VANILLAGOODS BAKING ACADEMY · CAKES & CUPCAKES

Course workbook

Cake Baking & Decorating

Cake layers, frosting, piping



Beginner · 5 video lessons · 36 minutes of video · Notes, quizzes and a practice log

By the end you'll be able to

- Bake flat, even cake layers
- Level, fill and stack a cake
- Crumb coat and frost smoothly

Inside

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Lesson videos by The Cooking Foodie, Preppy Kitchen, The Lindsay Ann, CupcakeJemma and Life, Love and Sugar, watched on YouTube from the course page.

This workbook belongs to _____

START HERE

How to use this workbook

This workbook goes with the free video course **Cake Baking & Decorating** on vanillagoods.com. Watch each lesson there, then use these pages to keep what you learned and to track what you have practised.

1

Watch

Open the lesson page and watch the creator's video. Jot quick notes on the lined space as you go.

2

Read and tick

Read the VanillaGoods notes, then tick each key point once you can explain it in your own words.

3

Check and practise

Answer the three questions, compare with the answer key on page 13, then log your bake.

Your lesson plan

	LESSON	VIDEO	WATCHED	QUIZ	PRACTISED
1	**Mixing a vanilla butter cake batter** Video by The Cooking Foodie	6 min	☐	☐	☐
2	**Baking flat, even layers** Video by Preppy Kitchen	10 min	☐	☐	☐
3	**Leveling, filling and stacking** Video by The Lindsay Ann	6 min	☐	☐	☐
4	**The crumb coat** Video by CupcakeJemma	6 min	☐	☐	☐
5	**Smooth buttercream finish** Video by Life, Love and Sugar	8 min	☐	☐	☐

Tools you'll see

9-inch round cake pans · Stand mixer · Parchment paper · Kitchen scale · Oven thermometer · Turntable and decorating kit · Offset spatula · Bench scraper · Cooling rack · Silicone spatula · Piping bags and tips

Any brand works. The lessons show what each tool is for.

Keep track online too

On each lesson page, "Mark complete" saves your progress in your browser, with no account. Finish every lesson and the course page lets you print a free certificate of completion.

Mixing a vanilla butter cake batter

Video by **The Cooking Foodie**: *"Classic Vanilla Cake Recipe | How to Make Birthday Cake"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/classic-vanilla-layer-cake-1-mixing-a-vanilla-butter-cake-batter

Mix a moist vanilla birthday cake batter that bakes up tender, using butter for flavor and oil for moistness, and finish it with vanilla cream cheese frosting.

Key points

- [ ] Room-temperature ingredients emulsify into a smooth batter
- [ ] Alternate dry and wet ingredients and stop mixing once combined
- [ ] Real vanilla is the main flavor, so use the best you can

Before you start

Bring eggs, butter and milk to room temperature, about 65–70°F, and line two cake pans with parchment. Weigh the flour if you can; this recipe uses about 290 g for 2 1/3 cups.

Mixing method

- Cream the butter and sugar until pale, then beat in the oil
- Add eggs one at a time, then the vanilla
- Add the dry ingredients in three parts, alternating with the liquid, starting and ending with dry
- Mix on low only until no streaks of flour remain; overmixing makes a tough, tunneled cake

VanillaGoods tip

Vanilla is the star of a vanilla cake. Use 1–2 tsp pure vanilla extract, or scrape the seeds of one vanilla bean into the butter and sugar for visible specks and a deeper flavor (one bean is roughly equal to 1 tablespoon of extract).

