

Recipe for rich fruit cake

This is the recipe I always use for Christmas cakes and when I need a fruit cake for a celebration or wedding cake. It is based on a Delia Smith recipe, but I have tweaked it! It is a very reliable cake, being both rich and moist. This recipe will produce an 8" square cake.

Preheat oven to 140°C.

Ingredients:

1lb (450g) currants

6oz (175g) sultanas

6oz (175g) raisins

2oz (50g) glacé cherries, chopped

2oz (50g) mixed peel, chopped

4 tablespoons brandy

6oz (175g) plain flour

2oz (50g) ground almonds

¼ tsp freshly grated nutmeg

½ tsp mixed spice

8oz (225g) unsalted butter

8oz (225g) soft dark brown sugar

4 large eggs

2oz (50g) flaked almonds, crushed into small pieces

1 dessert spoon black treacle

Grated rind of 1 lemon

Grated rind of 1 orange

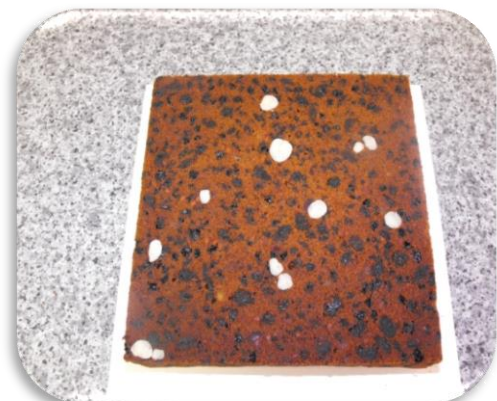
Juice of half an orange

Method:

1. Place the dried fruit, mixed peel and cherries in a bowl and mix in the brandy. Cover the bowl and leave the fruit to soak at least over night; better still, leave it for several days for the fruit to become infused with the brandy.
2. Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy.
3. Lightly beat the eggs and add to the mixture, a little at a time, beating thoroughly after each addition. If it starts to curdle, add a little flour.
4. When all has been added, fold in the flour, ground almond and spices.
5. Stir in the fruit and peel that has been soaking.
6. Add the nuts, treacle, and grated lemon and orange rind.
7. Squeeze the juice from half an orange and stir into the mixture.
8. Spoon the mixture into a prepared tin (8" square), with the bottom and sides being lined with greaseproof paper. Spread the mixture evenly and make a slight indent with the back of a spoon in the centre of the cake to help the cake bake flat.
9. Wrap a triple layer of newspaper around the cake and tie with string.
10. Cut a piece of greaseproof paper to fit the top of the cake. Cut a hole approx. the size of a 10p piece; place the greaseproof paper on top of the cake.
11. Bake the cake on a low shelf for approx. 2-3½ hours (depending on your oven) at 140°C. Place a baking sheet immediately above the cake – this helps to prevent the top of the cake from over browning. Check after 2 hours. The cake is cooked when a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean; if it still seems a little sticky, place back in the oven and keep testing at 5-minute intervals, until done.
12. Remove from the oven and leave in the tin to cool. This cake will take several hours to cool and will continue to cook as it does so.
13. While the cake is still warm, pierce several times with a skewer and drizzle approx. a tablespoon of brandy over the cake.
14. When completely cool, wrap the cake in greaseproof paper and then in foil and store in an airtight tin. If you wish you can “feed the cake” every couple of weeks with some more brandy. This cake improves with keeping as the flavours really mature; it can be made months in advance.

Step-by-step guide: How to ice your Christmas cake

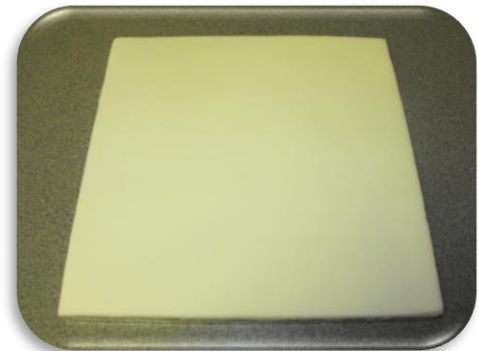
1. I always turn my cakes upside down so I have a flat top to work with, and then fill in any large holes with bits of marzipan.



