with your florist that you'll be able to get the roses you want on the day.
- Take royal icing if you're stacking the cakes somewhere else.
- Make sure there's a safe, cool place for the cake to sit out of direct sunlight during the day.

READER OFFER

CAKE TIN SET FOR £29.99 + £2.95 p&p.

These Mermaid silver anodised cake tins – 15.2, 22.8 and 30.4cm, will last a lifetime. They have easy food release bases and even heat distribution. The tins are also anti-warp, twist and buckle and, as the surface is not coated, they won't peel, rust or flake.

HOW TO ORDER Call 0845 166 4242 and quote code GF018.

Offer closes 28/2/06. Allow 28 days for delivery.



Frosting the petals

OVER TO YOU!

If you've been inspired to make our cake, we'd love to see the results. Send in photos to our address on p13 with full contact details and we will publish the best.

WHERE TO BUY SPECIALIST ITEMS

Angel Creations
 0208 567 1081
 angelcakeorder@hotmail.com
Jane Asher Party Cakes 020 7584 6177
 jane-asher.com
Squires Shop
 0845225 5671
 squires-shop.com
Sugar Shack
 020 8952 4260
 sugarshack.co.uk

Celebrate with a special cake

Whether you're celebrating a birthday, anniversary or wedding, a homemade cake is so original, and it can save you money, too. One versatile vanilla cake is the basis for all of **Jane Hornby's** gorgeous bakes PHOTOGRAPHS **PHILIP WEBB**

One simple recipe, 3 great cakes

Easy vanilla cake

SERVES 12 • PREP 20 mins •
COOK 1 hr 20 mins **Easy**

I often bake using yogurt – it gives a slightly more dense cake and prevents any kind of dryness. Drench the cake with vanilla syrup while it's still warm and I guarantee this will be one of the tastiest, best-keeping vanilla cakes you've ever made.

250g pack unsalted butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
250g/9oz golden caster sugar
seeds scraped from 1 vanilla pod or 1 tsp vanilla paste
5 large eggs, cracked into a jug
85g/3oz plain flour
100g/4oz full-fat Greek yogurt (I used Total)

250g/9oz self-raising flour
3 tbsp semi-skimmed milk

FOR THE SYRUP

50g/2oz golden caster sugar
seeds ½ vanilla pod or ½ tsp vanilla paste

1 Heat oven to 160C/140C fan/gas 3. Grease a round, deep 20cm tin, then line the base and sides with non-stick baking paper.

2 Using electric beaters or a tabletop mixer, beat the butter, sugar, vanilla and ¼ tsp salt together until pale and fluffy, then pour in the eggs, one at a time, giving the mix a really good beating before adding the next. Add 1 tbsp of the plain flour if the mix starts to look slimy rather than fluffy. Beat in the yogurt.

3 Mix the flours; then, using a large metal spoon, fold them into the batter, followed by the milk. Spoon the mix into the tin and bake for 1 hr 20 mins or until well risen and golden – a skewer inserted into the middle should come out clean.

4 Meanwhile, make the syrup by gently heating 50ml water with the sugar and vanilla in a pan until the sugar dissolves. Set aside. Once the cake is out of the oven, leave to cool for 30 mins in the tin, then use a skewer to poke holes all over the cake, going right to the bottom. Pour the syrup over, letting it completely soak in after each addition. Leave to cool completely, then either wrap the cake well or fill and ice it. *If you wrap it with baking parchment and cling film, the unfilled cake will keep well for up to 3 days, or in the freezer for up to a month.*

PER SERVING 399 kcals, protein 6g, carbs 48g, fat 21g, sat fat 12g, fibre 1g, sugar 27g, salt 0.31g

A good, basic vanilla buttercream

Put 175g soft unsalted butter into a large bowl and beat with electric beaters for a few secs until pale. Gradually add 300g sifted icing sugar, a spoonful at a time, beating well after each addition. The mixture will seem stiff by the time all the sugar has been added, but keep beating and it will become pale and creamy. Finally, beat in seeds from 1 vanilla pod or 1 tsp vanilla paste. *Will keep in the fridge for up to 1 week. Bring back to room temperature and beat well before using. Makes enough to cover a 20cm cake.*



The perfect cake for the big day...

