

Four Tier Woodland Cake

Serves up to 200 people

The cake, which is set on a moss-covered pedestal, is composed of four tiers, each four inches high-eighteen, fourteen, ten, and six inches in diameter, from bottom layer to top. Each tier consists of four yellow-cake layers. The cake is moistened with a verbena-infused simple syrup and filled with lemon curd. The cake is then covered with a Swiss meringue buttercream icing, onto which the decorative ferns are piped.

To make this celebration of a cake, you need to be extremely well organized. Working with a friend will not only make the endeavor much easier, but also much more fun. Wendy usually bakes the cake layers on a Thursday for a Saturday wedding. Chill the layers before assembling the tiers to make the cake firm and easy to handle. You can make the layers up to six weeks in advance; wrap them well with plastic wrap and freeze. The verbena syrup can be made several days in advance and refrigerated.

To assemble the moss-covered base you will need:

- 2 flats of live moss that has been watered
- 1 four-by-twenty-inch Styrofoam round
- Box of straight or floral pins
- Serrated knife

To assemble the Woodland Cake you will need:

- 8 two-inch-high Moist Yellow Cake tiers, 18, 14, 10, and 6 inches in diameter (recipe follows)
- 8 1/4 cups Verben Sugar Syrup (recipe follows)
- 16 1/4 cups Lemon Curd (recipe follows)
- 24 3/4 cups Swiss-Meringue Buttercream (recipe follows)
- 2 foam-boards, 3/16-inch thick, 20 by 30-inches
- 15 wooden dowels, 1/4-inch thick, 12 inches long
- 1 wooden dowel, 1/4-by-24-inch
- Moss-green, leaf-green, nut-brown, and royal-blue paste food colors

To assemble the moss-covered base:

1. Place an 18-inch round cake pan in the center of a 4-by-20-inch Styrofoam round, and trace the circular shape onto the Styrofoam.
2. Using a serrated knife, cut a bevel from the top of the 18-inch circle to the bottom edge of the Styrofoam. Sand down any bumpy spots by rubbing with another piece of Styrofoam. Use a dry paintbrush to brush off Styrofoam.
3. Starting at the bottom of the Styrofoam, pin pieces of damp moss onto base. Break off small pieces of moss, and pin them to fill any empty spots. When you reach the top of the Styrofoam, do not pin the moss. Place pieces of moss so they rise 1/4 inch above Styrofoam but can be removed so the cake can be more easily placed on the base.

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To assemble the Woodland Cake:

1. Each cake layer needs a sturdy base. Trace the 18-inch cake pan twice onto a 3/16-inch foam board. Trace 14-, 10-, and 6-inch cake pans (once each) onto a piece of 3/16-inch foam board. Carefully cut out the rounds. Glue the 18-inch rounds together (this will ensure a steady base). Once cakes have cooled slightly, remove from pans. Do not peel off parchment. When completely cool, place each cake right side up on a foam-board round, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 6 hours; this makes the layers firm and easy to handle. At this point, they can also be frozen.
2. Begin with the largest tier. Remove from the refrigerator. If it didn't bake level-cakes often don't-even it out with a serrated knife. Use a turntable to make it even all around.
3. To split the cake, center it on the turntable. Hold a serrated knife against the edge of the cake; rotate the turntable, working the knife through the cake. Repeat the same process with all eight cakes. Each tier will now consist of four layers.
4. Place a small dollop of the buttercream icing in the center of the cake. Put another foam-board round on top of it; invert the cake onto the foam board. Remove the first foam-board base and parchment. The bottom of the cake is now the top; the cake will remain on this foam-board round until it is eaten.
5. Brush the cut surface of the bottom half of the cake with the verbena syrup. This syrup will moisten the cake and add a subtle flavor.
6. Pipe the buttercream around the perimeter of the bottom half of the cake. Use a pastry bag fitted with a standard-size coupler. This "dam" will keep the lemon-curd filling in place. Cover the bottom layer with lemon curd. It should be about 1/8-inch thick; don't use so much that the upper layer slips and slides. Carefully place the second layer cut side down, and brush the top with verbena syrup. Repeat this process for the next two layers. Allow to set for 2 to 3 minutes.
7. Using an offset spatula to give the tier a "crumb coat," ice top with buttercream. This thin layer of icing will seal the cake. Start from the center and work toward and over the edge, making sure to spread the buttercream over the sides of the tier.
8. Smooth the icing, though it doesn't have to be perfectly smooth at this point because more icing will later cover the crumb coat. Chill in the refrigerator to set the icing, between 30 minutes and 1 hour, until it doesn't feel sticky to the touch. Repeat steps 2 through 8 with remaining tiers.
9. Give the tiers a final coating of buttercream. Use an offset spatula to smooth the top, and a tool called a bench scraper for the sides. Before you ice each tier, wipe off the spatula, dip it in hot water, and then spread icing on using the warm, clean spatula. This will make a clean, finished edge.
10. The icing should be smooth and uniform. But perfection is nearly impossible; if you see an air bubble or other small flaw, make that side the back of the cake. Refrigerate the tiers.

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11. Insert a 1/4-inch-diameter dowel vertically into the 18-inch tier. Mark dowel 1/4 inch above the cake, and remove from cake. Cut dowel at the marked place. Use cut dowel to measure 13 more dowels of the same length. Insert eight dowels 4 1/2 inches from the edge of cake evenly spaced in a circle. Inside this circle, place 6 dowels, evenly spaced, 7 inches from the edge of cake. Repeat this process with the 14-inch and 10-inch cakes. For the 14-inch cake you will need 10 dowels, 6 evenly spaced 4 inches from the edge, and 4 evenly spaced 6 inches from the edge. For the 10-inch cake you will need 6 dowels evenly spaced 3 inches from the edge.

