The little book on
ROYAL ICING
for those who are easily frightened

Sif Sand Jensen
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Victorian style royal icing such as The Lambeth Method, has received an almost mythical status. My first encounter with information about The Lambeth Method contained words such as "extremely difficult to master" and "very high skill level". I have students coming to my classes almost frightened of simple overpiping.

And sure, like everything else worth doing (besides eating and sleeping), it takes years of dedicated practice and talent to really excel and do awesome advanced work. However, I credit a lot of this mythical status to the lack of readily available information for the true beginner.

With this book I hope to demystify the art of royal icing and overpiping. Some of my classes are for the absolute novice with no previous royal icing experience. Here I've tried to include many of their most common mistakes, struggles, questions and those things that they're always assumed to know - but often don't.

This is the book I wish I had when I tried to teach myself the art of royal icing from an old book written specifically for professionals (not to be recommended). It is written for you, whether you just want to master the basics, need to brush up on your skills or want to pipe like the masters of the Victorian Era. We all have to start somewhere, and one of those "wheres" is right here.

The format of this book allows me to make updates and revisions easily, which I will do from time to time. Your feedback is important in this matter. Did you like the book? Were the instructions easy to follow? Was there anything missing? Anything you wish I would have elaborated on? Grammatical errors?

You can mail me at sif@sifbeth.dk - I look forward to hearing from you.

This book may be downloaded free of charge, but since I'm trying to earn my living on teaching the art of royal icing, I hope you'll chose to pay for it if you find it useful. You can find more information on how to do this by visiting http://books.sifbeth.com. Here you can also find information on how to be kept up to date about new releases of this book as well as information on other books I might release later on.

I hope you'll enjoy the book, and remember: Don't eat too much blue icing. It'll stain your tongue.

Sif Sand Jensen
Equipment for upcoming master decorators

Tubes (tips) and couplers
Difficult to live without.

Flower nails
For flower making.

Disposable piping bags
Because I hate folding paper bags (cornets).

A scriber or long pins
For poking holes in the cake. Use food grade equipment when working on real cakes.

Plastic wrap
For making icing bullets.

Airtight containers
For keeping icing. One that will keep at least half a liter/2 cups. Smaller containers for keeping batches of colored icing are nice to have as well.

Clear sheet protectors
Insert template and practice your heart out.

Silicone baking mats
The cheap kind you can see through. Great for run-out collars and practice. I don't use these them in this book, so you don't have to buy them right now.

Coffee
For when you're pulling those all-nighters, finishing up cakes.
An icing tube is also known as a piping tip. It’s one of those differences between US and UK English. I call them tubes. Hopefully we can still be friends.

The tubes used in this book are PME Supatubes for the sole reason that I prefer them to any other brand (this book is not sponsored). The exception to this rule is the petal tube, where I use Wilton 101s for my smallest flowers. If you’re using another brand, you might have to experiment a bit. For those of you using Wilton tubes, you’ll find a list of appropriate tubes at the bottom of the page.

It’s also possible to follow any technique demonstrated in this book with any brand of tubes provided they have round tubes, star tubes, leaf tubes and petal tubes available.

**Round tubes (also known as writers)**
Round tubes are extremely versatile. It is possible to decorate some very advanced cakes using round tubes only. Round tubes are good for pearl borders, dots, for writing, filigree, lace, figure piping and extension work. The smaller the number, the smaller the opening and the harder to use.

**Rope tubes and star tubes**
They’re the same, but different. Rope tubes have a lot of very small points while star tubes have fewer, larger points. These can be used for scrolls, shells and swirls. In this book they’re mainly used for overpiping and shell borders. I prefer star tubes for overpiping and rope tubes for shell borders, but you can use whichever you prefer.

**Leaf tubes**
Used for piping leaves.

**Petal tubes**
Used for flower making.

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**Which tubes do you need?**
All numbers refer to PME Supatubes, except 101s, which is a Wilton tube.

The following tubes are used in this book:
1.5 - 2 - 2.5 - 5 - 43 - 50 - 56 - 101s

I also recommend the following:
1 - 3 - 42 - 44 - 6 - 13 - 51.

If you can’t get your hands on PME tubes, try to get a selection of small round tubes, star tubes, petal tubes and leaf tubes. Usually the three smallest available of each type will do.

**If using Wilton tubes**
Round tubes: 1 - 2 - 3
Open star tubes: 13 - 14 - 16
Leaf tubes: 65 - 66
Petal tubes: 101s - 101
If you plan on using royal icing for decorating, which I suspect you might, you’ll find a convenient, easy recipe below.

The consistency can be a little tricky the first few times, but look no further than the very next page of this book for some tips and tricks on the subject.

