

The easiest sponge cake in the world

Contributed by Bagpuss

Sponge cakes are very easy to make using a method called the all in one sponge. This recipe is also very adaptable as it can be turned into fruit puddings, muffins for lunch boxes or nice sponge cakes for afternoon tea.

The recipe follows a standard ratio of 2oz/55g marg/butter 2oz/55g Self Raising Flour 2oz/55g Caster Sugar 1 large egg also 1/2tsp baking powder and 1/2 vanilla extract. The recipe is relatively robust so these quantities don't have to be very exact provided there is roughly equal quantity of the 4 main ingredients. People generally make double or quadruple this quantity 4oz/110g, 2eggs, 1tsp or 8oz/225g, 4eggs, 2tsp. A 4oz sponge is plenty for a single layer but for a sandwich you generally need at least 6 if not 8oz spread over two tins. Instructions for making an easy sponge

1. Get the butter out of the fridge to reach room temperature (this is helpful but not essential)
2. Turn the oven on to heat up to 180°C (350°F / Gas Mark 4).
3. Line/grease an appropriate cake tin/muffin tin (see below)
4. Measure out all the ingredients and place into a large bowl
5. Mix the ingredients together well until the mix has a dropping consistency, which is when you can lift a globule up on a spoon and it will drop off when tipped downwards. This consistency is like very thick double cream. After beating it seems too thick water down with a bit of milk, if it seems too thin add more flour. This mixing can be done with an electric mixer, a wooden spoon or even just a fork - it depends on what you have.
6. Pour mixture into the prepared tin
7. Put in oven until done (for a 4oz cake this will generally take 30 minutes but variation in timing is discussed below).

Methods for telling if the sponge is cooked include looking to see if it has shrunk away from the side of the tin; listening to it if it still bubbling it is still cooking; inserting a skewer or piece of spaghetti - if it comes out clean it is done; lastly giving the cake a light press - if it springs back on itself it is probably done.

Equipment A 4oz sponge will make a nice sized cake in a 7"/18cm cake tin. It will also make about 12-15 cup cakes in a shallow bun tin., 8 in deep muffin tin. An 8oz sponge will happily fill a 8"/20cm tin or the mixture can be divided in half into two smaller tins for a sandwich loaf.

Cooking times All these sponges cook at 180 degrees C but the times will vary note these values are approximate.

- 12 buns will take 15-20 minutes
- a 4 oz sponge will take 25-30 minutes
- a 6 oz sponge 35 minutes
- a 8 oz sponge 40-45 minutes

This timing generally works for the middle of the oven. If the cake is high up or low down the timing will change. Putting more things in the oven can also affect the cooking time but generally not that dramatically. For deciding how long it is likely to take always give the cake at least 3/4 of the minimum time before checking. This is to ensure the cake has enough time to set so it is less likely sink when exposed to the lower temperature outside the oven.

Variations The above recipe will produce a nice plain vanilla sponge but you can do a lot more with it than that. Below are some of the common variations I use.

Chocolate cake For a 4oz sponge mix add about tablespoon of cocoa powder to the mixture. Depending on how thick your mixture is already you may need to add a bit of milk too.

Citrus cake for a 4 oz sponge mix add the zest and the juice from a citrus fruit (you would need half an orange's worth or a whole lemon). I find both lemons and oranges work quite well. Again if the mixture becomes too wet add a bit more flour. For an added twist as soon as the cake comes out of the oven cover the top with a couple table spoons of granulated sugar mixed with the juice of a lemon/half and orange and it will set to a nice crust.

Apple cake for a 6 oz sponge mix add one large apple or two smaller apples chopped up in to chunky pieces. Then sprinkle the top of the sponge with demera sugar and oats and bake for about 45 minutes. I frequently do this in a square tin about 20cm square as it makes a nice tray bake and also bakes more evenly. When adding fruit you need to be sure not to add too much liquid though. Adding apples or pears, or dried fruit, is fine, but fruit from tins will generally be too moist so the cake won't cook properly in the middle.

Coffee and walnut cake For a 4oz sponge mix, add about tbs of strong coffee (I use some instant coffee, espresso powder is good, and a tbs of hot water) and then add about 50g of chopped walnuts to the mix and bake as normal.

Pistachio cake The cake in the illustrations for this article is a further variation, pistachio cake. Make as 8oz sponge split across 2 tins (180 oven - 30min cooking time), but replace 50g of flour with 100g of blitzed pistachios. Fill with cream cheese mixed with icing sugar and vanilla extract. Top with pistachio praline made by melting 100g caster sugar with 2tbs of water in the microwave for 2-3 minutes or till bubbling vigorously. Quickly stir in about 50g of chopped pistachios then pour over baking parchment and break up when set and use to decorate the cake.

What can go wrong/Problems This is a relatively robust mixture so there is little you can do to it which will produce an inedible sponge. If you use butter/marg which isn't at room temperature you can get lumps of butter in the mixture which never properly mix in. While this doesn't have a significant affect on the quality of the sponge it can make it look a little unsightly. If you open the oven too early you can cause the cake to sink which while this doesn't ruin the cake again it is less appealing in appearance. To avoid this you need to be patient and make a few attempts. What these sponges are most sensitive to is the temperature of the oven - slightly too hot and the top of the cake can catch before the middle is cooked properly. This can be avoided by looking at the cake about 3/4 of the way through the cooking time and covering it loosely with foil or baking parchment for the remaining cooking time and then next time decreasing the temperature by 5 or so degrees. The more you bake the better you will get with your own oven - it's just one of those things which takes a bit of time.

Decorating the cake A nice sponge can need no decoration. Things like dusting with icing or filling with jam or fruit curds can be nice. Here a recipe for a simple butter cream which will make a good decoration for many sponges:

50g butter/marg 100g icing sugar tsp vanilla essence Beat the butter till soft, add the vanilla essence and slowly mix in the icing sugar till you get a creamy mixture. Again this can easily be varied, adding similar flavourings to the ones suggested for the sponges can work well e.g cocoa powder for chocolate, strong coffee for coffee, citrus juice for citrus flavoured. You can make a similar icing but lower fat using either water or citrus just as a base. Here you take a couple tbs of juice or water and add icing sugar until you have a spreadable paste. This will be always though be a much looser icing than butter cream and while it is fine for covering a cake it won't make a good filling for a sandwich cake.

Other resources Delia Online, Sponge cakes Recipes Forum