2. Spread warm apricot jam all over the fruit cake. This is to help the marzipan stick to the cake.



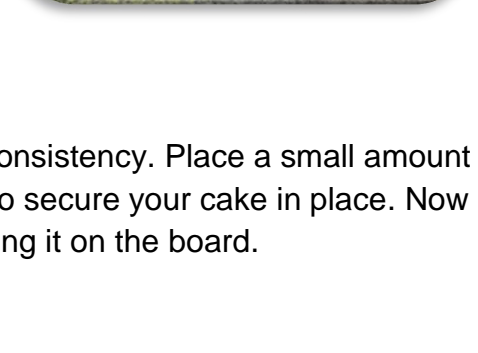
3. Roll out your marzipan to the correct size and place it over the top of the cake. Smooth the marzipan around the cake, trimming away any excess. At this stage, I always leave it overnight to prevent oil seeping through to the icing.



4. Prepare the cake board (I used a 10" square). Take some white sugar paste and roll it out to a square a little larger than the board. Use a little bit of water on the cake board to secure your sugar paste. Trim off any excess.



5. Now to the icing of the cake. Knead white sugar paste until soft, sprinkle cornflour/icing sugar onto the table and roll the icing so it is large enough to cover the cake. Place on top of the cake, smoothing down the top and sides. Then remove any excess sugar paste. I would suggest leaving the cake and board overnight to harden up.



6. Mix a small amount of royal icing to a thick consistency. Place a small amount in the centre of the iced cake board. This is to secure your cake in place. Now gently lift your cake with a palette knife, placing it on the board.

Step-by-step guide: How to make your penguin and Christmas trees

Equipment:

Black, white, red, yellow, orange and green sugar paste

Rolling pin

Edible glue

Paintbrush

Scissors

Black edible pen (not pictured)

Heart cutter

Teardrop cutter

Holly cutter

Star cutter



How to make your penguin:

1. First take some black sugar paste and roll into a ball, to make the penguin's body. Then take a smaller amount of sugar paste to create his head.



2. Now onto making the penguin's face. Take some white sugar paste and cut out a heart shape using your cutter. Attach this to the penguin's head using edible glue or water.



3. Attach the penguin's head and body together. Using white sugar paste again, take your teardrop cutter to create a white "bib" and then glue this to your penguin's body. This can now be left to one side to dry for a few hours.



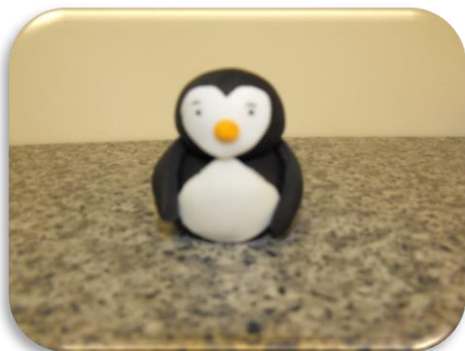
4. Once your penguin is dry, use the orange sugar paste to create his nose. Glue this onto your penguin's face, ready for the next stage.



5. Now create your penguin's two wings using black sugar paste. Once the wings are almost dry, attach to the penguin's body using edible glue.

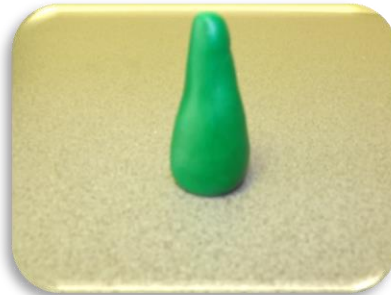


6. Take your black edible pen and draw on eyes and eyebrows. Finally, model a Christmas hat out of red sugar paste, leave to dry and then attach to your penguin's head. Then just add a little white sugar paste for the bauble.



