WORKING WITH FONDANT

Why use fondant

Not all home bakers are comfortable with their frosting piping skills, which can take years to perfect. By adding just a few simple fondant elements, you can turn a plain frosted cake into a beautiful or whimsical masterpiece, personalized to the recipient's interests.

> **Tip:** I never frost an entire cake with fondant, but instead use it for decorative trim on top of an already frosted cake. I encourage the recipient to remove all fondant decorations prior to serving the cake. Many people don't care for the taste of fondant, so it can detract from enjoyment of your delicious cake.

Where to buy

You can find fondant at any craft or cake decorating supply store, or at big box stores such as Meijer and Walmart. It comes in boxes or tubs in a variety of brands, sizes, and colors. My personal go-to's are Wilton, Satin Ice and Sweetshop.

Rolling and shaping

If you have ever played with Play-Doh, you can work with fondant. Fondant looks and feels much like Play-Doh and is just as easy to work with. When you first pick up the fondant it will be a little stiff. Take a small amount, roughly the size of a plum (a little goes a long way), and gently roll it in the palms of your hands. It will quickly begin to soften. Work it until smooth. Just one to two minutes.

Using a fondant rolling tool, a standard rolling pin, or even a bottle, you can easily roll out the fondant similar to cookie dough or pie crust. Once rolled, you can cut into strips or other shapes using a cutting wheel or knife. You can also use your favorite cookie cutters to cut out fun shapes. You can roll to any thickness you like that fits your particular project, but if you roll it too thin, it will become challenging to handle. I suggest no less than 1/8" thick.

You can also mold and shape fondant into any shape you can imagine. Just work the fondant with your fingers, pressing and shaping just like Play-Doh. It is very flexible and forgiving. If you aren't happy with what you have created, just roll it into a ball and start over.

> **Tip:** Fondant dries out quickly. Keep all unused portions covered with plastic wrap or in a zip tight bag until ready to use. Keep out just the amount you are currently working with. Store unused fondant at room temperature. It can be stored safely for several months but will eventually dry out. Never refrigerator or freeze fondant as it will render it unusable.

How to color

Since you often need just a small amount of each color when creating your cake design, it can be more cost effective to purchase white fondant and color it yourself. It is super easy to do and allows you to achieve the exact color(s) you are looking for.

Starting with a small amount of fondant, roll it in your palms until it is soft and smooth. Then add a drop or two of food coloring (I use Wilton or Americolor). Using both hands, pull and stretch the fondant and then roll in your palms. Stretch the fondant and roll, repeating until the color is incorporated. Using this combination of pulling and rolling with your hands, the color incorporates quickly. Start with just a drop or two of color and then add more until you reach the intensity you are looking for. Honestly, I find it easier to color fondant than frosting.

> **Tip:** I always use food-safe vinyl gloves when working with fondant to protect the fondant from my hands and potential germs (you never stick your hands in regular frosting, do you?), and to protect my hands from the fondant. This is particularly important when adding color. It can be messy.

Putting the pieces in place

You can make your fondant decorations in advance (store in a covered container at room temperature) or place them on your cake immediately. When placing fondant elements on your cake, use a small drop of frosting to secure in place. This is especially important when you are placing them on the sides of the cake so they don't slide down or fall off. Don't use too much frosting because it will ooze out from under your fondant. When layering multiple pieces of fondant, use a tiny dab of water to get them to stick together.

Know the limits

Fondant can be used to create a myriad of shapes and designs, but it does have some limits. It never hardens completely, so cannot support a lot of weight. Let's say you want to create a snowman, stacking three various sized balls on top of each other. The snowman will begin to droop because the bottom ball cannot support the weight of the top two. For this type of application (or any large item you want to stand up on your cake), use gum paste (also found in craft stores) instead of fondant. It is similar and just as easy to work with, but it hardens completely and can support more weight.

Where to find cake ideas

Don't know where to begin? Check out Pinterest for an endless supply of cake ideas to fit any occasion. Change them up to make them your own.

> **Tip:** Don't stress. This should be fun. When cutting and shaping your fondant decorations, don't worry too much about perfection. No one will scrutinize the size or shape of each element. The magic happens when they all come together to form a lovingly created design.

Storing your cake

Store cake at room temperature. To be safe, I never refrigerate or freeze a cake with fondant decorations. Humidity and condensation can wreak havoc with it and distort your hard work. So, if you have a cake with a filling that requires refrigerator, you may want to rethink using fondant decorations.

Examples

Piano keys were made from fondant cut into white and black strips using a ruler for consistency.

Butterflies were made from fondant using a cookie cutter and then gently shaped. Additional wing coloring was shaped from small pieces of various colors of fondant. Quick and easy.

Flowers were shaped with fondant. There are numerous online tutorials on flower shaping. It is incredibly easy.

Snowman was made with gum paste so it would hold its shape. The snowflakes were cut from white and several shades of blue fondant, then sprinkled with coarse white decorating sugar.