How to bake, assemble and decorate your cake

Simple elegance wedding cake

CUTS INTO about 90 slices ● PREP and COOK 3 days, to stagger the work

For the confident cook 🍳 un-iced

To make a three-tier wedding cake, all you need to do is multiply the basic cake mixtures and icings according to the table below, and take your time. You will need some special equipment, but the stunning look of this cake belies just how straightforward it is to put together.

YOU WILL NEED

5 x ingredients for Easy vanilla cake

5 x ingredients for Basic vanilla buttercream

340g jar strawberry jam, optional (I used Tiptree Strawberry & Champagne)

340g jar apricot jam, warmed and sieved

4kg/8lb 9oz white ready-to-roll icing (I used Regalice)

15cm, 23cm and 30cm thin round cake boards

40cm thick round cake board

cocktail sticks

palette knife

a roll of baking parchment

a flat baking sheet or cake lifter

icing sugar, for rolling out

string, for measuring

8 x long plastic dowels

kitchen scissors

3.5m x 1.5cm white satin ribbon

tube of UHU glue, or similar

TO STACK AND INSERT THE FLOWERS

12cm and 15cm polystyrene cake dummies

18-gauge floristry wire, cut into about 20 x 10cm lengths

15-20 white and pale green hydrangea heads (get some smaller, some larger, if you can); your florist can advise

40cm, 30cm and 18cm cake boxes with lids, if you're transporting the cake

● Making the cakes

Make the basic recipe, following the quantities and times in the table, then cool and drench with the syrup as before. The cakes can be frozen ahead, without icing. However, if you bake them three days before the wedding, the cake will be fine until the big day.

For the bottom tier

Triple the quantities for the basic cake mix, then spoon into a ready-lined deep round 30cm cake tin. Bake for 2 hrs 15 mins on the middle shelf until risen and cooked through as before. While this cooks, make up a quadruple batch of the syrup – this will be enough for all three cakes. Cool and drench the cake with syrup as before.

For the middle and top tiers

Double the quantities for the basic cake mix, then spoon it into ready-lined 15cm and 23cm cake tins, filling each to about two-thirds full. Bake them together on the middle shelf, taking the small cake out after 1 hr 15 mins, and leaving the larger cake to cook for 1 hr 30 mins in total. If you know that your oven has hot spots, quickly move the cakes around after 50 mins. Cool and drench with syrup as before.

● Layer and cover the cakes with buttercream and jam

1 Make the buttercream as in the basic recipe. You will need 5 x basic quantity – this is a lot, so split your weighed-out quantities in two before you start mixing. You may have some left over, but better too much than too little. Weigh out the buttercream according to the table, below. Spread a little buttercream over the 15cm cake board. Level the top of the cake if you need to, then upturn the 15cm cake onto it. Split into three using

a bread knife. I like to mark the front of the cake on each layer before lifting it off,



using toothpicks, so I can reassemble it in exactly the right way. Take the top third off first (what was the bottom of the cake) and set aside. Carefully cut

the middle layer and set that aside, too. A flat baking sheet or cake lifter can be very helpful here to slide the cake layers off and then back onto each other.



2 Spread a layer of buttercream over the cake on the board. Return the middle layer, lining up the toothpick markings, then spread another layer of buttercream on top. Add a little jam if you like, dotting it over, then spreading evenly. Top with the final piece of cake, then dust off any crumbs on or around



the cake. Now brush the whole cake with a thin layer of apricot jam. This should stop you getting too many crumbs in the buttercream. Sit the whole cake on a large sheet of baking parchment.

3 Spread the rest of the buttercream over, starting with the top, then smooth and paddle it around the sides and down to the board. Repeat the whole process with the remaining cakes, using the corresponding boards and the quantities in the table. The cakes are now ready to be iced. You can leave them overnight if needed, loosely covered with cling film.