I use pasteurized egg whites (those that are suitable for meringue) for my royal icing. I realize this product is not available in all parts of the world, so you can use fresh or powdered egg white at your own discretion. Just remember that dipping fresh eggs in boiling water will not save you from salmonella, should the egg be infected. When in doubt use dried or pasteurized egg whites.

The recipe given below is for pasteurized/fresh egg white. If you’re using powdered whites, follow the instructions on the package for rehydrating them and use this chapter to help you with the rest.

All recipes for royal icing are more or less alike, so if you have your own favorite by all means use it. I will not take (much) offense.

Royal icing (enough to decorate one 20 cm/8 inch cake with bunches of stuff)

2 egg whites
400 grams (approx. 3 cups) icing sugar, sifted

Using your stand mixer with the paddle attachment (not the whisk!), put the egg whites in the bowl and start beating on low speed. Add half the icing sugar while the mixer is running. Let the mixer run until smooth. It will be very liquid. Add more icing sugar in heaping spoonfuls until the icing is thick and white. Scrape the bowl a few times.

When you’ve added almost all the icing sugar, it’s time to start testing the consistency. You might not need all the icing sugar, or you might need a little more.

Beat the icing on low speed for a minute, and be very careful not to beat it longer. You’re basically making a meringue here, and the longer you beat it, the more tiny air bubbles will form in the egg whites. These bubbles will make for a really annoyingly unstable icing with air bubbles rapidly expanding as it is heated by your hands.

When your icing is finished, keep it in an airtight container, and keep it covered at all times. I use most of my icing straight away but keep any leftovers in the fridge for several days (or on the kitchen counter if not meant for consumption). The icing will settle and develop air bubbles when it’s sitting in the container for more than a few hours. Give it a healthy stir to make it nice and smooth again, and it’s ready for use. When I need icing, I just take a few spoonfuls on a plate and rub it down with a spoon. Then I tint it. I use a lot of plates when I decorate a cake.

I don’t have a stand mixer!

Well, go buy one already! Or stir it by hand. It’s a bit rough on the good ole wrists, but I’m sure it’s a great upper arm workout. Make small batches, and use a spoon. Those used for café latte are best, but any tablespoon will work. It’s the same procedure as described above, but you run a much smaller risk of overbeating the icing.

Don’t use a hand mixer! They run much too fast for royal icing, and I have yet to see one with paddles instead of whisks.

When it’s hot and/or humid

When it’s raining, or in hot, humid weather, royal icing is not your friend. It might melt and refuse to dry. You can add 1/4 tsp cream of tartar to the recipe, which should help it dry. I run both the air-conditioner and dehumidifier if I absolutely must work with royal icing in humid weather.
Icing consistency

Explaining icing consistency in writing is no easy task. I’ll give it a fair try anyway and describe what I consider to be a good starting point. Usually we talk about three different consistencies of icing. In reality, there are far more than that. Sometimes medium icing is too soft, but stiff icing is too stiff. Then you’ll want to go with something in between. Smaller tips require slightly softer icing than larger tips, as do tiny details as opposed to large outlines. So go on and experiment. Get some practice. You’ll learn to feel the icing by simply giving it a stir and look at the texture and flow. Until then, test the consistency with some tubes on a sheet of paper before putting it on the cake. It’ll save you both time and frustrations.

So, as mentioned, there are three consistencies. But, I have added a fourth: medium-soft, which I use a lot.

You can test the consistency of your icing by using a spoon. Stick it into your icing bowl and pull it straight up. The resulting peak, as well as the way the icing in the bowl behaves, will tell you something about the consistency.

Soft icing is used for fine details such as the yellow dot in the middle of a flower, filigree and scrolls using the smallest of the round tubes, or dots and short lines. When testing consistency with a spoon, the peak will topple over and the contour of the icing will soften. If it runs or loses all contour, the icing is too soft.

Medium-soft icing is good for larger details, where medium icing is a bit too stiff. It will work for shells and overpiping in a pinch (if you’re feeling lazy). I often use it for the top layers of overpiping, where small tubes are used. It can be used for extension work, writing and small details as well. When testing consistency with a spoon, the peak will bend but not fall. The icing in the bowl will settle slightly but not lose its shape. Medium-soft icing is made by adding a few drops of cold water to medium icing (which is much easier than firming up soft icing).

Medium icing is the type you’ll use the most. It’s good for everything except flowers and the smallest of the round tubes (#0 and #00). When testing consistency with a spoon, the peak will stand but the top will bend slightly. The icing in the bowl will look firm but feel soft when stirred.

Stiff icing - I use this for flowers and large leaves only. When testing consistency with a spoon, the peak will stand straight and not bend at all. The icing in the bowl will not move and will feel firm when stirred. Be careful not to make it too stiff - it must not be inflexible and difficult to stir. A teaspoon of corn syrup will make the icing easier to use.

