

African Safari Wedding Cake Tutorial

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In 2011, I was asked to create an African safari wedding cake for a couple getting married at the Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa, FL. The venue is amazing because the guests enjoy cocktail hour on a patio adjacent to the giraffes, zebras, and elephants. Then, they move inside to the reception where the windows continue to offer unforgettable views of these animals. Since I created this cake, I have been asked to recreate versions of it for different couples many, many times and cake decorators from all over the world have emailed to ask how I created it. The cake is so unbelievably simple to make that I thought I'd share the process with you in this tutorial. So far, all of my brides have chosen to keep the cake design very simple, but imagine the numerous ways you can embellish and enhance it!

Supply List:

- Buttercream-iced or fondant-covered cake
- Silhouettes of African animals (explained in step 1)
- X-Acto™ knife
- Cutting board
- Icing Images Chocolate Brown Icing Sheets (www.icingimages.com)
- Fondant smoother
- Viva® paper towels
- Shortening
- Small rolling pin
- KitchenAid® mixer with pasta roller attachment, optional
- Fondant ribbon cutter, optional
- Buttercream colors of your choice for flower embellishments
- Dusting pouch filled with powdered sugar
- A small/medium paintbrush
- Small bowl of water



Step 1:

Begin by finding pictures of animal and tree silhouettes that you may see on an African safari. To do this, I did a quick Google search for things like "African safari animal silhouette" or "Serengeti tree." Save the images to your computer and open them in Microsoft Word. Here, you can crop the images to include only the ones you like and resize them to what will be appropriate on your cake. When you are resizing, keep in mind the scale of the animals in relation to each other. In other words, your monkeys can't be taller than your giraffes.



Step 2:

Cut the silhouettes out and then, using an X-Acto™ knife, use the print-out as a guide to cut the shape out of the brown Icing Sheet. The Icing Sheets come with a thick plastic backing. Leave the backing on while you are cutting. Your knife will most likely not go through the plastic sheet, but I like to work on a cutting board just in case.

Unlike some of the other icing sheets available on the market, these do not dry out when exposed to the air. You do not have to feel rushed when working with them. In fact, you can cut the animals out weeks in advance and seal them in a plastic bag until you're ready to decorate the cake.



Step 3:

Gently lift the edible sheet off of the plastic backing. This is generally easy to do, except for very narrow parts of the animal. Sometimes, it is easier to cut & peel away the excess icing sheet before lifting the animal shape.



Step 4:

Cut out all of your animals and set them aside. Here, you can see the variety of animals I use – hippopotamuses, giraffes, lions, monkeys, rhinoceroses, warthogs, elephants, ostriches, etc. If the male and female silhouettes are strikingly different (as in the lion), you may want to include both. It also helps to bring your cake to life if you can use the animals to portray scenes. For example, include elephants of various sizes and have a baby elephant holding his mother's tail in front of him. Or show the monkeys sharing a snack under a tree.



Step 5:

Next, we will apply the cut-out shapes to the cake. If the cake is freshly iced in buttercream, you should be able to pick up the shape and stick it right on the cake – no water or “edible glue” necessary. If the buttercream has crusted or the cake is iced in fondant, you can lightly brush the backs of the shapes with water or a water/corn syrup mix. Just be careful not to go overboard in wetting the backs or the color may run on your cake.

You will also want to leave about ½ – 1 inch space between the bottom of the tier and the animals. We will be adding a fondant ribbon to this space later.

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Step 6:

Once I have the animals in place, I like to go back with a Viva® paper towel and fondant smoother and just smooth over the animals to make sure they are nicely adhered to the cake. You have already smoothed your buttercream so you don't need to apply a lot of pressure here.



Step 9:

Apply this fondant ribbon to the base of each tier. You may need to brush a small amount of water on the back of the ribbon to get it to stick to the cake. Then, I like to go over it one more time with my fondant smoother to eliminate any air bubbles or ridges in the fondant ribbon.

If you notice that you have placed an animal too low or too high, move it. The animals will easily peel back off of a buttercream cake. If the animal is only slightly out of place, just plan to put an embellishment like a flower or greenery there.



Step 7:

Finish applying the animals and trees. Here, I am showing the cake from a few different angles so you can see the shape placement.



Step 10:

On this cake, the bride wanted small flowers and blossoms in a couple of different shades of pink. You don't want the flowers to overpower the animals, but it is a nice way to incorporate some color and life.

Now back away, and take a look at your work. You're done! Now, wasn't that easy?



Step 8:

Now we will add the fondant ribbon around the base of each tier. I like to use my KitchenAid® pasta roller attachment to get a strip of even thickness. But whether you use the pasta roller or roll it by hand, we will need a strip of brown fondant for each tier.

