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Fondant

Frustrating Yet Fabulous

Have you ever looked at a beautifully decorated cake and asked yourself 'How do they get the icing to look so smooth and elegant?' The possibility is it's not just your regular ole icing that has been used, but the ever versatile yet temperamental, fondant.

By BELINDA HOGAN

WHAT IS FONDANT?

Fondant in its basic form is a concoction of sugar, water and glucose, which creates a creamy white substance used in some confectionary and for the purpose of cake decorating. It is the beautiful thick yet smooth

icing, we have all seen on traditional wedding cakes and it has a very distinctive flavour. For most of us, it is the substance that we would all love to use well on our creative cake creations to give them that traditional touch of elegance. In a modern sense,

fondant is used to give cakes that absolute wow factor in regard to decoration. Some of us have perfected the art of using fondant whilst many of us are committed to working out just how best to use it. Experts agree, fondant is not only difficult to make, it's difficult to use. However, like everything with sugar art, practice will make perfect!

In French, the word 'fondant' is derived from the word 'fondre', which means 'to melt'. This is very apt considering the way fondant is made and the fact visually it gives the impression that it's going to melt in your mouth when you eat it. However, looks can be deceiving when it comes to the taste of fondant! Let's just say, some fondant has a very acquired taste. This general opinion is more about uncooked fondant, which is mostly made out of confectioner's sugar. To counteract this lack of taste, you can add vanilla, lemon, almond extract and even chocolate. Cooked fondant on the other hand can taste sweet enough to eat. You can add food colouring to fondant and some sugar artists have perfected marshmallow recipes that are more tasteful.

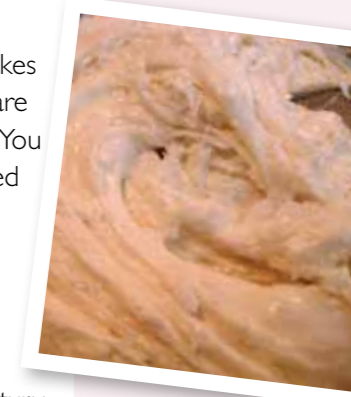
These days not only can you make your own fondant, you can buy it pre-made at the supermarket. Many people start with the pre-

made fondant, perfecting this on their cakes before trying to make their own. There are different ways you can use fondant too. You can roll it, pour it and sculpt it. With rolled and sculptured fondant, gelatin or agar is used to help it manipulate more easily.

WHERE DOES FONDANT ORIGINATE FROM?

Fondant was invented in the sixteenth century during the Renaissance in Europe, but it was only the rich who could afford to eat it, due to the extremely high cost of white sugar. Think of Marie Antoinette who is said to have coined the phrase 'Let Them Eat Cake,' as the type of people who were eating fondant during this period. The poor of course loved to eat cake too, so bakers created a paste made from sugar and almonds, which is not unlike what we know as fondant today in regards to texture and taste.

The earliest fondants were first popular in candy fillings (poured fondant) and it was not until the early twentieth century did it start to be used as a popular icing for cakes (rolled and sculptured fondant). Today, we chill fondant before we apply it to our creations, but in earlier times small cakes were dipped in warm fondant and then allowed to set.



Above: Mixed marshmallow fondant
Below left: Bakers in Berlin, 1947, dip their small cakes in warm fondant and then let set.

Below right: Peppermint mocha cupcakes covered in poured fondant.

Opposite page: Chocolate Poured Fondant Filled Cake.



Photo Courtesy of Kristen Ausk



Photo Courtesy of Ben Earwicker

decorating reality television programs that many of us are addicted to watching!

HOW DO YOU MAKE FONDANT?

There are various techniques and thousands of recipes in cookbooks and on the web about how to make fondant. It's a tricky process that requires lots of patience and perseverance. But in a nutshell, a general combination (there can be other ingredients depending on the recipe) of sugar, water and glucose is carefully mixed together, which is heated and then cooled precisely to form minuscule crystals. These tiny crystals are what give fondant its lush, smooth texture and appearance. If you don't get the mixture absolutely right, you can run into all sorts of problems. For example, if you heat the mixture for too long, your fondant will probably have a dull look and taste gritty. If you fail to get the balance correct with all of your ingredients, your fondant will possibly be too stiff to knead. A fondant with too little glucose will remain a liquid and not turn into the dough like substance you desire. Once you have mixed your dough to the correct consistency, make it into a ball and wrap it in plastic wrap. Some recipes say pop it in the fridge, others says put it in an airtight plastic container, so it does not dry out.

Once cooled, you are ready to knead your fondant and ice your cake. Some chefs suggest covering your cake with a light fruit glaze, a thin layer of marzipan or buttercream frosting to help prepare your cake's surface for the fondant. This will alleviate any crumbs that will give your icing a lumpy look. If you are using poured fondant start at the centre top and then flow it down the side of your cake, using a spatula to smooth and direct. For the rolled variety, follow your recipe directions in regard to draping your fondant over your cake and sculpting any additions. Make sure to investigate the array of tools you can buy to help you in the process.

WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL WHEN USING FONDANT?

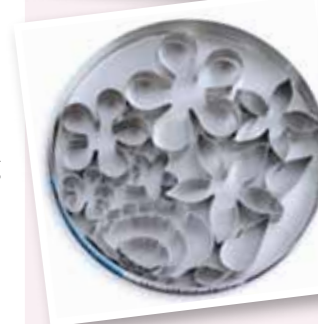
Like most elegant things, fondant is delicate and intricate to use, so there is no room for error. For your fondant to turn out the way you want, there are reasons why you need to follow process to the tee. Here are ten fondant-making tips:

- Work with your fondant quickly. Why? Because it has a tendency to dry and crack making it impossible to manipulate.
- Cool your hands before you touch fondant. Why? Because hot hands will make your fondant sticky and unworkable!
- Use a clean surface when kneading your fondant. Why? As a cook, this is a golden rule. You don't want odd bits contaminating your icing!
- Keep a plastic bag handy. Why? Placing your fondant in a plastic bag when you are not using it will slow down the drying process.
- The weather is the key to great fondant. Why? If it's too humid your fondant will become sticky. If it's freezing you'll be playing backyard cricket with your fondant ball!
- Do not freeze your fondant balls. Why? Condensation will destroy it.

- Do not stick your finished fondant covered cake in the fridge. Why? Our condensation friend will again have its way!
- Get above your fondant when you are kneading it. Why? Fondant is tough and you will need all your elbow grease when you knead. In fact kneading fondant is a great little work out!
- Don't pull your fondant over your cake. Why? Fondant looks tough but is very delicate and it will rip.
- Keep the corn flour handy. Why? Placing corn flour on your kneading board will help your fondant not get sticky.

WHO CAN USE FONDANT?

We can all use fondant, but you need a positive attitude with it. Fondant is like a temperamental toddler that will frustrate you and require your absolute patience. It is like a delicate piece of china that will snap if you are not careful with it. It's like a plant that will dry out and die, if you do not nurture it. As cake artists we need to get in tune with fondant's rhythm, flaws and potential. Yes fondant can be frustrating to work with at times, but when you work out what makes it tick, there are endless creative possibilities. It truly is fabulous!



Above: Tools of the trade – fondant cutters
Below right: Smoothing your fondant – to rid your creations of any lumps.

Opposite page:
Top: Sculptured rose fondant
Below: Traditional wedding cake with fondant icing.

