

# Cakes 'R Us... not.

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## **The CRUNCH:**

Cakes 'R Us... not.

## **CRUNCH deets:**

Someone's got an upcoming birthday/anniversary/graduation/Saturday, which means one thing – CAKE! You usually outsource without hesitation, but this time, something's different. That's right, you want to bake The One. Problem is, the last time you tied those apron strings, your cake tasted... meh. And who wants to whisk, mix, bake, and decorate only to serve 'meh' to a crowd?

## **The Fix:**

Ice ice baby.

## **Fix deets:**

We've baked a few cakes in our oven. We've had better luck baking buns. But Saturday was our last baby's first birthday so this time, for this party, it had to be special. We did our homework and came up with a plan: our standard vanilla cupcakes and one chocolate butterfly cake. It's been seven years of Thomas, Mater, Grievous, and the great Marvel/DC debate. And for the last four years, it's been times two. So, yup, a butterfly.

We've picked up these baking tips over the past decade or three:

- Use fresh everything, including baking soda, powder and flour.
- Let butter and eggs warm up to room temp.
- Use dry measuring cups for dry ingredients and wet for wet.
- Spoon the dry stuff into measuring cups and use a knife to level. Don't scoop.
- Prepare the cake pans. Opinions differ about whether to butter and then flour, or butter, then parchment, then butter again. Or just parchment. Or parchment with butter on top but not underneath. Or maybe use silicone bakeware.
- Cream/whisk the butter/eggs for a loooong time.
- Don't overmix when adding dry to wet.

After much Smitten Kitchen browsing, we decided to make the freezer our friend on our quest for the perfect cake. And guys, we will never bake a cake any other way again. Here's how it went down:

- [This](http://smittenkitchen.com/blog/2008/07/project-wedding-cake-the-cake-is-baked/) recipe was selected. Most people say not to try a new recipe when entertaining. Not only did we choose a new recipe, we math'd it down to two layers. We like to live on the edge.
- We forgot to buy baking soda, so used a box that's been open a couple of months. And our flour was probably also celebrating its first birthday.
- We employed the spoon and level technique, used dry/wet measuring cups for dry/wet ingredients, and remembered to take the cold stuff out of the fridge early. Woot! But as soon as we switched the mixer on, a spray of powder jumped out of the bowl. And when we added the wet to the dry, a wave sloshed up over the bowl's edge, taking some powder along for the ride. So much for precision.
- Everything was well-creamed. Not so much intentionally, but because every time we turn the mixer on that's exactly when the phone rings/email buzzes/baby spits up/preschooler needs the toilet. So... probably also guilty of overmixing. Maybe the key to making The One is just doing it alone!
- The pans were buttered, parchmented, and buttered again, because that's what [Deb](http://smittenkitchen.com/about/#Deb) (<http://smittenkitchen.com/about/#Deb>) does.
- The oven was set to 300°F instead of the recipe's suggested 350°F, which meant we had to guesstimate a longer bake-time and stay close with toothpicks ready to insert. This wasn't for taste, but to level out the cakes. It totally worked – no bulgy butterfly wings.
- The two layers were fully cooled, upside-down, on a baking rack and then the parchment was removed. This took about two and a half hours in our warm kitchen.
- Each layer was frozen on a sheet of aluminum foil, unwrapped and touching nothing.
- About an hour later, the layers were individually wrapped in plastic and sealed in freezer bags. This is in lieu of triple-wrapping... who's living on the edge now?
- The following morning, it was time to decorate. Which meant whipping those babies out of the freezer, de-plasticizing, cutting and assembling the butterfly, and going to town with the icing. We'd read about a crumb coat (a thin layer of icing to seal the crumbs in so the icing doesn't look... crummy), and thought about it for maybe a second before deciding more icing never hurt. So we coated, let it set while we cleaned up the bomb that had exploded in the kitchen, and then returned to ice again. And sprinkle. And confetti. And sprinkle some more.

The result was the moistest cake we've ever made, and more fanfare than we've ever received. And while the warm eggs, extra butter, and stale flour might have made some difference, we're pretty sure the freezer deserves all the credit. Thanks new BFF!

#### **Remember this:**

It's super easy to bake a cake. And when you freeze it, it's super delicious and can be done weeks in advance to dial down the party prep stress. If you're disappointed when you try to make something perfect and it doesn't work, don't give up. There's always something else you can try, and with a little research, experimentation, and patience, you'll get there. Victory... almost as sweet as cake.

[Email](http://crunchcompass.com/contact/) us if you'd like to know the easy way to assemble a butterfly or want to shortcut a cake pop!

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