How to make your Christmas trees:

1. Take your green sugar paste and roll it into a cone shape.



2. Next take a small pair of scissors and cut upwards, to make the branches. Leave this to one side to dry.



3. Once dry, use the star cutter to create a star from yellow sugar paste and glue this to the top of the Christmas tree.



Step-by-step guide: How to make your reindeer

Equipment:

Dark brown, light brown, black, red and purple sugar paste

Rolling pin

Edible glue/paintbrush

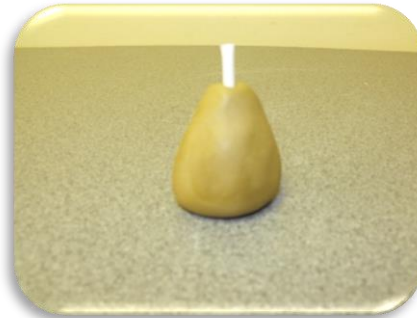
Lollipop stick/cocktail stick

Round cutter

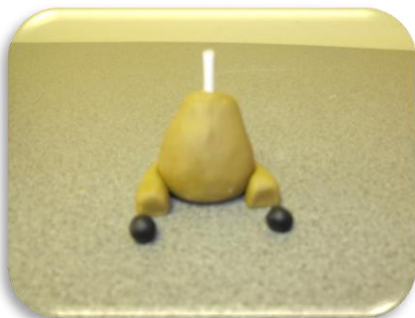


How to make your reindeer:

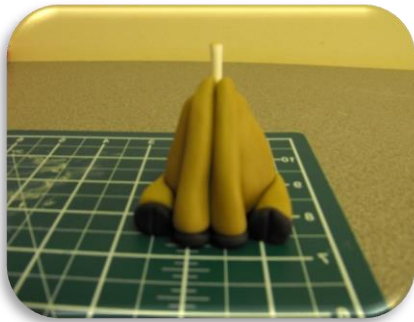
1. Roll some dark brown sugar paste into a cone-like shape. Place the lollipop/cocktail stick in the centre of his body, leaving a small amount sticking out; cut off at required length.



2. Roll out four sausage shapes for the reindeer's legs and four small black balls for the feet. Two should be a little thicker and shorter; these will be the back legs. Make the front of the legs rounder. With your finger flatten the black balls slightly and stick them to the reindeer's legs.



3. Now attach the legs to the body. Also make a smaller round ball for the reindeer's head and attach it to the body, on top of the stick. Set aside to dry.



4. Take the light brown sugar paste, cut out a small circle and attach it to the reindeer's face. Next, take a small amount of red sugar paste to make your reindeer's nose and glue it on too. Once the nose is in place, make his mouth; I used the back of a cocktail stick.



5. Take two tiny balls of black sugar paste to make your reindeer's eyes and glue them to his face. For his antlers, roll two small sausage shapes and, with a knife, cut to form the antlers, then glue to the head. Next, take two small pieces of dark brown sugar paste and mould into ears; glue these next to the antlers.



6. Take your purple sugar paste and roll a small-sized rectangle to form the reindeer's scarf. Glue this around his neck.



7. The final stage is to glue all your pieces onto your cake using royal icing, which is stronger than edible glue.
8. Take your choice of ribbon and attach it to the board and cake. It can be kept in place with a pearl-headed pin.
9. If giving the cake as a present, I would wrap in the cellophane of your choice and tie with a ribbon.
10. For your final finishing touches you can make a range of other additions, such as snowballs, holly, a sledge, a dusting of icing sugar and edible glitter – anything to make your Christmas cake unique!



All cake decorating supplies can be purchased from:
Once Upon a Cupcake, 39 The Avenue, Minehead, Somerset TA24 5AY.