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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, December 15, 1931.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Frosting the Cake." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes Revised."

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Somebody asked me the other day to suggest an easily made, plain, cooked frosting for cake. I didn't even have to think over my answer to that question. In the very next breath I said: "An excellent and easy frosting? Of course. Ten-minute vanilla frosting. Please see the green cookbook, page 121."

This frosting contains just five things--sugar, water, egg white and-- But wait. If you haven't a cookbook, perhaps you'd like to take down the recipe. The five ingredients are:

1 cup of sugar  
4 tablespoons of cold water  
1 egg white  
1/8 teaspoon of salt, and  
1/2 teaspoon of vanilla.

I'll repeat that list of five. (Repeat.)

Now put the sugar, water and unbeaten egg-white together in the upper part of the double boiler. Are you sure you got all that? I'm going to say it over again because it's important. Put the sugar, water and unbeaten egg-white into the upper part of a double boiler. Have the water in the lower part boiling. Begin beating the mixture with a dover beater at once, and beat constantly while it cooks for about 10 minutes. It then looks like ordinary boiled frosting and should be almost thick enough to spread. Take it from the stove, add salt--the vanilla, and continue to beat until it has thickened and holds its shape on the beater.

What to do if this frosting seems soft and not sufficiently cooked? Just cook it a few minutes longer in the double boiler.

What if it is too stiff? Add a small amount of water and cook again.

The recipe I have just given is sufficient to ice a two-layer cake. But be sure not to put on the icing until the cake is cold. Experts usually



ice a cake this way: They cover the top first, piling the icing in the center. Then they work it out lightly to the edges using a spatula. Next they frost the sides. And they always use quick light strokes and keep the spatula free from crumbs.

If you want to vary this recipe for quick cooked icing, give it a chocolate crust. When the white icing over the cake has set, just melt some unsweetened chocolate and pour it over the top in a very thin layer.

You'll find four icing or frosting recipes in the radio cookbook--three beside the one I have just given you. And beside, there are two excellent cake-filling recipes, one made with dried fruit and nuts and the other with lemon.

By the way, perhaps those three words--icing, frosting and filling need definitions. "Icing" and "frosting" both mean the same thing to me--a sweet covering to go over the outside of the cake. "Filling" is a mixture used between the layers of a cake. The filling may have frosting as a foundation or may be a thick corn-starch mixture.

This brings us to the next question? What's the purpose of icing or frosting a cake anyway? Decoration, for one thing. As a friend of mine puts it, "For festive occasions a delicate, well-made icing is the crowning glory of any cake." Then, of course, icing gives added sweetness. And finally, this covering helps keep the cake fresh. However, since it is so easy to over-indulge in sweets, especially at the Christmas season, a cake without frosting is often to be desired, especially the sponge or angel cake for the younger children.

And that reminds me of a question that came in by mail the other day: "When should I ice my fruit cake?" the question asked. "Of course, I want it in tip-top condition for Christmas day."

Shall I give you my sincere and personal opinion by way of answer? All right. No hard feelings at all if you don't agree with my ideas on this subject or any other. I think housekeepers, like people of any other professions, have a right to disagree on professional matters, if they want to. But as for icing a fruit cake--well, I don't believe in it early, late or ever. But as I said, that's my personal opinion. However, if you want to ice a fruit cake, the time to do it is shortly before serving. Otherwise, it is likely to become discolored during the time when the cake is stored. And use only a thin layer of the icing.

Now I'll explain why I don't believe in icing fruit cake or any other cake that is to be kept for a long season. In the first place, fruit cake doesn't need this covering to keep it fresh and moist. The fruit in the cake will do that. And the cake doesn't need added sweetness. It is rich enough already. Finally, icing on fruit cake is a nuisance rather than a decoration when the cake is cut. Fruit cake, as we've often mentioned before, should always be served in thin slices. And naturally when you slice it thin, the icing cracks and crumbles and probably falls off. My idea is that frostings are suitable for any of the usual cakes which are to be used at once or within a few days of baking.



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The Recipe Lady just gave me a helpful suggestion about keeping a iced or frosted cake in fine condition for several days. She says that a piece of fresh bread kept in the bread or cake box with the cake will help keep both the icing and the cake fresh.

Somebody else has suggested adding a tablespoon of butter to the icing when it comes off the stove to help it keep just the right consistency. I haven't had time to test this myself and neither has the Recipe Lady, but the news came from a very fine cook, so I'm passing it along to you to try out for yourself.

Before it slips my mind, let me say a word or two about making cooked icing. If ease and speed are not your main objective in making icing, don't forget that good, old-fashioned boiled frosting which, I think, is the finest frosting there is. Of course, it takes more time and is a little more difficult to make. You know how it's done. Boil sugar and water together until they form a syrup of the proper consistency and then beat this into stiffly whipped egg whites. This frosting is made on the fondant principle. Beating is what gives the fine, creamy texture.

Several people have inquired about using thermometers for making this kind of icing as well as for making Christmas candies. A candy thermometer is a very wise investment for insuring success. No danger of an icing so soft that it runs off the cake or so stiff that you can't spread it on, if you cook by temperature and rely on a tested thermometer. The cold-water test is not so accurate. For many years housekeepers have been testing icings and candy mixtures by dropping a bit of the cooked syrup into cold water. If it hardened sufficiently, they considered it done. If not, they cooked it some more. Naturally this test, though generally used, is not so accurate as testing with a thermometer. It requires some experience to make certain of success with an indefinite test of this kind. But with a tested standard thermometer even an inexperienced cook can be certain of good results, certain that she is taking her icing from the stove at just the right moment. When a sugar mixture reaches a temperature of 238 to 240 degrees F., it gives a soft ball when dropped in cold water. At 250 degrees it gives a hard ball.

Just time for one last question. Why do some icing recipes call for corn syrup as well as sugar? And why do others call for cream of tartar? Either the syrup or the cream of tartar have an effect on the sugar that makes an especially smooth, velvety texture in the finished product.

Tomorrow: Wednesday? That's our day to talk about the younger generation. Questions and answers tomorrow.

Oh, by the way. On Monday, this coming Monday, I'll give you the Christmas dinner menu. It's early, but there's nothing like having all the dinner plans made some days ahead.

