

ESSENTIAL ITEMS FOR THE BEGINNER CAKE DECORATOR



Cake decorating is a great hobby for anyone who enjoys baking and has an artistic side. Thinking back to when I started I had very little idea as to which tools I really needed and were important and I was like a child in a candy store – to be honest I am still a little like that and have to stop myself each time I go online or into a store!

You can purchase cake decorating kits that contain a broad assortment of tools. However, these can be expensive, especially for someone who is initially interested in learning the basics. I also found that with some of the initial courses I undertook, the tools I needed for that specific course were included – so since completing my courses, I now just add items as I find need them.

Make sure you do some on-line research when looking for items because I have found a significant number of items on-line that are much cheaper than buying from stores.

I have put together the following list of items that I think are essential for you have that will make it a little easier for you to be able to create beautiful, creative cakes.

ESSENTIAL ITEM #1: CAKE TINS

True professional cake tins are the key to making beautiful cakes. Professional cake tins have straight sides instead of slanted. This helps to keep the sides of your cake straight after it is stacked, reducing or eliminating the need to carve down the edges to get perfectly even sides. Square and round tins are the most common, but there are many other shapes and special moulds that you can purchase over time.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #2: CAKE BOARDS

Each cake you make needs its own cake board. These give stability and strength to your cakes, makes them easier to handle and holds them together. You can use the thin cardboard boards for smaller cakes, however, for large cakes over 9", it's best to use a cake drum, which is three cake boards that have been glued and pressed together, then covered in foil.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #3: REVOLVING CAKE STAND

A revolving cake stand elevates your cake from the table, making it much easier to reach and decorate. The stand twists and rotates, so it is easy to reach all of the sides of the cake. A revolving stand is most useful for people who ice cakes regularly.

There are a few key features to look for when choosing a stand. Most stands are made of either plastic or metal. Plastic is lightweight, easy to move around, and easy to store. However, metal is usually of a professional quality and is heavier, which makes turning the cake stand smoother.

You should also consider the size of the stand and look for one with a completely flat edge. Any ridging makes putting the cake on the stand or removing it a difficult task. A non-slip base means that the cake will be more secure.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #4: ROLLING PIN

A rolling pin is essential for rolling out fondant and flower paste. Fondant rollers usually come in two sizes (23cm and 50cm). Small rollers are used for rolling out just enough fondant for decorations, and large rollers are for rolling out fondant to cover an entire cake.

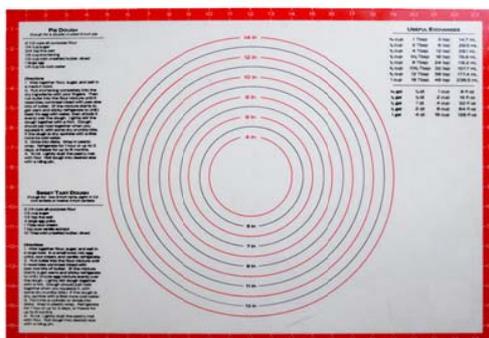
Many people will already have a good rolling pin at home and wonder why you would need to buy fondant rollers. Many traditional rolling pins have handles and they may not be strong enough to roll the fondant thin enough, also many rolling pins also are not as long as fondant rollers and can leave lines in your fondant.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #5: ROLLING MAT

Also consider purchasing a roll-and-cut mat that helps with sizing the fondant for a cake. The mat has sizes already marked and measured to fit a cake perfectly. It also has a non-stick surface to prevent the fondant from sticking to the mat.

I use a large silicone pastry mat with both cm and inch measurements – this is made of flexible silicone and is non-stick and non-slip. Easy to clean and rolls up on my large fondant roller for easy storage.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #6: SERRATED KNIFE OR A CAKE LEVELLER

A serrated knife has a blade with distinct ridges that make it easier to cut into a cake without damaging it. The blade should be fairly long; it should be able to cover the entire diameter of a cake. Look for a handle with sturdy, non-slip grip.