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: 9-inch round cake pans | Stand mixer | Parchment paper | Kitchen scale

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

1 Why should the eggs, butter and milk be at room temperature?

- (A) So the cake bakes faster
- (B) So you can skip creaming
- (C) So they emulsify into a smooth batter

2 In what order do the dry ingredients and the liquid go in?

- (A) In parts, alternating, starting and ending with dry
- (B) All the liquid first, then all the dry
- (C) Everything at once on high speed

3 What happens if you keep mixing after the flour streaks disappear?

- (A) The cake gets lighter
- (B) The cake turns tough with tunnels
- (C) Nothing changes

Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

WHAT I MADE	DATE AND HOW IT WENT
	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

WHAT WENT WELL

WHAT I'D CHANGE NEXT TIME

Baking flat, even layers

Video by **Preppy Kitchen**: *"How to Get Flat Cake Layers"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/classic-vanilla-layer-cake-2-baking-flat-even-layers

Why cake layers dome and brown at the edges, and the simple fixes, including cake strips, that give you flat layers with no trimming.

Key points

- [ ] Edges bake faster than the center, which causes domes
- [ ] Insulating cake strips slow the edges down
- [ ] Weigh batter so every layer bakes the same

Why layers dome

The pan's edges heat first, so the batter there sets while the center keeps rising, forcing a dome and leaving dark, dry sides. Slowing the edges or the whole bake evens it out.

Fixes that work

- Wrap pans with damp cake strips (or a folded wet towel in foil)
- Bake at 325°F instead of 350°F for a gentler rise, adding a few minutes
- Divide batter by weight so every pan holds the same amount
- Spread the batter slightly up the sides and tap the pan to release large bubbles

Watch for

Line the bottoms with parchment rounds and grease the sides so layers release cleanly. Cool 10–15 minutes before turning out.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: 9-inch round cake pans · Kitchen scale · Parchment paper · Oven thermometer

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

1 Why do cake layers dome in the middle?

- (A) Too much vanilla
- (B) The pan was greased
- (C) The edges set first while the center keeps rising

2 What do damp cake strips do?

- (A) Slow the edges down so the layer rises evenly
- (B) Add moisture to the batter
- (C) Keep the pan from sticking

3 The easiest way to make sure every layer bakes the same is to...

- (A) Eyeball the batter
- (B) Divide the batter by weight
- (C) Use one big pan

Practice log

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WHAT WENT WELL

WHAT I'D CHANGE NEXT TIME

Leveling, filling and stacking

Video by **The Lindsay Ann**: *"Cake Decorating 101 (Part 1): How to Level, Tort, Fill & Stack a Layer Cake // Lindsay Ann Bakes"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/classic-vanilla-layer-cake-3-leveling-filling-and-stacking

Level and tort cake layers, fill them without bulging, and stack a straight cake that's ready for frosting.

Key points

- [ ] Chilled layers cut cleanly and crumb less
- [ ] Pipe a buttercream dam to hold soft fillings
- [ ] Put the last layer bottom-side up for a flat top

Leveling and torting

Cool layers completely; chilling them for 30 minutes makes them firmer and easier to cut. Use a long serrated knife or cake leveler and a turntable, turning the cake against the blade rather than sawing through it.

Filling and stacking

- Anchor the first layer to the board with a dab of frosting
- Pipe a ring of stiff buttercream around the edge before adding soft fillings like jam or curd
- Keep each filling layer even, about 1/4–1/2 inch
- Place the top layer upside down so the flat bottom becomes the top

Watch for

If the stack leans, chill it 15 minutes before frosting. A level, cold cake is the foundation of a smooth finish.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Turntable and decorating kit | Offset spatula | Bench scraper | Cooling rack

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

1 Why chill layers for about 30 minutes before leveling?

- (A) They taste better cold
- (B) They cut cleanly and shed fewer crumbs
- (C) The frosting sets faster

2 What is the ring of stiff buttercream piped around a layer's edge for?

- (A) Decoration
- (B) Gluing the cake to the board
- (C) Holding soft fillings like jam or curd in place

3 Which way up does the final layer go?

- (A) Bottom-side up, so the flat bottom becomes the top
- (B) Top-side up, like the others
- (C) It makes no difference

Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

WHAT I MADE	DATE AND HOW IT WENT
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WHAT WENT WELL

WHAT I'D CHANGE NEXT TIME

The crumb coat

Video by **CupcakeJemma**: *"How To Get a Perfect Crumb Coat On Your Cake | How-To & Tutorial | Cupcake Jemma"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/classic-vanilla-layer-cake-4-the-crumb-coat

Apply a thin crumb coat that seals in crumbs and gives you a clean, firm base for a smooth final layer of frosting.