Adjusting consistency

If your icing is too stiff, a few drops of cold water or corn syrup will make it softer. Don’t add anything until the icing has been properly tinted, though. Paste colors will soften the icing especially if used in large amounts, so it’s better to wait. Icing that is too soft will need to have some more icing sugar added. Add a little at a time in tablespoon increments. It will thicken faster than you might think. The same goes for adding water or corn syrup to thin the icing. You’ll be amazed at how fast you can go from firm icing to soup by adding just a little too much water.
How to make an icing bullet

An icing bullet is an easy and convenient way to fill your piping bag. Unfortunately I can't claim to be the inventor. I read about it on the Internet when I first started decorating cakes. I personalized the method to suit my needs and now I'm sharing it with you. Take care not to overfill your piping bag. The icing bullet must not be larger than you can fit it easily in the palm of your hand. A few tablespoons at most. The more icing you stuff into the piping bag, the more your hand will hurt and the less control you'll have. An exception is when using very large star tubes.

How to:

1. Grab a piece of plastic wrap. Place a heaping tablespoon of icing in one of the corners.
2. Fold the wrap over the icing. Use your hand to seal the wrap and make a nice cone shape.
3. Seal the top and fold it down.
4. Roll the icing cone around itself, folding the top down a few times. Cut away excess wrap.
5. It's done!
6. Cut off the tip and pop it in the piping bag.
7. You're ready to pipe. When the icing bullet is empty, take it out and replace. Don't make icing bullets in advance. The icing will set and air bubbles will expand.

Working without a coupler

When working with small amounts of icing a coupler is almost always unnecessary and in the way. When using an icing bullet, there is no need for a coupler. If the icing bullet is properly made you can even change the tube. Pull out the icing bullet with the tube attached, remove the tube and place a new one in the bag. Insert a fresh icing bullet, and you're ready to go.
How to hold a piping bag

You've carefully prepared a batch of royal icing, made an icing bullet and popped a tube in your icing bag. In other words: You're ready to do some piping. But first you must learn how to hold the piping bag. There are two ways. You either hold it in your hand (Method 1) or between your fingers (Method 2).

Method 1:
This is the standard method. When in doubt, use this one. Hold the icing bag in the palm of your hand. The coupler should rest on your palm with your fingers carefully closed around the icing. Apply pressure to the top of the icing bullet, never to the middle - at best, you'll just make piping very difficult for yourself and at worst, the bag will pop and icing will go everywhere.

Method 2:
Used for piping bags without couplers or when using cornets*. Or for when there isn't much icing left in the bag. Hold your bag in one hand. The tube rests on your index and middle finger. Your thumb is firmly placed on top of the icing bullet. Use the other hands' index finger to guide and support the tube. This method is great for making tiny details especially on the side of the cake.

*A cornet is a piping bag folded from parchment paper.

Pressure
To squeeze out the icing, you have to apply pressure. That's hardly breaking news. How to control the pressure, however, is worth a few lines.

If you're new to the art of squeezing icing through a tube, you'll notice how the small tubes can be a bit difficult to control. The icing looks all wiggly and curly and can be difficult to squeeze out of the tube. This happens when you apply too much pressure, especially if you're still having trouble with consistency and are using icing that is too stiff. The smaller the tube, the lighter the pressure needed.

Pressure is also used to control how bold your piping is. Try increasing pressure when piping straight lines or shell borders. The lines will grow bolder and the shells larger. Try experimenting a bit. At some point you'll need a larger tube of course. There's only so much pressure a piping bag can handle without bursting. If you have to squeeze hard to extrude icing, there might be too much icing in your piping bag for the tube to handle. When working with small tubes only a small amount of icing is required. With larger tubes you can use more icing.

Warm up
Before I start decorating a cake, I spend a few minutes warming up my hands. No aerobics required, just a piping bag. I grab a piece of paper and start piping. Shells and lines and curves and dots and whatever I can think of. It's as if there's a certain amount of ugly piping I need to get rid of. After a few minutes my hands seem to have discovered what they're meant to do, and my piping flows like it should. It's also a great way of checking the icing consistency.

When changing tubes, I do the same thing, checking that everything is still okay. I make certain that the icing consistency fits this particular tube, or check to see if the tube is clogged because my dishwasher fell asleep on the job, or if the new tube will work for its intended use. And then I start decorating.
How often should I practice?

Mastering the art of royal icing takes dedicated study and practice. And lots of it. It is time consuming which is off-putting to a lot of people. After all, why spend countless hours practicing, when you can stuff fondant in a silicone mold and be done in two minutes?

Because it’s worth it, dammit. And because piping is much more fun when you know what you are doing.

From time to time I have people showing up in my classes who are terrified of using royal icing. What they quickly discover is that it’s not scary. You don’t have to bake and decorate a cake every weekend in order to become good at it. This way of practicing your skills is way too time consuming and expensive.