12. Have 2 cups buttercream in each of three bowls. Have toothpicks on hand to add paste coloring to buttercream. Mix three slightly different hues of green using moss-green, nut-brown, leaf-green, and royal-blue paste colors. Use real ferns to help you match the color.

13. Fit 3 medium-size pastry bags with couplers. Place #1.5, #2, and #3 tips on pastry bags. Using the different sized tips will give your ferns a more organic appearance.

14. Choose the best side of each tier, and mark by placing a small piece of tape under the foam board. This will allow you to remember where the front of the cake is.

15. Begin with the 18-inch tier. Using prepared pastry bags, pipe sprawling fern leaves, starting with the center stem and continuing with the individual branches. Finish with the individual leaves. Continue this process using the different shades, piping ferns in a variety of sizes. Refrigerate tier. Repeat with remaining tiers.

16. If possible, assemble cake at or near final location. Remove any pieces of moss that would hinder cake placement from top of Styrofoam. Place bottom tier on prepared moss-covered base. Pin pieces of moss back onto Styrofoam, so that the bottom edge of cake is hidden. Stack remaining tiers onto 18-inch tier, making sure to line up fronts.

17. Finally, to stabilize the cake, hold the 24-inch dowel against the side of the assembled tier cake and measure height of cake. Cut dowel 1/4 inch less than the height of cake. Sharpen dowel with a utility knife to form a point. Position the dowel in the center of the 6-inch tier. Using a mallet, pound the sharpened dowel through all four tiers. When the dowel is almost flush with the cake, use a smaller piece of scrap dowel to completely submerge the long dowel into the cake. Fill hole with white buttercream and smooth. If necessary, pipe another fern over this area.

Sources:

Wendy Kromer Specialty Confections
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www.wendykromer.com

**Note: To order back issues of Martha Stewart Weddings,
please call 1-800-274-6800**

Moist Yellow Cake

Makes 4 1/2 cups batter (you will need to make 22 batches)

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus more to coat pans
2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
4 large eggs, at room temperature
2 2/3 cups cake flour, sifted, plus more to coat pans
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup milk, at room temperature

1. You will need 22 batches total to make the following: two 6-inch round layers, two 10-inch round layers, two 14-inch round layers, and two 18-inch round layers. (One batch makes two 6-inch layers; 3 1/2 batches make two 10-inch layers; 6 1/2 batches make two 14-inch layers; 11 batches make two 18-inch layers.)

2. Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter the baking pans; line the bottom of each pan with a round of parchment paper. Dust pans with flour, making sure to coat the sides evenly.

3. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream together the butter and sugar until light in color and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Add the vanilla extract, and then the eggs, one at a time.

4. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt three times. Add to egg mixture in three additions, alternating with the milk, and starting and ending with the flour.

5. Pour the batter into prepared pans (filling three-quarters full). Bake the 6-inch rounds between 35 and 40 minutes; bake the 10-inch rounds between 45 and 50 minutes; bake the 14-inch rounds about 1 hour and 10 minutes; and bake the 18-inch rounds about 1 hour and 25 minutes. The cakes are done when the tops are golden brown and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean.

Verbena Sugar Syrup

Makes 8 1/4 cups

4 1/2 cups water

1 1/2 ounces loose verbena tea leaves

6 3/4 cups sugar

1. Bring 4 1/2 cups of water to a boil in a heavy saucepan, remove from heat, and add dried verbena leaves. Let rest for 1 to 3 hours (depending on how strong you want the flavor).
2. Strain the infusion through a very fine sieve. Discard the verbena leaves. Return the infusion to a heavy saucepan and add sugar. Stir to combine. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Remove from heat, and let sit until it cools to room temperature.

Lemon Curd

Makes 2 1/2 cups (you will need to make 5 batches)

3/4 cup lemon juice

1 cup sugar

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

8 large egg yolks

1. Stir together lemon juice, sugar, and butter in a medium, heavy-bottom saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat.
2. In a large bowl, whisk the egg yolks continuously. Slowly pour the lemon mixture into the egg yolks. Whisk until completely combined, away from heat. Return the mixture to the saucepan, and bring to medium-low heat, stirring continuously until the mixture coats the back of a spoon, about 6 to 8 minutes.
3. Strain the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve. Cover the surface of the curd directly with plastic wrap to prevent skin from forming. Refrigerate for several hours or overnight.

Swiss-Meringue Buttercream

Makes 5 1/2 cups (you will need to make 5 batches)

10 large egg whites
2 1/2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
4 cups (8 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1. Combine the egg whites, sugar, and vanilla in the heat-proof bowl of an electric mixer. Set the bowl over a pan of simmering water. Whisk continuously until the sugar has dissolved and the whites are hot to the touch, 5 to 7 minutes.
2. Transfer the bowl to an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Mix on low speed, gradually increasing to high speed, until completely cool and stiff glossy peaks form, about 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, cream butter in a separate bowl to soften. Add butter gradually to egg whites. Add vanilla extract. Beat 2 to 3 minutes, until frosting is smooth and spreadable. If it looks curdled during mixing process, continue to mix until smooth.

Sources:

Gel paste food coloring: forest green; leaf green; super brown, or nut brown; and royal blue
Stainless-steel #1.5 round pastry tip
Pastry tips: #2 round and #3 round
12-inch polyurethane pastry bag
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