

# Buttercreams

Buttercream frosting is a staple of the pastry kitchen and a technique well worth mastering. There are several categories of buttercream, and various levels of difficulty, so start with the easier types and work your way up. But once you've made a fresh buttercream, you'll never go back to cans of store-bought frosting.

**American Buttercream:** The simplest of all is the American buttercream, which is just a mixture of confectioners' sugar and butter—although with commercially produced cakes (those you'll find in supermarkets and some bakeries), it's usually made with vegetable shortening. American buttercream is the type of frosting that most home cooks are probably familiar with. I do a slight variation on the idea by using cream cheese in addition to a little butter; see [Cream Cheese Frosting](#).

**French Buttercream:** This frosting takes the idea of a simple buttercream a step further by enriching the basic frosting with egg yolks. And the sugar is added in the form of a hot syrup that cooks the egg yolks and gives the frosting body.

Then there are the meringue-based buttercreams. These produce a very white frosting and are my personal favorites. There are two types, Italian and Swiss.

**Swiss Buttercream:** This is the easier of the two meringue-based buttercreams and I call for it for frosting cakes in this book. It's based on what is called a Swiss meringue, which is made by heating egg whites and sugar gently in a double boiler. This not only melts

the sugar but pasteurizes the whites, making them safe to eat and more shelf stable. This same method is used to make [Marshmallow Creme](#).

**Italian Buttercream:** Any budding pastry chef out there might also want to master the Italian Buttercream. It is the frosting of choice for wedding cakes; it's based on an Italian meringue, which is egg whites beaten with a sugar syrup that is heated to 238°F and requires a candy thermometer.

Once you've mastered the buttercream, it's time to learn how to use a pastry bag. Just a couple of simple techniques and you'll be creating showstopping cakes. See "[Decorating with Icing](#)".