Go and buy some cake dummies instead. Plain round dummies, measuring 15 cm/6 inches and 20 cm/8 inches. Get some matching cake boards. Cover everything in fondant (I brush the dummies with egg white to make the fondant stick). Let them dry for a few days, then use them for practice. They will keep for ages. So will the royal icing you decorate them. This means you can grab an hour of practice whenever you have the time without having to first bake and cover a cake. You can spend weeks on a single cake, should you desire. A prepared batch of royal icing will keep for up to two weeks in the fridge (see the chapter on royal icing on page 7). Just give it a good stir and you’re good to go!

Get some sturdy clear sheet protectors as well. You can get them at any office supply store. Use them to practice on when you don’t feel like decorating a cake. You can practice everything from shell borders to advanced overpiping on them. Tape them to a board and get started. Wipe the icing off when you’re done and you can use them again and again.

Practice the basics as often as possible. Do this even if you consider yourself to be an advanced decorator. It’s easy to get lost in the wonderful world of advanced techniques, but if you can’t pipe a decent dropstring, your other work will suffer too. Do shells, scrolls, lines, curves, trellis, dropstrings and basic flowers. This has the added bonus of keeping your skills sharp, if there are extended periods of time where you can’t find the time to decorate an entire cake.

Left-handed or right-handed?

I’m left-handed. This means I usually work from right to left, as opposed to right-handed decorators who work from left to right. It took me a few months to figure out why I had difficulty recreating the overpiped borders in my antique cake decorating book (apart from the fact that my skill level were nowhere near good enough). As soon as I started mirroring the borders, my skills improved.

The illustrations in this book show the left-handed way (mainly because I made them). If you’re right-handed and having problems, just mirror the instructions.

With that being said, being able to work both ways is worth practicing. Especially when it comes to overpiping. After much practice, I can proudly say that I can now overpipe both ways - almost without crying.
Dividing the cake into sections will (hopefully) ensure a nice, balanced design. Usually it’s the cake top being divided into sections, but often the bottom is divided as well. You can get all sorts of cake dividers, but if you’re up for it, you can make your own templates. You’ll need a piece of sturdy, white paper, a pair of compasses, a set square with a half circle protractor and a calculator. A pencil might come in handy as well, and something pointy to poke holes in the cake. I use a scriber or metal pins.

1. Start off with the large piece of sturdy cardboard (or parchment paper). Using the compass draw a circle with the same diameter as the cake. This is your template.

2. A full circle is 360°. To divide the circle into 8 sections, you’ll need to divide 360 by 8, which equals 45. So each section will measure 45°.

3. Use the half circle protractor to measure out the sections, using the hole from the compass needle as a guide. With a ruler draw lines from the centre to the edge. Now you have a template with 8 sections.

4. Cut out the template and place on the top of your cake. Fasten it with a (clean) pin in the middle. With the scriber or a pin poke tiny holes along the top edge of the cake – one for every line on the template. 8 in total.

5. To divide the bottom into sections as well use the set square as a guide. Place it on the side of the cake so that it aligns with the pinpricks on the top. Mark the sections on the bottom all around the cake. See picture above.

How many sections?

I like to keep my sections around 2 inches wide at the top edge of the cake. This will work for most of the designs in this book. Should you require smaller sections or more divisions, it’s a simple matter of using your calculator to figure out the degrees for each.

The table below shows you the amount of 2-inch sections needed on the most common sizes of round cakes, as well as the number of degrees needed to measure out the template with the half circle protractor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diameter</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 cm/4”</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 cm/6”</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 cm/8”</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 cm/10”</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25.7°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 cm/12”</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22.5°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 cm/14”</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 cm/16”</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16.3°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I don’t get it!

Then go visit www.sifbeth.com and download the templates I made. Or get one of the fancy cake dividers.
Shells and shell borders

The shell is a good place to start for any beginner. A nice, even shell border demands at least some control over pressure, speed and rhythm. It is very educational and not too difficult. You can practice shells everywhere. On paper, the tabletop, a cake pan turned upside down, your dog...

Well, perhaps not on the dog.

**Icing consistency:** Medium  
**Tubes:** Star tube, rope tube, round tube

**How to:**
1. Place your tube on the cake in the angle shown on the picture (approx 45°)
2. Pipe a shell. Don't move the tube while piping.
3. Stop the pressure and pull the tube back. The shell should form a pointy end. If it doesn't, your icing is too stiff.
4. Place the tube behind the shell, leaving enough space for another shell. Pipe.
5. Repeat for as long as needed.

**Troubleshooting:**

If something doesn't look quite right with the shells, there are a few things to consider: Are you keeping the tube still while piping? Do you make sure the tube is pulled free from the shell before lifting it? Are you giving enough space when piping shell borders? If not, you might want to.

