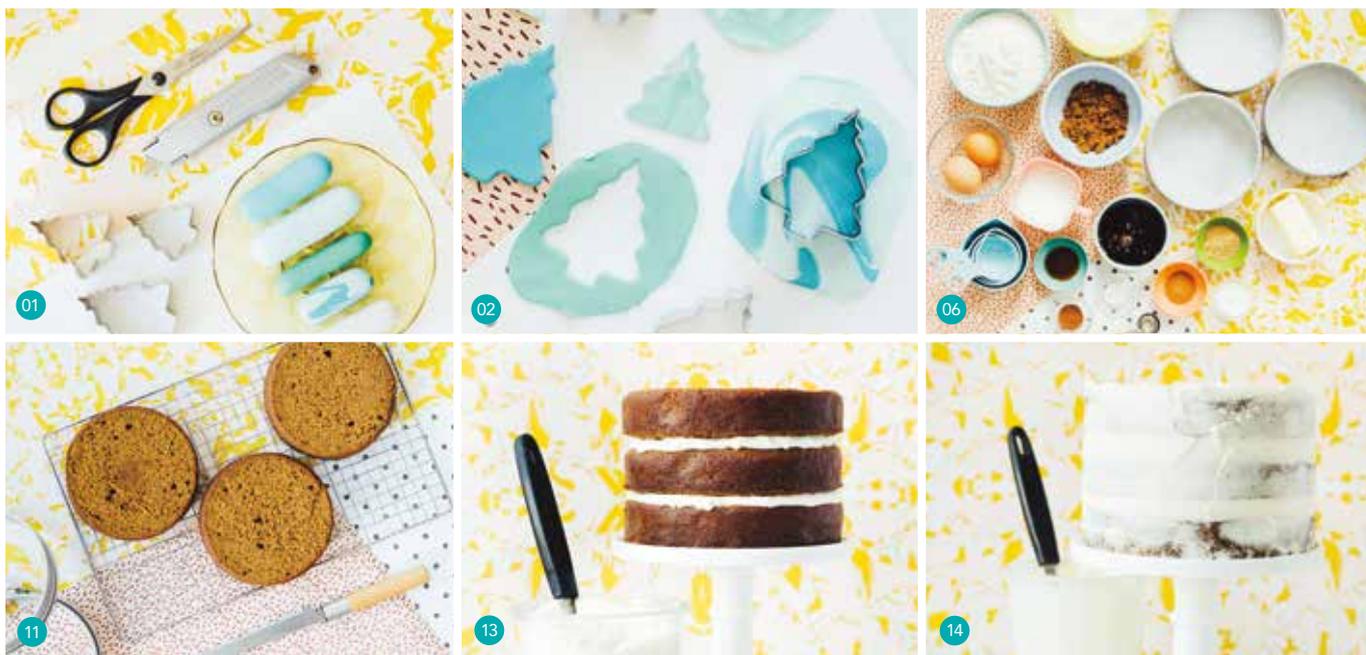


ALL THINGS NICE



Earn your Star Baker badge with Laura Mitchell's
Christmas gingerbread cake and tree toppers





HOW TO MAKE A GINGERBREAD CAKE AND TOPPERS

MATERIALS

- Polymer clay in mint, turquoise, green, white and gold (we used Fimo)
- Christmas tree-shaped biscuit cutters in various sizes
- Craft knife
- Rolling pin
- Wooden skewers
- Baking tray
- Baking paper
- Craft glue

- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 125ml (4 fl oz) buttermilk
- 2 large eggs
- **For the frosting**
- 225g (8oz) unsalted butter
- 170g (6oz) full fat cream cheese
- 500g (17½oz) icing sugar
- 1 tbsp lemon zest
- Juice of half a lemon
- 30g (1oz) desiccated coconut

INGREDIENTS

For the cake

- 190g (6½oz) plain flour
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- 115g (4½oz) unsalted butter
- 100g (4oz) granulated sugar
- 75g (2½oz) dark brown sugar
- 125ml (4 fl oz) treacle

EQUIPMENT

- Three 15cm (6") cake tins
- Baking paper
- Bowl
- Serrated knife
- Palette knife

Even after tucking into Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, there's always room for cake.

Especially if that cake is a light, spiced gingerbread sponge, slathered with fresh cream cheese frosting and topped with coconut.

Decorated with a forest of evergreen (and everlasting) tree toppers, this show-stopping alternative to a traditional heavy fruit cake is sure to impress, plus it won't you take days to create.

Making the cake toppers

- 01 Break off a piece of green clay, and **twist it together** with the white clay to marble them.
- 02 Roll out the five different shades of clay to roughly 0.25cm (¼") thick. Use the cutters to cut five tree shapes in a **variety of sizes** and colours. Create a diagonal dotted pattern across two trees with the point of a skewer, as shown.
- 03 Preheat the oven to 110°C/230°F/Gas Mark ¼ and line a baking tray with baking paper. **Place the shapes** onto the lined



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tray and bake for 30 minutes, then leave to cool.

04 Glue a skewer onto the back of each tree, then leave to dry.

Making the gingerbread cake

05 Preheat the oven to 175°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4. Grease the tins, then line with baking paper.

06 Whisk the flour, baking powder, salt and spices together in a bowl, then put to one side.

07 Using an electric whisk, beat the butter until it's smooth. Add the sugar and beat together until the mixture is pale and fluffy.

08 Add the eggs to the mixture, one at a time, fully incorporating each one before adding the next. Add the treacle and vanilla and continue mixing until incorporated.

09 Alternate adding the dry ingredients and buttermilk, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients, and fully incorporating each ingredient before adding the next. Take care not to overmix.

10 Spread the batter evenly into the three tins and smooth the tops

with a spatula. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean.

11 Place the cakes on a wire rack to cool for 10 minutes, then turn out of the tins and cool completely.

12 To make the frosting, beat the butter and cream cheese until fluffy. Add the icing sugar a little at a time. Add the lemon zest and juice, then continue beating the mixture until fluffy again.

13 To assemble, use a serrated knife to trim each cake into even layers. Place one layer on a cake stand and top with a generous amount of icing, using a palette knife to spread it evenly. Repeat with the remaining two layers. Place the cake in the fridge for 30 minutes to chill.

14 Use the palette knife to apply a generous coating of icing over the cake. Once completely covered, use the palette knife to remove some of the icing, allowing the cake to show through. If the cake looks uneven or patchy, apply more icing to that area and scrape

around the cake again, making sure all the edges are straight.

15 Scatter desiccated coconut across the top of the cake. Using the image above as a guide, arrange the clay trees on top of the cake in a tiered pattern.

MEET THE MAKER LAURA MITCHELL



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