

FONDANT AND BUTTERCREAM – SOME TIPS



WHAT BRANDS SHOULD I USE?

I was quite overwhelmed when I started using fondant and buttercream as there are so many pre-made brands out there and they are available in a variety of colours, flavours, textures and elasticity. I did heaps of research on the internet and realised that not only do different brands taste different and feel different, but different brands actually work better for different specific tasks and everyone has an opinion!

I found a good article by *Lesley Wright* called *the “The Good, the Bad and the Tasty: A Comparison of Fondant Brands”* that has some great information and is well worth a read. However in the end I made up my mind by sampling a number of different brands and have found that Satin Ice works well in our climate.

As a full time working mum I do not have the time or inclination to make homemade fondant. However it looks like it would be simple and inexpensive to make. At this stage I am happy to continue to use store brand fondant and buttercream as I have a consistent base to work from.

GETTING STARTED WITH FONDANT

Once you’ve selected your fondant of choice, prepare a clean working area. Stainless steel makes a perfect work surface for fondant, but virtually any hard, flat surface will work with the aid of a fondant mat placed atop it. I actually use a silicon pastry mat that is non-stick and I love working on it.

I use disposable gloves when I knead fondant as I have quite warm hands and it also stops sticking on your palms and I don’t have to grease my hands. Knead the fondant until it’s warm, soft and pliable. You should be able to pinch a bit and roll it into a ball using your palms without seeing any cracks. Remember to only work with the amount of fondant you need for a particular task. Keep the rest in a plastic bag or in an air-tight container to prevent it from drying out.

THICKNESS OF FONDANT

It is generally suggested to use between 3mm – 6mm of rolled fondant, but typically you want to go as thin as possible without sacrificing elasticity. Though you don’t want a thick layer of fondant covering your cake, you also don’t want your fondant to tear as you’re working it. Practice makes perfect when it comes to covering cakes with fondant and I have found some brands better than others for this.

ADDING STRENGTH TO FONDANT

If you want to add strength to your fondant so that it will dry hard when making figurines, letters or accent pieces, add some CMC Powder (a food-safe hardening agent) while your fondant is soft and warm.

Knead about ¼ teaspoon into a golf-ball sized ball of fondant and continue working. Items laid to dry will begin to harden within a few hours and will be completely hard in a few days. Do not add the CMC to your fondant too soon, though, or it will become difficult to work with as it hardens and dries out.

Just remember that practice makes perfect, by the time you have covered a couple of cakes they will start to look better than many of the cakes you can buy from a store – so don't be put off with some small failures.

YOU NEED TO FOLLOW SOME VERY IMPORTANT RULES WHEN MANAGING FONDANT ICING.

- **Your icing will dry out very quickly** so it is important to work quickly to avoid your icing becoming cracked and difficult to use.
- **Never use icing that is too dry** or over kneaded. This will make the corners crack very easily.
- When you are not using your icing (even for a minute) **put it in a plastic bag or cover it** with plastic wrap to avoid it drying out.
- If you have hot hands this will tend to make your icing sticky and then you will be tempted to over use corn flour that will dry your icing. Either **Cool your hands** under cold water and keep your corn flour to a light sprinkle or wear disposable gloves.
- **Weather will affect your fondant icing** - humidity will make the icing sticky and very cold weather will make it as hard as rock.
- **NEVER EVER refrigerate your icing** when it is on a cake. Fondant will sweat in the fridge. Once your cake is covered it is perfectly fine to store in a cool place (20 degrees).
- Your **excess fondant icing is best stored in a sealed bag or container**. Follow the instructions on how to store your particular brand of icing.
- **Always work the icing in small amounts** and try and get above your icing when you knead it on the bench. If you are short, get a stool so you can use your body weight to help you knead. If you try and knead large amounts of icing you will put undue pressure on your wrists and make your job very difficult.

Kneading icing is not like kneading dough. If you keep pummelling it will stick to the board and become unmanageable. Treat your icing a bit like play dough, keeping folding it in until it is smooth and warm to use but does not stick to the bench

- **Never cover a cake straight from the fridge.** To achieve a professional finish only cover cakes at room temperature.
- When **making dark colours** (such as red, black, brown, purple) make them the day before so the icing has time to relax and rest. Or do as I do and buy the pre-coloured fondant and then lighten or darken slightly if required.