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Simple Vanilla Buttercream

Makes about 4 cups

A simple vanilla buttercream icing is easy to whip up with a stand mixer, and this one tastes so delicious! The nature and consistency of this recipe works well for frosting any cake simply, as well as when making elaborate buttercream flowers. Get creative by mixing various colors or using fancy frosting tips. We dare you to just try not licking your fingers!

Ingredients:

1 lb (4 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
7 cups powdered sugar
2-3 tablespoons heavy cream
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Optional:

Gel food coloring in various colors

Directions:

1. Using a stand mixer, beat the butter for 5 minutes until it turns a pale yellow and has a smooth, silky consistency. Add the vanilla and beat for an additional 30 seconds until well combined.
2. Sift the powdered sugar once to remove any lumps. Add half of the powdered sugar to the creamed butter, and whip for 3-5 minutes until the icing looks nicely whipped. Then add the remaining half of the sugar, and whip for an additional 3-5 minutes, until fully incorporated with a whipped consistency.
3. Add the cream 1 tablespoon at a time, beating until the desired texture is reached. Make a thicker buttercream texture for any complex frosting shapes, and a thinner texture for frosting cakes. Make sure to scrape down the sides of the bowl occasionally with a spatula to ensure all the ingredients are evenly mixed.

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4. Mix different colors of buttercream icing using gel food coloring. (Gel food coloring tends to keep the consistency of the icing versus liquid food coloring. As well, gel food coloring lends deep colors with just a little bit. Assemble the various colors desired using small amounts of the gel coloring in a few tablespoons of white icing -- this is your "base starter color." Mix various tints of the desired colors by using several small bowls. Transfer most of the base color to another bowl reserving only the amount of the base color needed for final decorating. Add white buttercream to the second bowl in a quantity needed to achieve the next lighter color. Transfer most of this second color to a third bowl reserving the amount needed of the second lighter color needed for final decorating. In the third bowl, add enough white buttercream to achieve the next lighter tint. Continue for the number of colors desired. Create a full range of colors with larger amounts of frosting. For buttercream flowers, a range of pinks, oranges, yellows, and peaches would be a good place to start. For green leaves, mix a few different light green hues, and a few darker hues. For subtle colors, add color very slowly. Mix colors according to color theory, i.e., for a darker green, add a little red. For a darker orange, add a tiny bit of blue. For less saturated colors, add a bit of brown. Mix color in slowly -- over-saturated colors happen very quickly.

5. After mixing an array of colors, keep the frosting covered with plastic wrap until you're ready to use.