Key points

- [ ] A crumb coat is a thin layer that traps loose crumbs
- [ ] Chill until firm before the final coat
- [ ] Keep crumb-coat frosting separate from your clean frosting

How to do it

- Spoon a small amount of frosting into a separate bowl so crumbs don't get into your main batch
- Spread a thin layer over the top and sides, filling gaps between layers
- Scrape it smooth and thin with a bench scraper; it's fine if cake shows through
- Chill 15–30 minutes until firm to the touch

Why it matters

Loose crumbs drag through frosting and ruin a smooth finish. Sealing them in, and firming the cake, lets the final coat glide on cleanly.

Watch for

Use medium-soft frosting for the crumb coat. Stiff frosting tears the cake surface and pulls up more crumbs.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Turntable and decorating kit · Bench scraper · Offset spatula · Silicone spatula

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

1 What is a crumb coat?

- (A) A thin layer of frosting that traps loose crumbs
- (B) The final, thick layer of frosting
- (C) A dusting of cake crumbs on the sides

2 Why use a separate bowl of frosting for the crumb coat?

- (A) Because it needs more sugar
- (B) So crumbs do not end up in your clean frosting
- (C) To keep it warmer

3 How long should the crumb coat chill before the final coat?

- (A) About 2 minutes
- (B) Overnight only
- (C) 15 to 30 minutes, until firm to the touch

Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

WHAT I MADE	DATE AND HOW IT WENT
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WHAT WENT WELL

WHAT I'D CHANGE NEXT TIME

Smooth buttercream finish

Video by **Life, Love and Sugar**: *"How to frost a smooth cake with buttercream frosting"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/classic-vanilla-layer-cake-5-smooth-buttercream-finish

Get smooth buttercream sides and a clean top using a turntable, a bench scraper and a little patience.

Key points

- [ ] Apply more frosting than you need, then scrape it away
- [ ] Hold the scraper still and turn the cake
- [ ] Pull the top edge inward for a sharp finish

Step by step

- Start with a chilled, crumb-coated cake on a turntable
- Pile on a generous layer of frosting and roughly spread it around the sides
- Hold a bench scraper upright against the side and turn the turntable in one smooth motion
- Fill any gaps with more frosting and scrape again until smooth
- Use an offset spatula to pull the raised top edge in toward the center

Tips for a better finish

- Beat buttercream on low for a minute to knock out air bubbles
- Warm the scraper in hot water and dry it for the final pass
- For crusting American buttercream, smoothing lightly with a paper towel after it sets removes small marks

Watch for

Practice pays off; even professional decorators started with bumpy cakes. Chill between passes if the frosting gets too soft.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Bench scraper · Turntable and decorating kit · Offset spatula · Piping bags and tips

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

1 For smooth sides, how do you use the bench scraper?

- (A) Move the scraper around the cake quickly
- (B) Hold the scraper still and turn the turntable
- (C) Press hard and scrape downward

2 How do you get a sharp top edge?

- (A) Cut the edge off with a knife
- (B) Add more frosting on top
- (C) Pull the raised edge inward toward the center with an offset spatula

3 Why beat buttercream on low for a minute before frosting?

- (A) To knock out air bubbles
- (B) To warm it up
- (C) To add more air

Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

WHAT I MADE	DATE AND HOW IT WENT
	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

WHAT WENT WELL

WHAT I'D CHANGE NEXT TIME

ANSWER KEY

Check your answers

One correct answer per question. If you missed one, the note explains why, and the lesson page has the full notes and the video.