To make even sized shells, create a rhythm in your head. It should go something like "squeeze, pull back, squeeze, pull back". Sing it in your head. It's great fun.

Sometimes it's not practical or even possible to let the tube rest on the cake while piping. In that case, support the tube with your index finger. It makes everything a tad more steady. When piping on the top of a cake, I like to rest my elbow on a dummy or a (sturdy!) stack of books. This makes it easier to keep my arm still.
Lines and curves

Being able to pipe a straight or curved line will undoubtedly come in handy at some point during your cake decorating career. Like today. Or tomorrow. Or next week. It’s one of the basic techniques that, when you master them, makes everything so much easier.

Icing consistency: Medium, medium-soft for smaller tubes
Tubes: Round

How to:
1 Use round tube #2 or #1.5 depending on experience and courage. It’s easier with #2. Use only a little amount of icing - a few tablespoons. This will make it easier to control your piping bag, as you won't have to apply much pressure (for more on this subject, see page 10).

Hold your piping bag very close to the cake, not quite touching, in an almost vertical position where you want your line to start. Squeeze. As soon as the icing lands on the cake, start lifting the piping bag and moving it back or to the side depending on the desired pattern.

2 Release pressure towards the end and lower your piping bag so it lands where the line should end. Release the icing from the tube with a tiny flick of your hand. Don't lift the piping bag until the icing is fully separated from the tube.

Consistency, flexibility and where to put your hands
For larger figures like circles, squares and trellis work, medium icing is the way to go. Medium icing is not very flexible, which makes it easier to pipe straight lines and large circles.
Medium-soft icing is more flexible, which makes it great for smaller details and for smaller round tubes, such as #1.

Flexibility is also determined by how close to the cake you hold the tube. Holding the tube high over the cake - 2 inches - makes it easy to pipe smooth large curves and circles. But if you want to pipe a small, scalloped pattern, you'll need to get much closer to the cake, which in return is harder to do.

So basically, when you use medium-soft (or even soft) icing and get really close to the cake, you have all the flexibility you need for small details. But the icing will not be as forgiving. If your hand is shaky and untrained, it will show.

On the other hand, when you use medium icing and keep some distance to the cake, you’ll achieve smooth lines and circles much easier. But you'll pay with lack of flexibility.

Unless you are doing really tiny stuff use medium icing. It will work for most decorations and you’ll just have to raise and lower the tube as your pattern requires.

What could possibly go wrong?
Air bubbles! They are not your friend. Do not invite them in for coffee. Air bubbles will make your icing break. As air bubbles develop when icing sits or gets warm, you’ll need some freshly stirred icing. Get a clean tube as well.

If your curve appears to be squared off, it’s usually because you’ve been pulling the piping bag a bit faster than necessary. Let the icing drop on the cake while carefully following the curve with the tube. It takes a bit of coordination the first few times.

If your lines are rough and uneven, your icing might be too stiff. Soften it a bit with a few drops of corn syrup or water.

If nothing works at all and everything sucks and you never want to decorate a cake ever again, there’s only one solution: Melt a few squares of white chocolate in a large mug. Pour an espresso on top and stir. Top with warm milk. Drink. It will make everything better, I promise.
Dropstrings

Dropstrings are basically icing garlands. They can be used as a decorative element on their own or as a part of overpiping. They’re quickly made and easily customized. Normally the smaller, round tubes are used to make dropstrings, but you might need the star tube or the rope tube, especially when you work with overpiping.

**Icing consistency:** Medium, medium soft (for narrow dropstrings)

**Tubes:** Round tubes, star tubes or rope tubes.

**How to:**

1. Divide your cake into sections. Mark each section with a dot (see also the chapter on dividing your cake into sections, page XX). Place your piping bag at the beginning of a section.

2. Using a light, consistent pressure pipe the dropstring. Move your hand to the side and stop the pressure when the icing string is long enough.

3. Attach your string at the end of the section (where the next dot is). Make sure the icing is secured to the cake before removing the tube, or you might pull off the entire string.

For your ordinary everyday dropstring using round tubes #1.5 or #2, use medium icing. For tiny dropstrings, or dropstrings made with round tubes #1, #0 or #00, use slightly softer icing. Not too soft or it might break under its own weight. It might take a few tries to get it just right. Luckily ugly dropstrings are easily removed from the cake before they dry. Use a scriber or a needle.

**Troubleshooting:**

**Breaking strings:** Air bubbles are the number one culprit here. Icing sitting too long in the bowl, or getting warm and cozy in your hands, will develop air bubbles. Put some fresh icing on a small plate, and rub out the air bubbles with a spoon.

**The string is uneven:** A very common problem that occurs when using uneven pressure and not lifting the string enough (or too much) towards the end. The result is a string that instead of being a nice, even curve, looks like a check mark trying a little too hard to reach for the next section. Practise is the only remedy.

