

Decorating Sugar Cookies

Chapter 1. Welcome!

Decorating sugar cookies with royal icing is a challenge. However, the outcome is often beautiful (and delicious!). Custom, hand-decorated cookies are expensive, so learning to decorate on your own can be very rewarding!

Detailed decorating takes focus; it can be a way to slow down, relax, and direct your attention towards something besides life's normal stressors. The best part of sugar cookie decorating is that if you make a mistake, you can just eat it!

Chapter 2. Necessary Tools

You will need different tools for making, coloring, and decorating the icing.

Tools for making the icing

- Large bowl
- Small whisk
- Spoon(s) or spatula(s)

Tools for coloring the icing

- Spoon(s) or spatula(s)
- Gel food coloring
- One small bowl per icing color
- One piping bag per icing color
- Tall glass

Tools for decorating

- Your piping bags filled with flooding and decorating icings
- Scribe tool or toothpick
- Patience

Chapter 3. Making Your Royal Icing

Royal icing is used to decorate sugar cookies because it dries quickly and its consistency is nice to work with when decorating.

Mastering icing consistency is the key to successful sugar cookie decorating.

Royal icing is finicky and hard to work with until you get to know it through lots of hands-on practice. Many people give up because it's tricky to master. You might need several tries to get it right.

Royal icing consistency is affected by the humidity in the air. Therefore, a specific ratio of water in any given recipe may have different results on different days when mixing for the consistency you desire.

You can watch videos on YouTube to learn how to get the right icing consistencies.

Royal Icing Ingredients

3 Tbsp	meringue powder
1/2 cup	warm water
3 Tbsp	light corn syrup
1 tsp	vanilla extract
1 tsp	almond extract
2 lbs	powdered sugar

How to make white royal icing

This recipe gives you your basic royal icing. You will later modify the consistency of this icing to make flooding icing and detail piping icing.

Do NOT overmix your icing. Overmixed royal icing doesn't dry well on cookies and will easily crumble and fall off the cookie. It also tastes disgusting.

1. Whisk meringue powder and warm water together by hand with a small whisk in a large mixing bowl.
2. Whisk in light corn syrup, vanilla extract, and almond extract.
3. Add the powdered sugar to the bowl.
4. Move your bowl to a mixer and mix on low speed with a paddle for 30 seconds or until combined.
5. Scrape bottom and sides of bowl with a spatula.
6. Continue mixing on low speed for 2-3 minutes.

7. Look for stiff peaks in icing. To do this, put your paddle or a spoon into the icing and then pull it out. The icing peaks should stay formed with little to no bending or falling over.
8. If peaks are not stiff, mix for 1 more minute.
9. Cover in airtight container to prevent drying.

Chapter 4. Coloring and Thinning Your Royal Icing

Royal icing is colored by mixing small amounts of water and food gel coloring into the icing bowl. At times, a few drops of water makes the difference between too thick, too thin, or just right.

Each icing color should be mixed in a separate bowl.

1. Squeeze a drop or two of gel food coloring into your bowl of icing.
2. Thin your icing to the right consistency by adding small amounts of water with a half-teaspoon or a small spray bottle.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until your colors look good and your consistencies are perfect.
4. Cover in airtight container or place in piping bag or close.

Royal icing consistencies

Icing used for flooding requires a very unique consistency, while icing used for other techniques should have a toothpaste-like consistency. Icing consistency is the key to decorating success.

Icing used for flooding should have a consistency that is thin enough to flow into itself but thick enough that it doesn't drip off the cookie.

Icing used for decorating should be a bit thicker than icing used for flooding. Decorating icing has an ideal consistency that matches toothpaste.

Note on deep and dark icing colors

Deep or dark colors such as red, navy blue, and black require a great deal of food coloring.

Colors intensify across time. If a dark color is needed, mix a good amount of color into the icing, then let icing sit in airtight bowl for at least two hours. This allows the color to darken and prevents you from adding too much coloring.

Dark colors tend to stain the mouth when eaten.

Chapter 5. Icing Techniques

Are you ready to make some edible art?

Learn the three most common decorating techniques (flooding, wet-on-wet, and detail piping) here.

How to fill a piping bag

There's a trick to it! Use a glass to hold your piping bag open while you fill it. This makes much less of a mess!

Once you're ready to start decorating, fill your piping bags with icing.

1. Open bag and place inside a tall glass, then cuff bag over sides so it holds itself open.
2. Pour or scrape your icing into the bag.
3. Close bag by tying a knot, using a bag clip, or using a twistie.



Flooding

Flooding gives your cookie an even base layer of icing to which you can later add details.

Icing used for flooding should have a consistency that is thin enough to flow into itself but thick enough that it doesn't drip off the cookie.

A perfectly flooded cookie has even thickness across the cookies, is a little puffy, and has a slight shine after it has dried.

You can flood cookies in sections to add dimension, or flood the entire cookie at once.