1. Mixing a vanilla butter cake batter

1 **C** Ingredients at about 65 to 70°F blend into a smooth emulsion; cold ones make a lumpy, curdled batter.

2 **A** Adding the dry ingredients in three parts alternating with the liquid, starting and ending with dry, keeps the batter smooth without overmixing.

3 **B** Mix on low only until no flour streaks remain; overmixing develops gluten and gives a tough, tunneled cake.

2. Baking flat, even layers

1 **C** The pan's edges heat first, so the batter there sets while the center is still rising, which forces a dome and dries the sides.

2 **A** Damp cake strips (or a folded wet towel in foil) insulate the pan's edges so they bake at the same pace as the center.

3 **B** Weighing the batter into each pan gives layers of the same thickness that finish baking together.

3. Leveling, filling and stacking

1 **B** Chilled layers are firmer, so a serrated knife or leveler cuts cleanly with fewer crumbs.

2 **C** A buttercream dam keeps soft fillings from bulging out when the next layer goes on.

3 **A** Placing the top layer upside down puts its flat bottom on top, giving a level surface for frosting.

4. The crumb coat

1 **A** The crumb coat is a thin first layer that seals in loose crumbs and firms the cake, so the final coat glides on cleanly.

2 **B** Crumbs come off into the crumb-coat frosting; keeping it separate protects the main batch for the smooth final layer.

3 **C** Chilling 15 to 30 minutes firms the crumb coat so the final frosting spreads without dragging crumbs.

5. Smooth buttercream finish

1 **B** Hold the scraper upright and still against the side while the turntable turns in one smooth motion; the cake moves, not the scraper.

2 **C** After the sides are scraped, the raised lip of frosting is pulled inward toward the center for a clean, sharp edge.

3 **A** A minute on low knocks out the air bubbles that leave holes in a smooth finish.

WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED

Three things to do next

1

Mark each lesson complete

The "Mark complete" button on every lesson page saves your progress in your browser. No account, nothing to sign up for.

2

Print your certificate

Once all 5 lessons are marked complete, the course page prints a free certificate of completion with your name on it. It records what you finished; it is not an accredited qualification.

3

Bake it

Practice with VanillaGoods recipes that use what this course teaches.

vanillagoods.com/pages/recipes?q=vanilla%20cake

NEXT ON THE LEARNING PATH

Cookies & Dessert Basics

Beginner · Mixing, baking, texture techniques

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-course/perfect-cookies

Free guide for this course: "Cake pan and batter guide", How much batter each pan size needs, with bake times and temperatures. Get it from the course page.

Baking with real vanilla? VanillaGoods keeps Madagascar, Uganda and Tahiti vanilla in stock, along with coffee and tea, at vanillagoods.com.

✧ Key points from every lesson

1. Mixing a vanilla butter cake batter

- Room-temperature ingredients emulsify into a smooth batter
- Alternate dry and wet ingredients and stop mixing once combined
- Real vanilla is the main flavor, so use the best you can

2. Baking flat, even layers

- Edges bake faster than the center, which causes domes
- Insulating cake strips slow the edges down
- Weigh batter so every layer bakes the same

3. Leveling, filling and stacking

- Chilled layers cut cleanly and crumb less
- Pipe a buttercream dam to hold soft fillings
- Put the last layer bottom-side up for a flat top

4. The crumb coat

- A crumb coat is a thin layer that traps loose crumbs
- Chill until firm before the final coat
- Keep crumb-coat frosting separate from your clean frosting

5. Smooth buttercream finish

- Apply more frosting than you need, then scrape it away
- Hold the scraper still and turn the cake
- Pull the top edge inward for a sharp finish

The lesson videos are by independent creators (The Cooking Foodie, Preppy Kitchen, The Lindsay Ann, CupcakeJemma and Life, Love and Sugar) and play in YouTube's own player on the lesson pages; this workbook links to them and copies nothing. Notes, key points, questions and this workbook are written by VanillaGoods for home bakers.

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