**Curly/rough dropstrings:** The icing is too stiff.

**Measuring the cake**

Dividing a cake into sections is explained on page XX, and should be enough for basic dropstrings. But you can take it even further, which is convenient if you - like me - tend to be overly perfectionistic about everything.

I like my dropstrings to be even in size and depth. For this reason, I mark the lowest point of the dropstring before piping anything. The lowest point is right in the middle of the section (see picture to the right for clarification). To find this point, mark the exact middle of each section. Using a set square, measure the sides and mark how deep you wish your dropstrings to be.

The red dots on the picture shows the markings I made in order to pipe each design. This might seem overly tedious, and I’m not saying you need to go crazy with the laser line level or anything, but in the end it makes for a much neater cake.
Dropstring variations

I generally prefer dropstrings as a part of a design. They look great with overpiping or when their curves are filled with clusters of tiny flowers. But if you wish, you can use them on their own. In that case, I recommend going with some of the more elaborate designs. I have provided you with four different designs below. Use them as they are or as a starting point for your own imagination. Decorate them with flowers, dots, leaves and colors. The sky is the limit. That, and good taste.

I like to decorate the joints between the sections with a tiny flower, a leaf or a dot.

Remember: I am left-handed. The photos should be read from right to left.

Triple dropstring. Start with the top row of strings (1), continue with the middle row (2) and end with the bottom row (3).

This is an extension of the above design. A layer of triple dropstrings, only half as deep, are piped on top starting in the middle of the section.

Overlapping triple dropstrings. The bottom dropstring is piped first. Then two smaller dropstrings are nestled within. Start the next triple dropstring half a section to the side so they overlap.

Overlapping double dropstrings. Start with the bottom row of overlapping strings. Continue with the top row. This gives a nice, braided effect that looks far more complicated than it is. Give it a try!

More examples

Shown below are three cakes decorated with dropstrings. To the left is a classic Lambeth design. Dropstrings in various forms are used to overpipe large shells. A row of tiny dropstrings sits right above the bottom border. In the middle is a cake with extension work, of which dropstrings form the basic structure of the design. Along the top border of the bottom tier runs a series of triple overlapping dropstrings in different shades of purple. To the right the same top border, done in blue.
Five-petal flowers

Five-petal flowers are the most basic of piped sugar flowers. I like to make several hundred in one sitting. When they’re completely dry, they can be stored cool and dry in jars or resealable bags. They keep forever, unless you drop them on the floor.

Icing consistency: Stiff (or a bit softer for small tubes)
Tubes: Petal tubes
You’ll also need: Flat flower nails

How to:

Cut squares of wax paper and fasten them to the flower nail with a dot of icing.

Put a petal tip in your piping bag. The wide end should point towards the middle of the flower nail, and the pointy end away from yourself. If you are using a curved tube, the curve should turn upward - like a smile.

Hold the stem of the flower nail between your thumb and index finger. Place the tube on the flower nail as seen on the first picture. While turning the flower nail slightly to the left, pipe a petal by moving the piping tube upwards, to the right and down again, like a narrow "U".

Release the pressure towards the end of the petal to make a point. Turn the flower nail and pipe four more petals in a tight circle. With tube #1 pipe a tiny yellow dot in the middle. It's a flower!

Remove the wax paper with the flower from the flower nail - careful! If you drop it, it will land with the bottom up. Leave the flower to dry completely. This can take anywhere from two hours (in dry Scandinavian winters) to forever (in hot and humid places).

Troubleshooting:

The petals have holes in the middle: You’re trying to make larger petals than the tube was meant for. Make smaller petals or use a bigger tube.

It’s not uncommon to make the error of holding the tube upside down or inside out. Make sure you hold it with the wide end towards the middle and the curve upwards.

Too soft icing makes for wilted flowers. Use stiffer icing.

Too stiff icing makes for ragged petals and sore wrists. Soften the icing with a drop of corn syrup.
Arranging five-petal flowers

1. Place five flowers in a curve.
2. Below the curve, place five more flowers in a slightly more pointy curve, so that the flowers overlap towards the ends.
3. Place two flowers in the top center.
4. A single flower closes the gap in the middle. Pipe a few leaves between the flowers.

Cluster of flowers

1. Place four flowers in a square with flowers at the ends. Six flowers in total.
2. On top, place three flowers in a V shape.
3. Place three more on top of those, in a reverse V shape.
4. Finally place a single flower to close the gap. Pipe a few leaves between the flowers.

Branch (yellow flowers)

Pipe a curved line with tube #1 or #1.5, using brown or dark green icing. In every curve, pipe a tiny branch. With a leaf tube (#50), pipe leaves. If using green icing for the branch, tint the leaves a shade lighter. At the end of the tiny branches in the curves, place a flower.

