

ICES

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the BIG Hot Sugar Issue

Hot Butterflies

Mixed Media
Cake Topper

Ice Coral

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Mixed Media Cake Topper

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So often when I do wedding cakes, I get the request to do “something different” for the topper. Almost never do I wind up placing a bride-and-groom figurine set on top of my cakes. Often I’m asked to provide a simple topper of arranged flowers – either sugar or fresh, and sometimes I’m given the opportunity to “get creative” or “have fun”. Those are the toppers I enjoy most. Following is a slightly upscale take on a “simple” sugar flower topper.

You will need:

- Isomalt, prepared for casting
- Royal icing, piping bag, and tips (size 1.5 and/or 2)
- Oil-based, non-toxic modeling clay
- Heavy-duty vinyl upholstery plastic
- Cutters and/or a razor knife
- Rolling pin and 1/4”-diameter dowels
- Knife
- Heat source (propane torch, butane torch, or stovetop)
- Thermometer



Cast the Structure

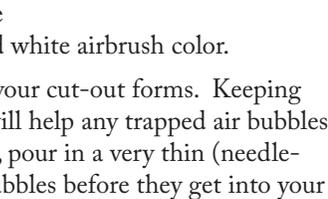
There are numerous plastic and silicone molds available for casting hot sugar. Often, though, what I’m looking for isn’t quite available, so that’s when I create my own forms for casting.

1. Place parchment paper or newsprint onto your work table, and lay the upholstery vinyl over it. Don’t forget the paper, or the vinyl may get hot enough to stick to your table, and you’ll break your pieces later when you try to remove them.
2. Using dowels or chopsticks as a guide, roll out non-toxic oil-based modeling clay. I like to roll on a silicone mat, then transfer to the upholstery plastic to keep the plastic clean.

3. Cut out your shapes using pastry cutters, cookie cutters, gum paste cutters, a razor knife, etc. (Note: if using a razor knife, you may want to cut before placing the clay on your plastic to keep from cutting or scratching it). You should have at least a base, an upright, and a small circle to cut up for braces.
 

4. Use cut-out pieces of clay as inserts in larger cut-outs for interest.



5. For casting this piece, I used clear and pale milky-green Isomalt. I achieved the pale milky-green by using a couple drops each of forest green and white airbrush color.
 
6. Pour the Isomalt slowly into your cut-out forms. Keeping the Isomalt in a warm oven will help any trapped air bubbles to escape, but to be extra sure, pour in a very thin (needle-thin) stream to pop any air bubbles before they get into your form. You should pour to a depth just less than the thickness of the clay to prevent over-pouring and making unattractive edges to clean up later.
7. If bubbles appear on the surface of your cast pieces, you can use a propane or butane torch with a low flame to pop them. Be careful not to concentrate too much heat in one spot, as you’ll just boil the Isomalt again and make more bubbles.
8. Let the Isomalt sit until cool and firm.
9. Peel away the clay, then move the vinyl to the edge of the table so you can flex it away from the cast pieces while keeping the pieces flat (much as some people do to remove runout pieces from wax paper).

Detail and Assemble

1. Place your cast pieces onto a silicone mat. I make sure to wear latex or nitrile gloves whenever I handle them to keep fingerprints off.
2. Using royal icing and a small tip, pipe freehand scrolls and embroidery on your background piece to add visual interest and texture. Here I’ve used a #2 tip to pipe “S” scrolls, dots, and embroidery flowers.
 

3. Heat the blade of a knife with your torch and use it to cut the bottom of your upright piece as well as wedges to use as braces. DO NOT force the knife through the Isomalt or you’ll break your cast piece and have to start again. If it doesn’t go all the way through, pick up the knife, wipe the blade with a damp cloth, reheat it, and continue cutting in the same spot. It will often take at least two heatings to cut through a piece this thick. Note: this is a great way to dull a

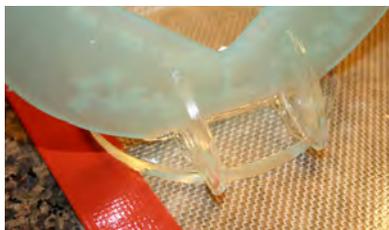


knife blade. I keep an inexpensive knife just for this purpose, and I never try to cut anything else with it. Make sure to wipe the blade after every cut, or the residue collected on the blade will stick to your cast pieces and cause you to break or mar them.

4. Pour a bit of melted Isomalt onto your silicone mat and dip the bottom of the upright piece into it. Working quickly, place the piece onto your base and hold it still for a few seconds until it starts to firm up. Keeping one hand on the upright to prevent it from falling, dip the two flat sides of one brace into the melted Isomalt, and place it behind the upright to help hold it up. Place the second brace similarly.



5. If you want to augment your upright with cut-out pieces, use a small, tapered spatula to dab a bit of melted Isomalt onto the spots of the cutouts where they will need to attach, and working fairly quickly place the cutouts in place. Hold until the Isomalt sets.



6. Add whatever additional elements you wish to complete your topper. In this case, I've wired some simple gum paste flowers into a spray and used a little melted Isomalt to attach the spray to the topper. You could similarly use a small vase of fresh flowers (don't glue this in place, but rather place it on the topper cake as the last part of delivery and setup), pulled sugar flowers, blown sugar animals or other shapes, gum paste figurines, a gum paste basket containing marzipan fruits, or anything your imagination will allow. Even a set of plastic bride-and-groom figurines would feel proud standing in front of your custom archway.

Preparing Isomalt for Casting

If you like you can use pre-cooked Isomalt for casting. It is available from various sources. I prefer to cook my own, and I use the following method:

1. Place Isomalt in a clean, non-reactive pan. I typically prepare a batch using no less than 2 pounds of Isomalt.
2. Add enough distilled water just to moisten the Isomalt (it should look like damp sand) – about 10% by weight.
3. Cover the pan and place over medium-high heat until it comes to a boil. Check to verify all the crystals have dissolved, and bring the heat to high, add a candy thermometer, and place the lid back over the pot as much as possible.

4. Continue to cook until the thermometer registers 340 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove the pan from the heat and immediately place in a sink or bowl of room temperature water to shock the pan and stop the cooking. When the sizzling stops, pour the cooked Isomalt into Pyrex measuring cups.



5. To color the Isomalt, add a few drops of food color (I like airbrush color) and let the heat of the Isomalt evaporate the water in the color for a bit before stirring it in with a small spatula.
6. Place measuring cups into a warm oven to keep the Isomalt ready to work. For casting, I like the Isomalt at just under 250 degrees Fahrenheit. Too much hotter, and you may find that it melts your clay and makes for a lot of edge cleaning. 🗑️