How to flood a cookie

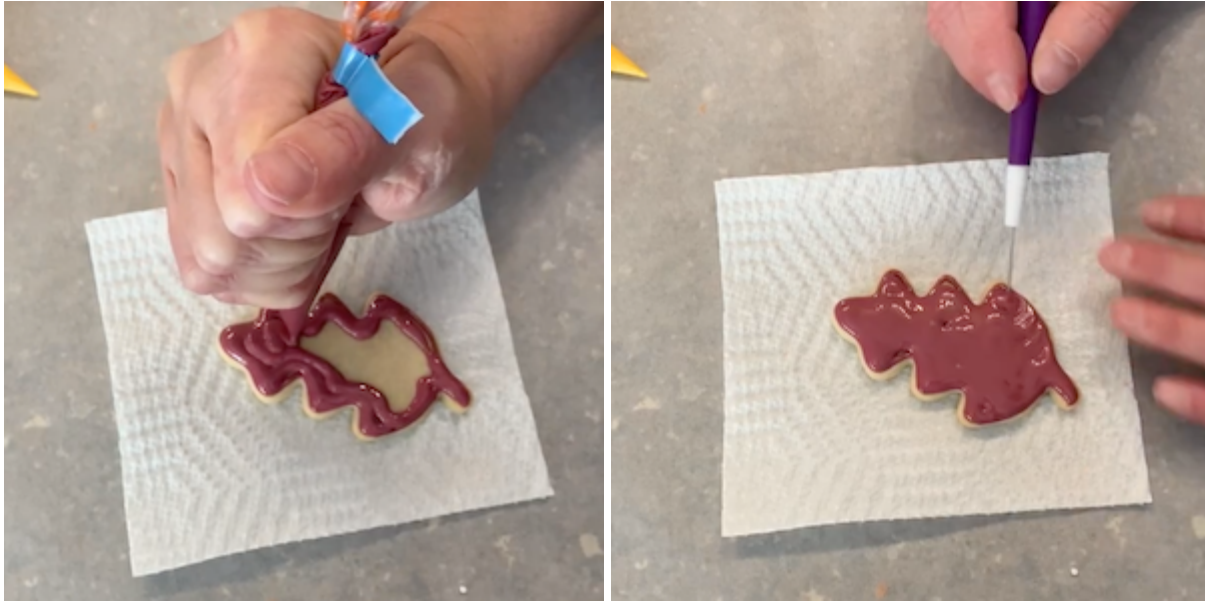
There are multiple ways to flood a cookie, but we'll teach you the currently preferred style. This style requires you to outline the cookie with flood icing, and then immediately fill it in.

This is the first step to decorating beautiful sugar cookies.

1. Outline the portion of the cookie you want to flood using a piping bag full of flooding icing.
2. Immediately fill inside of the outline with same icing.
3. Gently pull icing out to cookie's edges using a scribe tool.
4. Pop air bubbles and close frosting gaps with scribe tool.
5. If needed, level your icing by gently shaking cookie side-to-side.

The images below demonstrate steps 1-4.





How to let your icing crust

Allowing your icing to crust by using an oven, dehydrator, or time itself can be a very important middle step when decorating cookies with royal icing.

There are multiple methods to letting your icing crust.

1. Place in oven at 170 F for 10 minutes, then remove from oven and let cookies cool on pan.
2. Use a dehydrator.
3. Let icing air dry for several hours, then return later or the next day to add details.

How to do the wet-on-wet icing technique

The wet-on-wet icing technique allows you to add details with other colors while the flood layer is still wet and hasn't crusted. Your base flood icing and colored icing details will dry as one even layer.

This style of decorating adds a layer of mystery to non-decorators.

1. Flood cookie with base color.
2. Immediately add details with colored icing of same consistency.

How to create polka dots with wet-on-wet icing technique

Polka dots are an easy way to use the wet-on-wet icing technique.

Learn how to make them by following these directions.

1. Squeeze piping bag gently to drop spots of colored icing into flooded base icing.
2. Release pressure on piping bag while lifting away from cookie.
3. Let crust and dry.

The images below show wet-on-wet polka dots as they are being placed and after they have dried.



How to create stripes with wet-on-wet icing technique

You can make stripes using the wet-on-wet icing technique. These can then be turned into zig-zags or allowed to dry as is!

Wet-on-wet stripes can take lots of practice.

1. Touch colored icing piping bag down on edge of flooded base icing.
2. Lift icing bag slightly. Icing should hang from bag.
3. Apply gentle, even pressure and pull icing across cookie in a straight line.
4. Touch tip of piping bag down on end of line, then release pressure.
5. Let crust and dry.

How to create zig-zags with wet-on-wet icing technique

Zig-zags are a more advanced wet-on-wet icing technique. Begin by piping stripes, then use a scribe tool to complete the design.

After piping stripes, follow the directions below to create wet-on-wet zig-zags.

1. Pipe stripes, but do not let crust and dry.
2. Gently drag scribe tool perpendicular to direction of stripes.
3. Let crust and dry.

Detail Piping

Detail piping is often the key to gorgeous sugar cookies.

Once your base layer has crusted, you can add details. Common details include fine lines, flowers, script, and eyes.

Icing for detail piping must be thicker than flood icing, about the consistency of toothpaste.

Wait for each detail icing layer to dry before adding another for the most successful detail piping.

Extensive details can take hours and may be done over 1-3 days. Small details make beautiful cookies!

Many of the cookies below have been decorated with the detail piping technique.