TIP Before I ice a cake, I sit it on a big sheet of baking parchment. This lets you lift and move the cakes about as you ice, without disturbing the icing around the bottom.

TIP Chilling the sponges for 30 mins before cutting makes them easier to cut into layers. If you're really nervous about this bit, just split the cakes into two.

TIP Start with the smallest cake; that way once you know what you're doing, you'll feel more confident to do it on a larger scale.

● Covering the cake with icing



1 Dust the work surface with icing sugar, knead the icing until pliable, then use your rolling pin to roll it into a circle large enough to cover the sides and top of the cake, with a little left over. Use string to check the size. Use your rolling pin to help you lift the icing over the cake.



2 Smooth the icing around the cake with your hands, easing it over the edges and down to the board. Then trim off the excess with a sharp knife, flush with the bottom of the cake board.

Smooth any marks with the flats of your hands, buffing the icing to a slight shine. 3 Once you've iced all the cakes, cover the thick base board. Lightly brush with cooled boiled water, then lay the icing over. Trim to the edge of the board with a knife (I tend to do this like I would a pie crust, holding the board in my left hand, and knife in my right), then leave the board and the cakes to dry overnight.

● Stacking the cakes

Dowels, which are basically plastic sticks, provide stability and strength to tiered cakes, and polystyrene blocks allow you to add a 'floating' layer of flowers. By measuring and cutting the dowels to the same length as the polystyrene, you'll provide an even platform for the next cake to sit on, even if the cake below is a bit wonky.



1 Sit the 15cm dummy centrally on top of the biggest cake. Insert four of the dowels into the cake, around the outside of the dummy, in a square shape. Push them right down until they meet the cake board. Mark with a pen where the top of the dummy comes to. 2 Carefully pull out the dowels; then, using scissors, score around each dowel where you marked it. Snap the plastic



3 Position the biggest cake in the middle of the covered board. Run a thin line of glue around the base board and fix the ribbon around it. Fix the ribbon around each cake, using a spot of the glue on the ribbon to secure it to itself. If you're moving the cake to a venue, put the cakes into their boxes now. Make a little kit to take with you – glue, scissors, etc – just in case you have to re-do anything.

● On the day – stacking and decorating with flowers



I used hydrangeas – they're beautiful, in season and you can achieve a dramatic effect with relatively few blooms.

1 On the day, save putting the flowers on the cake until as late as you reasonably can. Cut the stems of the hydrangeas to about 2-3cm. Split your least-favourite bloom into smaller pieces – this will help you fill any awkward gaps later. Make sure you save one beautiful bloom for the top.

2 Insert a length of floristry wire into each stem (or wind it around the stem), leaving a spike of wire about 3cm long. Push this into the polystyrene dummy. Repeat until the two dummies are surrounded with a halo of flowers. The bottom cake should be in its permanent position now – out of direct light and away from any radiators. Lift the 23cm cake onto the bottom polystyrene dummy, taking care not to squash any petals, then repeat with the top cake. Fill any gaps with the broken-up flower head you reserved earlier. Sit the final bloom on top of the cake, and you're done!

● To watch Jane ice a cake with ready-to-roll icing, visit bbcgoodfood.com. The video shows a marzipanned cake, but the technique is just the same



TIP Never put a cake with sugarpaste icing on it into the fridge. Water will condense onto the icing, softening and spoiling all your hard work.

Cutting the cake

Cut the cake across, in a grid, rather than into wedges. You should be able to get 50 servings from the large cake, 30 from the middle and 12 from the top, when cut into 2.5 x 5cm pieces.

● All of the specialist equipment used is available from Squires (0845 225 5671, squires-shop.com) and Sugarshack (0800 597 5097, sugarshack.co.uk). Both deliver nationwide and Squires hires out tins.

