

# Basic Cake Decorating

## CHAPTER TWO: ASSEMBLING THE CAKE

### What You'll Need



1. Cake layers and buttercream frosting
2. Cake circle, parchment paper strips, offset spatula, icing spatula
3. Toothpicks, long serrated knife, and/or dental floss

### FIRST, WE'LL LEVEL THE CAKE LAYERS

One of the first things to do is make sure your cake layers don't have domes on top. We recommend the use of cake strips (pictured, right) when baking your layers. They're moistened strips of fabric that you wrap around the cake pan; they allow the cake to rise evenly and set uniformly to make a level top. Without them, the outside of the layer sets first, and the remaining batter is forced upward as it rises in the oven, creating a dome.

If your layers aren't flat across the top, you can trim them with a serrated knife. Make sure your knife is long enough to reach all the way across the cake's top. Keep the blade level as you gently saw back and forth.



*The cake on the left was baked with cake strips; the one on the right had none...*



*Hold the knife level and slice off the dome on top of the cake.*



If you want to have a four-layer cake, you'll split each cake layer in two. One way to help the cake layers line up so they stay level after filling is to cut a notch in the side of each layer. After you split the layers, you'll use this notch as a guide to make sure the layers are correctly lined up.

Now it's time to split the layers. It can be tricky to keep the knife level all the way through. You can give yourself a cutting guide by inserting toothpicks around the cake layer, and keeping the blade of your knife even with them as you cut. You can also rest a piece of unflavored dental floss on top of the toothpicks, and cut the layer with floss instead of the knife. Overlap the ends of the floss and pull it gently to draw the floss through the cake.



*Toothpicks can act as a cutting guide as you move your knife through the center of the cake.*

Now that you have your layers ready, it's time to assemble the cake. Place one half of a cake layer, cut side up, on a cardboard cake circle. Tuck strips of parchment paper under the layer on all four sides to catch any "accidents".



*Putting a bit of parchment under the cake layer before you frost will help the finished cake (and the plate it rests on) have a much neater appearance.*



*For a little extra pizzazz in a light cake, you may choose to spread a thin layer of seedless jam on the cake before filling it with frosting.*

After you've spread a little jam on the cake, cover the layer with 1/4-inch of frosting; place the next layer on top, taking care to line up the edges evenly. Place the next layer on top of the frosting, taking care to line up the notch on the side of the cake layer.



*A giant spatula is helpful for placing the next layer on top of the filling.*

Continue frosting and adding layers until all of the cake is in place. Now it's time to cover the entire cake with a thin layer of frosting called the crumb coat. Once chilled, this will set the outside of the cake, fixing any stray crumbs in place. It's an extra step, but using a crumb coat will allow you to finish frosting and decorating with much better results.



*Spread a thin layer of frosting over the top and sides of the cake; don't worry about how it looks; it will be covered by the final layer of frosting later, when you finish the cake. This is called a crumb coat.*

Refrigerate the coated cake until the frosting becomes firm. If you touch the surface and leave a fingerprint, it's not ready to work with yet.



*We tested this crumb coat after 15 minutes in the refrigerator. You can see it hasn't set yet; when the surface is touched, it leaves a fingerprint.*



*After another 15 minutes in the refrigerator, no fingerprint! This cake is ready for its finishing coat of frosting.*

After 30 minutes, the crumb coat has firmed up; after touching it lightly, no fingerprint remains. Now the cake is ready to decorate.