You can also run the curved branch in a circle or heart shape - it looks great on a cake top, or along the edge of a cake board.

Spray (pink flowers)

1. Pipe a spray of brown or green stalks with tube #1 or #1.5.
2. Pipe tiny green leaves with leaf tube #50.
3. Place a few flowers at the tips of the stalks. I like to keep a few of the stalks free from flowers.

Wreath

Place the flowers in a circle on the cake (use a template to mark a circle). Pipe a few leaves. Done! Layer the flowers for a more bulky wreath.

You can do any shape you like - a heart, for example. Try mixing colors and sizes for a more vibrant look.
Leaves are a great finishing touch. Paired with flowers or on their own, they add something special to almost any cake. They're especially great with overpiping, which you can see examples of in the overpiping chapter on page 20. Green leaves give your cake a subtle boost. They look natural and go well with any color.

For a more dramatic effect, you can use other colors. Red leaves look great with blue flowers as do yellow leaves with purple flowers. Just remember to match the colors to the cake itself, or you’ll end up with something out of a circus. For a more elegant look, use leaves a shade lighter or darker than the cake itself (lighter on dark cakes and vice versa).

Basically there are two types of leaf tubes: Flat and open. They make slightly different types of leaves. I prefer the open tubes, but ultimately it's a matter of personal taste.

**Tube:** Leaf tubes

**Icing consistency:** Medium or medium soft

**How to:**
This technique is similar to that of the shell border. Place your tube either on the surface of the cake, or very close to it. While holding the tube still, pipe a leaf. Stop the pressure and carefully move the tube backwards to release it. Don’t lift the tube before it has been fully separated from the leaf.

For a veined leaf, wiggle the tube up and down while piping. For a longer leaf, hold the pressure while moving the tube backwards. Wiggle the tip and gradually release the pressure towards the tip of the leaf. This gives a natural shape to the leaf.

**Troubleshooting:**
Elongated leaves (1): After piping the leaf, remember to stop the pressure on the piping bag when moving the tube backwards. If the icing is too soft you’ll have similar problems, but the leaf will look melted and soft as well.

Split ends (2): The icing is too stiff. Or you're splitting the ends with the tip of the tube by holding it at too steep an angle.

**Colors:**
Leaves are green except when they're not. But when they are, they need to be a nice, realistic shade of green. Be careful not to tint your icing the dreaded "plastic green", which is a dark shade of blueish green rarely seen in nature, but all too often seen in paste colors and on tacky plastic Christmas decorations. For this reason I almost always add additional colors to my green icing. Usually I start off with an olive or avocado green, and add a little lemon yellow, brown and/ or red until I get the desired result. These warm, reddish greens work very well with almost any color, while the colder greens will often look out of place.

**Where to put those leaves**
A dusting of delicate leaves will make any cluster of flowers pop - adding life and color and scrumptiousness.

Take a look at the yellow cake on the picture to the right. I placed a wreath of red flowers on the top, which contrasts nicely to the bright yellow cake and provides some balance to the design. Tiny green leaves are piped among the flowers. Without those leaves, the wreath would have looked like a flat, a blur of red.

The band of flowers on the side of the cake does something similar. It provides life and balance without drawing too much attention to itself, due to the use of yellow and white flowers. The leaves add subtly to the shape of the band and make everything seem alive without being too overpowering.

At the very bottom I placed a few dark red flowers adding some weight back to the bottom (which, for once, was a good thing), ensuring the wreath on top won’t get all the attention by itself. The placement of the flowers highlights the sections of the extension work that dominates the lower half of the cake. A single green leaf is enough here. Subtle, but still colorful, keeping with the scheme of the cake.
Overpiping is often called the Lambeth Method, and Joseph Lambeth did indeed become famous for his superior overpiping skills (can you tell I’m a fan?). He did not invent overpiping though. I’m a bit fuzzy on the historical details, so I’ll not elaborate too much on the subject and risk making myself look more stupid than necessary.

I’d much rather show you how to learn the Great Art Of Overpiping. There’s nothing mysterious or overly advanced about it. Anyone with determination and time on their hands can learn to master overpiping, at least to some extent. So don’t be afraid. It’s only sugar after all.

You get to eat your mistakes.

What is overpiping?

Overpiping is layered piping. You pipe layers of icing on top of each other in more or less elaborate patterns. The picture above shows an overpiping border and how it progresses. It has been photographed from below in order to clearly show the layers.

Your typical overpiping pattern starts off with a base scroll (A). I used star tube #5. The scroll is then overpiped with a curve (B) using the same tube. The curve is then overpiped with a round tube (C), a smaller tube for every new layer. Here I used #2.5, then #2 (D) and for the final layer, #1.5 (E).

The border is finished off with leaves and flowers.

