

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FONDANT AND GUM PASTE?



FONDANT is typically used to cover cakes, cupcakes and sometimes biscuits. Rolled fondant (RTR) is a pliable, dough-like icing that has a smooth appearance that helps give cakes a polished look and is also flexible and workable enough to mould and hand shape into flowers, 3-dimensional figures and bows, molded decorations, imprinting designs and making cut-out accents.

However it can take time to dry and you risk your design losing its shape, especially if it is a 3-dimensional figure.

I often use a 50/50 gum paste / fondant mix when I make certain details or decorations on a cake (for example Sven in the picture above was made of a 50/50 mix). I do this because it helps make the fondant more workable and you can roll it out thinner than straight fondant, it holds its shape better and I do not want the actual decoration I am making to dry as hard as gum paste – particularly on children's birthday cakes – we all know that kids love icing!

GUM PASTE is also a pliable dough, however it dries very hard and crunchy and is not suitable for covering cakes. It can however be rolled very thin and is ideal for creating hand-modelled flowers, large figures, bows or other intricate decorations as it holds delicate shapes very well.

Drying time with gum paste is reduced and you will need to work with your gum paste quicker than you would with fondant.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN TO USE GUM PASTE OR FONDANT?

If the intention is that the decoration will be eaten along with the cake then it is best made of fondant or at least a 50/50 mix of fondant and gum paste.

For example for my ruffle cakes I use a 50/50 mix because I find that straight fondant does not ruffle as well and I certainly do not want hard, crunchy ruffles on my cake from using straight gum paste.

If the items can be removed off the cake then I would do them in gum paste. For example, some of the larger figurines and animals that sit on top of the cake or around the cake and are usually removed before serving can be made in gum paste as it is unlikely they will be eaten.

However saying this – my son would happily crunch on a gum paste flower just for the sugar hit!

HOW LONG WILL GUM PASTE AND FONDANT LAST AFTER OPENING THE PACKAGE?

Make sure you store your fondant and gum paste at room temperature in an airtight container away from heat and humidity.

I have successfully stored opened fondant for 4-5 months in an airtight container. I have wrapped it in plastic wrap and then placed it into a plastic bag and removed all the excess air. Do not refrigerate or freeze fondant.

Gum paste dries out quickly so ensure you keep it wrapped in plastic wrap and store in a plastic bag in your airtight container. If storing longer than 3-4 weeks it is suggested that you cover with a thin coating of vegetable shortening, wrap it tightly with plastic wrap then place in a plastic bag in your airtight container and refrigerate.

HOW LONG DO FIGURINES AND DECORATIONS TAKE TO DRY?

It really depends on the size and type of decoration as to how long it takes to dry. In general I have found it take 2-3 days, however the environment and weather can play a huge part in determining this. If you are in a more humid area, the moisture will lengthen your drying time. Flat items will dry a lot quicker since most of its surface is exposed to the open air, while three-dimensional figures will take longer because of their thickness.

If you use gum paste it can cut down on the drying time. Where and how you store your items will also play a part in how quickly they harden. I usually dry them on a flat baking tray lined with baking paper. Keeping them in a cool, dry place, away from sunlight (to avoid discoloration) is also important. If you are planning to paint or draw on your fondant it is advisable to allow it to dry at least a day to avoid tearing or damage.

If you are working ahead of time but still want them to remain a bit soft and pliable, you can store them in an airtight container and remove them when you are ready to work with them.

HOW LONG IN ADVANCE CAN I MAKE MY FIGURINES / DECORATIONS BEFORE I NEED TO USE THEM?

I always try to make my figurines, flowers and other items ahead of time so that they can set properly. In most cases I have made them, at most, about a month ahead.

Just remember that many of the purple tones tend to fade quickly, so limit your use of purple if you are making your decorations more than a day or 2 in advance.

CAN I STORE MY DECORATIONS IN THE REFRIGERATOR?

It is not a good idea to put your items that are made with fondant or gum paste in the refrigerator as the condensation will cause them to fall apart.

HOW LONG CAN I KEEP A FONDANT/GUM PASTE FIGURINE BEFORE IT STARTS TO DETERIORATE?

I understand you can store them indefinitely as long as they are properly stored.

Once fully dried they can be stored in a cardboard box or for long term storage put in an airtight container in a cool dry place out of direct sunlight. If they are exposed to moisture or condensation this can cause them to break down. Because fondant and gum paste is made mostly of sugar this acts as a preservative and this is what keeps your items from going mouldy or rotting.

WHY DO MY GUM PASTE FIGURINES HAVE LARGE CRACKS IN THEM?

I have found that when you create a figurine with gum paste it dries from the inside out rather quickly. This causes the inside of your item to push outward creating cracks and problems in your figurine.

This is one of the main reasons I use a mixture of 50/50 fondant and gum paste or fondant with some CMC Tylose powder added (CMC powder is a man-made gum used as a flower glue or a hardening agent which when added to fondant, creates a quick version of gum paste/modelling paste) as this gives a better consistency for working with and also tends to slow the drying process down a little and results in less cracks.

Another reason for cracks can be from not kneading your paste enough as it needs to go through the process of kneading to get it to a pliable state. You really need to roll the paste in your cupped hands with some pressure until it is warm, soft and very pliable and this will help work out some of the cracks.

WHAT SHOULD I USE TO GLUE MY FIGURINES TOGETHER?

I prefer to use edible adhesive glue as I find that it adheres quite fast. I tried using a little water to stick on items however I found that the items often moved and did not adhere quickly enough.