I initially started with a serrated knife however I do not have a good eye for 'level' no matter how hard I tried. I have now purchased a cake leveller and find that this works really well. I have removed 2 of the cutting blades and only use 1 – I have had no issues cutting my cakes level since I purchased this.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #7: ANGLED SPATULA / PALETTE KNIFE

An angled spatula (palette knife) is great for icing. Unlike traditional spatulas, which have a straight blade, the palette knife has a handle raised upwards. This helps to you spread your icing without accidentally hitting the cake with your hand.

Palette knives come in several sizes, from small to large enough to ice entire cakes in just a few strokes, so choose the most appropriate length.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #8: FONDANT SMOOTHERS

These little tools are incredibly useful when covering a cake in fondant. They help smooth the fondant onto the cake and help to release air bubbles from under the fondant. The smoother will help erase rolling pin marks and also helps to ensure that the fondant is applied to the cake evenly. It can even polish the surface so that it is smooth and silky. I find that having two is very useful as I tend to use one to hold the side of the cake so it does not mark whilst I am working with the other smoother.

As you gain more experience you can also buy fondant corner smoothers that assist in getting nice neat rounded or sharp corner on your cakes.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #9: MODELLING TOOLS

When working with fondant and flower paste modelling tools can be useful. The tools are used for shaping and cutting. They can be used to create flowers, petals, and other decorative items, as well as for creating textures on a cake that is already covered in fondant. They are about the size of a pen.

Some common tools also found in a kit include a ball tool, which has spherical attachments on the ends for shaping flower petals; a bone decorating tool, which has angled knobs that help to smooth curves and create frills; serrated and tapered cones for creating indents; and a shell and blade tool for embossing.

Experimenting is the best way to learn which tools work best, but buying a kit may be more economical than buying each piece individually.



ESSENTIAL ITEM #10: PIPING BAGS

Piping bags are essential for decorating any kind of cake with buttercream or royal icing. They can be used to create decorative borders, lettering, and all sorts of other details, including flowers.

There are essentially two kinds of piping bags: washable and disposable. Disposable piping bags can be plastic or parchment. They are convenient because they can just be thrown away after use, but reusable bags can save money in the long run.

ESSENTIAL ITEM #11: NOZZLES AND COUPLERS

Nozzles fit onto piping bags using a two-piece coupler with a threading mechanism. This holds the nozzle in place securely and allows the cake decorator to change the nozzles without too much fuss. The base of the coupler sits inside the bag, while the outer part holds the nozzle in place and screws onto the base.

Look for special effects nozzles that can do multiple designs. In addition to the various nozzle shapes, they can vary in size, from very tiny to a couple centimetres in diameter, so you can create large details as easily as small ones.

ESSENTIAL ITEM # 12: SHORTENING, CORNFLOUR OR ICING SUGAR



Fondant can be very sticky, especially when you are rolling it out to cover a cake.

You will need to use icing sugar, cornflour or some type of shortening on the surface to keep the fondant from sticking.

I have tried all of these and I now only use 'Sprink' which was recommended at one of the courses I did. Sprink is a commercial grade all-purpose release agent that does not contain water and is free from any odour or after taste. It sprays with a very thin film which provides complete and clean release even with cakes containing high sugar content. I use it for coating all baking surfaces including my cake tins, baking sheets, difficult moulds and as my non-stick agent for rolling out fondant.

I have found that if I dust with icing sugar, one of two things happen: I end up working in too much icing sugar and my fondant became dry and cracked; or it became sticky and kept sticking to my work bench/tools/hands.

I also found the same thing happened when using cornflour and it was difficult to wipe of the residual from my fondant.

The choice is yours, if you chose icing sugar or cornflour it is best to keep it in a shaker to disperse it evenly while rolling out fondant.

MORE ITEMS!

I have not classified the following items as essential; however as you gain more experience you will most likely add these to your ever growing collection:

- A small non-stick board
- Soft and fine brushes for painting
- Cutters and embossers
- Colours and dusts
- Clear alcohol for mixing colours and dusts
- Small and large flower formers