Turn the page for two more special cakes

	YOU WILL NEED				
	15cm round	23cm round	30cm round	40cm board	Total ingredients
Cake mix	2 x basic recipe makes both cakes		3 x basic recipe		5 x basic recipe
Baking times	1 hr 15 mins	1 hr 30 mins	2 hrs 15 mins		
Syrup	4 x basic recipe will be enough for all 3 cakes				4 x basic recipe
Buttercream	Approx 400g/14oz	Approx 600g/1lb 5oz	Approx 1.3kg/3lb		5 x basic recipe
Ready-to-roll icing	500g/1lb 2oz	1kg/2lb 4oz	1.7kg/3lb 10oz	800g/1lb 12oz	4kg/8lb 9oz

...and every summer occasion



Children will love this birthday cake – and you'll love its simplicity. Chocolate buttons are always a hit, so I've turned them into butterflies and ladybirds with the help of coloured sprinkles and squirty icing tubes. If you're making the cake for a boy, then it's easy to turn the ladybirds into spiders – simply add a few liquorice legs

Birthday bug cake

SERVES at least 16 children • PREP 20 mins plus 30 mins for the decoration, plus cooling
• COOK 1 hr 20 mins **Easy**

The decorated cake can be left, loosely covered, in a cool, dry place (not the fridge) for up to 24 hours before the party.

Easy vanilla cake and syrup mix, as before (see page 108)

100g/4oz white chocolate (I used Milkybar)

Basic vanilla buttercream mix, as before
12 giant chocolate buttons, 6 cut in half
treat-size pack chocolate buttons

2 chocolate sticks (I used Matchmakers)
hundreds and thousands
red (or whatever colour you like) writing icing tubes (I used Asda)
multicoloured candles

1 Bake the Easy vanilla cake in a greased, lined deep 20cm cake tin as in the basic recipe; drench with syrup and leave to cool. Leave the oven on.

2 Break the white chocolate into cubes into a microwaveable bowl, and heat on High for 1 min (or melt over a pan of simmering water). Stir, then leave any remaining lumps to melt in the warm liquid chocolate. Once just-warm, beat the chocolate into the buttercream.

3 Start the butterflies. Put the whole giant buttons on a flat baking tray on non-stick baking paper, then put into the oven for 20-30 secs or until the chocolate looks shiny. Take out, scatter with hundreds and thousands, then leave to set completely before cutting in half with a large non-serrated knife. For the ladybirds, pipe dots of icing all over the already cut giant button halves, then leave aside to dry.

4 Spread the buttercream over the cake, then start to arrange the butterflies. Cut each Matchmaker into 3 – these will make the bodies. Press onto the cake, then stick four giant button halves around each body to make 'wings'. For the ladybirds, place two spotty button halves together, then use a small button for the head. Scatter more hundreds and thousands all over the cake, then poke in the candles.

PER SERVING 536 kcals, protein 7g, carbs 64g, fat 30g, sat fat 18g, fibre 1g, sugar 47g, salt 0.28g

Summer celebration cake

SERVES 16 • PREP 20 mins • COOK 1 hr 30 mins **Easy**

Using the basic mix, adding fruit and cooking it in a slightly larger tin transforms the basic vanilla cake into a something special, perfect for dessert.

Easy vanilla cake mix, as before (you won't need the syrup)
2 x 170g punnets raspberries
225g punnet blueberries
225g tub crème fraîche
icing sugar (optional)

1 Butter and line a round, loose-bottomed 23cm cake tin, as before. Make the Easy vanilla cake batter as before, spread half of it into the tin, then mix half the berries into what is left. Spoon this over the first layer and smooth the top. Bake for 1 hr 30 mins; check as before with a skewer.

2 Cool for 30 mins, then remove from the tin and leave to cool on a wire rack. Once completely cold, put onto a plate, smooth the crème fraîche over and pile the remaining berries on the top. Dust with icing sugar, if using. *The cake is best eaten fresh, but will keep in the fridge for up to 2 days; return to room temperature before topping with the cream and fruit and serving.*

PER SERVING 349 kcals, protein 6g, carbs 35g, fat 22g, sat fat 13g, fibre 1g, sugar 19g, salt 0.24g

Easy yet impressive

