CLEO COYLE'S RED, WHITE, and BLUE FIREWORKS CAKE

+ 3 Tips on Frosting Any Cake

Text and photos (c) by Alice Alfonsi who writes The Coffeehouse Mysteries as Cleo Coyle with her husband, Marc Cerasini.

The American flag cake is a wonderful July Fourth tradition in the USA, enjoyed at backyard cookouts throughout the land. This Fireworks Cake is my version of it. There is a fun "wow" factor to it, especially after you cut it, yet it's very easy to make. You can use your favorite white cake and frosting recipes, or save time by using a boxed mix and canned frosting. It's a fun project for kids, and decorating supplies like the ones you see in my photo (left) can be purchased at most grocery stores. So let's get started. May you bake with joy!

~ *Cleo Coyle,* author of *The Coffeehouse Mysteries*

For the cake, you will need:

2 eight-inch round cake pans
Parchment paper
Non-stick cooking spray

1 box White Cake Mix
1-1 /4 cups water *(or according to your mix's directions)*
1/3 cup oil *(or according to your mix's directions)*
3 to 4 egg whites *(or according to mix directions, but **do not use whole eggs**, the yellow in the yolk will muddy up the food coloring)*
2 teaspoons liquid food coloring per layer *(red & blue) or ¼ to ½ tsp. of food coloring gel or paste per layer (also called "icing color," this is a denser food coloring, so start with the smaller amount & add more slowly)*
2 (16 ounce) cans of White Frosting *(or about 3 cups of homemade white frosting, be sure to use clear vanilla extract for a pure white frosting look)*

For the final Fireworks cake decorating, see my instructions on Page 4...

Free Recipe Guide to Cleo's new culinary mystery ***No Roast for the Weary***: *click here*.

METHOD:

Step 1 - Prep oven and pans: Pre-heat your oven to 350 degrees F. (or according to your own recipe or cake mix directions). Line two 8-inch round cake pans with parchment paper and lightly spray the paper with non-stick cooking spray. (If your baking pans are non-stick, just spray the paper. If your pans are *not* non-stick, lightly spray the sides of the pans, as well.)

Step 2 - Color your Batter: Make your cake batter according to package directions or your own recipe, with these notes.

(a) Use egg whites only and not whole eggs. Yellow egg yolks will muddy up your cake color. And...

(b) Cake mix directions will tell you to beat the batter for 2 minutes. (You are whipping air into the batter and this is an important step, but you don't want to over-beat, either, so...) Instead, beat the batter for only 1 minute. Then stop the mixer. You should have about 3-1/2 to 4 cups of batter. Divide the batter evenly into two bowls. Add 2 teaspoons of red food coloring to one bowl and 2 teaspoons of blue to the other *(or ¼ to ½ tsp. of the denser icing gel or paste)*. Add more to get the shade you like. NOW beat the batter for your 2nd minute. The color should blend in nicely.

Step 3 - Bake your cake: Simply bake according to package directions or your favorite recipe.

Step 4 - Cool and prep for frosting: Allow the cake to cool completely then run a knife along the outside edge of the pan, place a flat plate over the pan, and flip. The cake should come right out. If the parchment paper is still stuck to the cake bottom, peel it off. Place the blue layer top side down, flat side up, onto your cake plate, cardboard, or serving platter. (A few dabs of icing on the plate first will help make it stick.)

Generously slather white icing onto the blue layer. This will (of course) give you the "white" layer between your red and blue cake layers.

Stack the red layer on top. Here's how: Using a long knife, carefully level off the top of the red layer. Then flip it and place it on the iced blue layer. You want the flat *bottom* of the red layer to serve as the very top of your cake. This will give you a perfectly flat surface to create your fireworks design.

3 TIPS ON FROSTING CAKES

Time to frost the cake. I have 3 tips to share with you on frosting. If you're an old pro at this, these pointers are nothing new. But if you don't make many cakes, these will help you a great deal. (I promise.)

Tip #1: Never Frost a Warm Cake. Be sure your cake is completely cool before frosting. On a warm cake, icing will break down, and you'll get a gloppy mess. Conversely, cold frosting is too firm to spread smoothly. So if you've stored icing in the refrigerator, be sure to warm it to room temperature before using.