Base scrolls

Scrolls are the starting point for most overpiped borders. Their shape determines the look of the border and the curves used for overpiping. There are two kinds of scrolls:

C-scrolls: The easier of the two. A C-scroll with a double dropstring is the simplest overpiped border there is. It’s easily customized with some dots and flowers (see the picture).

S-scrolls: A bit more advanced, but not too much. There are different variations, as you can see in the picture to the right.

Overpiped borders are usually placed on the top or bottom edge of the cake. It is common practice to make the top edge rounded. This makes it easier to pipe borders directly on the rounded edge. On cakes with sharp edges, place the border on the side - not on the top.

When piping this kind of border on your cake, you’ll need to divide the cake top into sections. Read more about how to do this on page 12. This is done to ensure the scrolls are equal in size.

A 5 cm/2 inch section is fitting for the patterns in this book. If you make them larger, you run the risk of the pattern having the appearance of being stretched out. The templates shown on page 12 are all for 2 inch sections.
Base scrolls

Icing consistency: Medium
Tube: Star tube or rope tube (here shown with star tube)

How to:

Left-handed decorators will want to start at the right and work towards the left as show on the pictures. If you're right-handed, you want to start at the left and work to the right.

Place the piping bag on the cake approx at a 45° angle. Pipe the scroll by applying pressure and moving the tip up and down in a tight zig-zag pattern. Increase pressure where you want the scroll to be wider and gradually decrease pressure towards the end. If you're finding it difficult to control the size of the scroll by pressure alone, you can make the scroll wider by piping a larger zig-zag pattern instead. This works very well with C-scrolls.

Your scroll should be even without any gaps. If you lift your piping bag at the end of a scroll, you'll get pointy ends. Tap them down with a damp brush.

The first steps of overpiping must be done immediately after. It's usually done with the same tube used for the base scroll. Round tubes follow, decreasing in size. I use #2.5 - #2 - #1.5, but you can use #3 - #2 - #1 as well. Or any combination you prefer. You might want to let the icing dry for half an hour, before piping the final layer, especially if you're overpiping on the side of the cake.

Overpiping with dropstrings: See chapter on dropstrings (page 15).

Overpiping with curves: When overpiping with curves, start at the widest end. It's much easier - try for yourself and feel the difference (or, if there's no difference, revel in the fact that either way is a piece of cake for you).

The general rule is to follow the shape of the base scroll. But rules are meant to be broken, so feel free to let your imagination run wild. This is where the fun starts. The only thing limiting you is your skill level - and the laws of physics.

Base scrolls and how to overpipe them
A few borders to get you started

These borders can be used as is or as a starting point for creating your own. Explaining these borders in writing has given me many gray hairs, so make sure you take a good look at the pictures as well. The text will tell you which techniques to use.

**Border 1:** With round tube #1.5, pipe a double dropstring on the side along the top edge of the cake. Pipe corresponding double dropstrings on the top of the cake to create the oval shapes shown. With the same tube, pipe a trellis pattern inside the oval shapes. To clean-up the top and bottom of the trellis work, overpipe the inner set of dropstrings, both on the side and on the top. Decorate with flowers and dots.

**Border 2:** With round tube #1.5 pipe double dropstrings. In the loops, pipe C-scrolls with star tube #5. With the same tube, pipe shells between the C-scrolls. Overpipe with dropstrings using round tube #1.5. Decorate with dots.

**Border 3:** With round tube #1.5 pipe double dropstrings with a 1.5 cm/half inch space between them at the widest. Between the dropstrings, pipe C-scrolls with star tube #5. Overpipe with double dropstrings using round tube #1.5. Underline the entire border with an extra row of dropstrings. Place flowers between the sections.

**Border 4:** With star tube #5, pipe S-scrolls and immediately overpipe with the same tube. Alternate between S-curves and reverse S-curves - see picture. Overpipe with round tubes #2.5, then #2 and #1.5. Decorate with flowers and leaves.

**Border 5:** With star tube #5, pipe S-scrolls and immediately overpipe with the same tube. Continue overpiping with round tubes #2.5 then #2 and #1.5. Pipe a leaf in each S-curve.

**Border 6:** With round tube #1.5, pipe double dropstrings as seen in Border 3 but with a bit more space between them. Pipe C-scrolls with star tube #5. With the same tube, pipe mirrored S-curves as seen on the picture. Continue overpiping with round tubes #2.5, then #2 and #1.5. Decorate with flowers and leaves.
Thank you for reading my book!

I hope you found the book useful. Or at least amusing. I’d love to see any cake you make from the instructions in the book. Feel free to mail me a picture: sif@sifbeth.dk or post it on SifBeth’s Facebook wall at https://www.facebook.com/sifsandjensen

If you liked my book enough to pay for it (thank you!) you can do so at http://books.sifbeth.com/

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