

# Patchwork

I get asked quite often just exactly how to use Patchwork cutters and for what I use them most often. They are great, as the name implies for patch work where you are actually cutting a piece of thinly rolled paste and they are great embossers if you want to press the pattern for a particular motif into a fondant or crusting buttercream covered cake. In this project I used them as actual cutters.

You may recognize this cake from an earlier edition of the newsletter. It is a sampler cake. Because I teach quite a few different classes and only have room for a limited number of dummy cakes, I try to use each one fully. You only see the front third in a photograph which leaves me the majority of the cake on which I can do something else. In this case I repeated the same motif in three different techniques. This one is patchwork. There are also tube embroidery and bas relief. The hankies on the cake serve as both a decorative element as well as camouflage for the other motifs. The ribbon flowers on the top of the cake were the subject of the earlier article in which the entire cake appeared – and all this time you thought I just slaved away all day making cake after cake.

If you have not done much with sugar paste, these cutters are a good place to start. You can buy them in sets that contain related items to make an entire picture – how you choose to combine, color and embellish them is up to you.

A word about gumpaste and fondant, if you have never worked with them before, both mediums dry hard in the air. Fondant generally takes a bit longer to do this than gumpaste. When I am working on a cake that someone is going to cut and eat, I generally do these patterns in fondant directly on the cake. If the motif is going on a plaque that will be removed before the cake is cut then I work in gumpaste.

To keep fondant from sticking you can use some powdered sugar in a puff and dust your surface. If you are using gumpaste you need cornstarch in the puff. I use Crisco for either medium to bring back some of the workability if I have played with it too long and it starts to dry out. Unless you are trying for a specifically

cracked and wrinkled texture, you want to avoid that elephant skin look that over dried sugar paste can get.

Attaching your sugar paste to things – I use water to attach wet medium to wet medium as well as wet medium to dry. I prefer a water pen because I can make the water go only where I want it to so it does not leave shiny spots on my finished work. If you are trying to attach pre-dried sugar paste to something else that is already dry you need to have some wet paste in between the layers. Either spontaneously invent an additional “sandwich element” or thin down a small quantity of paste with water until it makes a thick glue and use that to adhere the two pieces.



When you are using them as cutters you have lots of options. Since all the divisions of these handy cutters are the same depth, they will all make the same depth cuts. You can choose to cut an entire motif from one color of your sugar paste – either fondant or gum paste, or you can cut the whole thing out of several different colors and “patch” them together. In the project shown here I did just that. All the leaves, stems and calyxes are cut from green paste and the flowers are cut from white paste and I colored them from there.

I chose my motif based on one that I saw in an embroidery book by Trish Burr entitled “Crewel and Surface Embroidery – Inspirational Floral Designs”. I like her placement of the flowers and the swag shape of this particular design.

# Cutter Motif

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Draw out your design to the desired shape and size. Make sure it will fit on your cake where you want it to go. If you are working with a round cake remember that pi is your friend. Multiply the diameter of your cake by 3.14 (pi) to get the actual distance around the cake. If you have a 10" cake,  $10 \times 3.14$  is about 31 1/2". This motif, the way I used it, then needs to be about 8" from tip to tip so that I could leave room for the "hankies" that separate the different methods used to produce the same motif.



I used a needle tool to poke through the pattern and leaf lines to help me place the individual pieces onto the side of the cake.

Roll your sugar paste out thinly on a non stick surface. You want the paste to be thick enough that the cutter can do its job (they are made so that you get a slightly rounded over edge on the top rather than just a blunt cut), but not so thickly that the cutter cannot easily reach the cutting surface to give you a nice clean cut.

I chose to work from the center of the pattern out to the edges, so I cut out the large full rose first. Next I cut some leaves. These leaves are supposed to fit right up against the petals of the rose so I decided where I wanted each leaf and how much of each leaf I wanted to be showing, placed them together and used the rose cutter to take pieces of them off so they would fit exactly when I placed them on the cake. Doing this will give the illusion that the leaves are behind the rose when they get dusted so don't panic if it looks too flat right at first.

Continue to work this way, cutting out those things that will appear behind others in the foreground and then

using the cutters of the foreground shapes to remove bits and pieces from them.

I didn't have a cutter for the elongated tear drop shapes that hang down from the swag so those are hand formed. Roll pieces of paste into a ball and then into teardrops; keep pulling and elongating the shape until you are happy with it and glue it in place.



Now that you have assembled the motif on your cake you get to start coloring and shading it. This is one of the most important parts of the project and it can make or break your finished look. Decide from which direction the light will come. By that I mean if these flowers were growing in a garden, where is the sun in the sky when you are drawing them. This bit of information tells you where the highlights and the shadows will fall – without those your arrangement, painting,



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## Patchwork Cutter Motif *(continued from page 9)*

drawing etc. will look unnatural, flat and staged. Most often I choose to have the light hit the piece from the upper right hand side which means that my highlights will go on the upper right hand side of my flowers and leaves and my darkest shadows will be on the left hand side. Once you have chosen this, make sure you adhere to it all the way through your piece even if you have to place a lamp on the table to help you remember.

Light can be a tricky business until you get onto how it functions so take yourself out side. Sit in your garden. Sit in someone else's garden if you haven't one and just watch the light. Take your camera with you and take pictures every 15 minutes or so and then compare how the highlights and shadows change.

I began by using a very small brush and several different shades of green. Each leaf, stem and calyx got roughly the same coloring because they are all the same species of plant. If you are mixing roses, calla lilies and lilacs, those greens may be different combinations for each kind of flower.

I colored the roses next. When you are layering color you want to start with the lightest shade, apply it and then build up from there. You can always add extra color, but it is a pain in the neck to try and subtract it or neutralize it. The roses are fairly small so I only used a couple of shades of pink and then used a gold color for the center. Building the colors helps give the illusion of depth even though your actual pieces are flat.

Remember to add some tiny touches of the flower colors on the leaves. There is always some reflection from flower to leaf in nature and it helps tie the entire piece together.

I chose to stop here with this design; you can continue to embellish to your heart's desire. Some pearls or dragee's could be placed in the center of the large rose, they could be attached to the cake to simulate filler flowers. You could paint some curling vines, add some painted dots. The choices are pretty much endless.

If you have questions feel free to contact me at (503) 985-3133. Please remember I live on the west coast. If the phone rings before 6:00 am I will talk to you, but I don't guarantee any advice I may give. You can also reach me at [frotusbush@gmail.com](mailto:frotusbush@gmail.com) 🍷