Tip #2: Crumb Coat and Chill: You should always frost a cake in two stages. The first stage is called the crumb coating (see photo at right). This is a very thin layer of frosting, so thin that you should be able to see the cake through the icing. This will create a smooth base for the final coating of frosting. NOTE: You must chill the cake to set this coating properly (1 or 2 hours in the refrigerator). To speed up the process, I place mine in the freezer for 15 to 20 minutes. Then remove the cake and do the final frosting. You'll be amazed at how easy it is to get smooth, pro results.

Tip #3: Use an Offset Spatula
(also called an Angled Spatula):

If you've been applying frosting with the back of a big spoon or a butter knife, consider the offset spatula *(pictured right)*.

This single tool will make it possible for you to smooth the sides and tops of your cakes like a pro.

You can find these here or at stores that sell kitchen tools.

DESIGN INSPIRATION

The initial inspiration for this "fireworks" cake design came out of my research for my Coffeehouse Mystery novels. Baristas use this method to create latte art. Of course, pastry chefs also use this basic method (calling it a **spiderweb pattern**).

Begin with a simple dot in the center of the cake.

I'm using the "drawing tips" from my ***Betty Crocker Cupcake Icing cans*** *(red & blue). These cake decorating cans come with several decorating tips. If you don't see these colorful cans in the baking aisle of your grocery store, try Walmart, or find* ***them online here****.*

Next: Draw concentric circles around the dot with alternating colors of red and blue. The last circle should be just off the top of the cake and around the side. This allows you to extend the design down the side of the cake.

Now you will need **a wooden skewer, a toothpick, or the edge of a knife.** (When using the knife, do not cut into the cake. Just drag it lightly through the icing.) Drag the tool from the center dot to the outside of the cake. Clean the tool between each drag. Do this four times, making a simple cross.

Be sure to drag the tool all the way over the top edge of the cake to include the circle you made on the side.

Repeat this process 4 more times, bisecting each quarter of the cross you made. (You will now see 8 "slices" of cake in the design.)

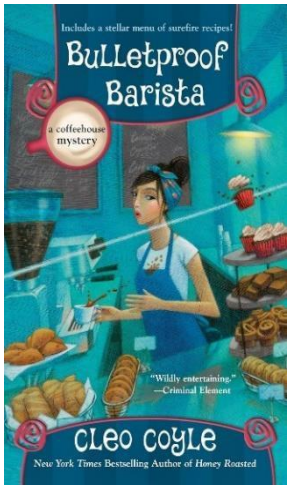
Using the reverse drag, you are now bisecting each of the original 8 cake "slices" that you made above.

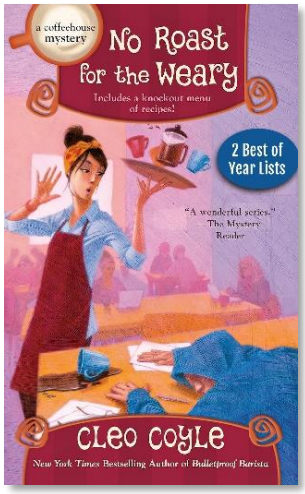
Now REVERSE the dragging direction. Instead of dragging the tool from the center to the outside of the cake, start at the outside and drag your tool toward the center. Be sure to clean your tool between each drag.

Your cake top is finished! Clean up the edges of your cake plate or stand by wiping off the excess frosting.

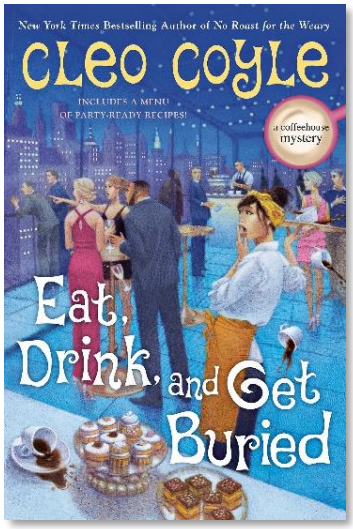
To decorate the base of the cake, use the **"star tips"** (also included with your **"Betty Crocker Cupcake Icing"** cans for decorating cakes). To create little bursts of red and blue icing around the bottom of the cake, alternate the colors, as shown. Then cut the cake, using your icing design as a guide. Plate each serving, and…

Eat with July 4th joy! ~ Cleo





The Coffeehouse Mysteries are bestselling culinary mysteries, set in a landmark Greenwich Village coffeehouse. Each includes the added bonus of recipes. To learn more and see more recipes, visit Cleo Coyle's online coffeehouse at www.CoffeehouseMystery.com And her recipe blog at www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com



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