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Baking School In-Depth: Petit Fours



During the 19th century in France, bakers discovered they could utilize the residual warmth of their stone ovens after extinguishing the initial intense heat. This blazing hot setting used to bake crusty loaves of bread was called *grand four* or “big oven.” The latent heat was enough to cook tiny, individual pastries as the oven cooled. This cooldown setting gave rise to the name *petit four* or “small oven,” *et voilà*, the creation of petit fours! The small pastries eventually assumed the name of the oven setting they were baked in, and they have since been elevated into various small, exquisite pastries, now treasured worldwide. The adorable cakes we consider petit fours are just one type, called petit fours *glacé*.

Our Petit Fours are comprised of buttercream with or without fruit preserves between two cake layers. Another thin layer of buttercream is applied on top before freezing. Poured fondant elegantly drapes over the cake and then it's time to decorate these charming, delicious, bite-size Petit Fours to your heart's desire. Follow along as we guide you through our straightforward process of making these elegant French Petit Fours that will have you exclaiming *magnifique* instead of *très tragique*.

THE COMPONENTS

CAKE: The cake is the foundation of a petit four and must have certain qualities. It should be very moist and relatively dense. Its density will help ensure that the cake slices cleanly and will be able to hold together when assembling the layers.

FILLING: We kept the filling flavors classic with Almond Buttercream and Bonne Maman® Strawberry Preserves, but you can use a variety of spreadable fillings, like lemon curd, chocolate buttercream, orange marmalade, or even hazelnut-chocolate spread!

CRUMB COAT: The second layer of Almond Buttercream is a practical application that will make your Petit Fours look flawless. This thin layer of frosting acts as a crumb coat, locking in any loose crumbs from the cake, and will help keep the surface perfectly smooth so the poured fondant glaze stays nice and smooth as well. The buttercream will also firm up as it chills, making it even easier to slice the Petit Fours into nice and neat little squares.

GLAZE: Not to be confused with the rolled sheets of sugar dough that blanket wedding cakes, Petit Fours are enveloped in an elegant glaze called poured fondant. It's simply a blend of confectioners' sugar, corn syrup, water, flavorings, and white chocolate heated over a double boiler until smooth and pourable. The beauty of poured fondant is that it gives you an all-over coating that sets into a shell as it cools and keeps the Petit Fours moist for days, making them an ideal make-ahead dessert.



INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

Excellent recipes require wonderful ingredients. Here's how our recipes' ingredients contribute to making exquisite Petit Fours.

UNSALTED BUTTER: Because butter is vital to the texture and richness of the cake and the Almond Buttercream, choosing a European-style butter with a higher fat ratio than generic grocery store butter will yield the best results. Salt content can vary across different butter brands, so we use unsalted butter to control the exact amount of salt in the recipe.

GRANULATED SUGAR: The most common form of sugar, highly refined white sugar is made from sugarcane or sugar beets. The removal of molasses and impurities leaves the sugar white. Sugar adds sweetness, and its hygroscopic nature also ensures a moist crumb. Colorless and neutral in flavor, granulated sugar allows the flavors of other ingredients to shine.

EGGS: Eggs bring richness through their yolks and structure through their whites, but they also help leaven baked goods. This recipe uses four large eggs for the cake batter's leavening, flavor, richness, and structure.

ALMOND AND VANILLA EXTRACTS: Almond and vanilla extracts are magical ingredients that add instant depth of flavor and complexity to the cake, buttercream, and fondant.

ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR: All-purpose flour has a protein content of 10% to 12%, creating Petit Fours that are tender yet have enough gluten structure to hold their shape.

BAKING POWDER: Most baking powders are double-acting, meaning the reaction occurs twice, using two different acids. The first is a quick reaction when baking powder is combined with a liquid in the batter. The second reaction is slower, occurring when the cake bakes.

KOSHER SALT: Kosher salt has a pure, clean flavor because it doesn't contain iodine or minerals. It is flaked rather than granulated, allowing for more even distribution when whipped into the cake batter and Almond Buttercream.

WHITE CHOCOLATE CHIPS: White chocolate is buttery, creamy, and deliciously sweet. While white chocolate is made from cocoa butter, it doesn't include cocoa solids like all other chocolates. To make white chocolate, cocoa butter is mixed with milk powder or cream powder, sugar, and a hint of vanilla. The outcome is an ivory-colored, silky-smooth, and delicately flavored confection that showcases flavors like strawberry and almond beautifully and is the perfect addition to our luscious White Chocolate Poured Fondant.

CONFECTIONERS' SUGAR: Also known as powdered sugar, confectioners' sugar contains 3% cornstarch to help prevent clumping (or caking). Essentially granulated sugar that has been ground into a fine powder, it comes in varying degrees of fineness (6X, 10X, 12X). The most common is 10X, which is perfect for our Almond Buttercream and White Chocolate Poured Fondant.

BONNE MAMAN® STRAWBERRY PRESERVES: Made with perfect fruits and simple ingredients, the rich sweetness in Bonne Maman® Strawberry Preserves enhances the almond, vanilla, and white chocolate.



TOOL TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Here are a few standout tools to help you make the perfect petit fours

SCALE: Bakers have long valued the accuracy of a kitchen scale; it's the easiest and fastest route to precise ingredient measurements for the perfect Petit Fours. (Pictured: [Zwilling Enfinigy Digital Kitchen Scale](#).)

INSTANT-READ THERMOMETER: An instant-read thermometer eliminates guesswork when making the poured fondant. As soon as the thermometer reads anywhere from 105°F (41°C) to 110°F (43°C), the glaze is ready for pouring! (Pictured: [Thermopen® One](#).)

GLASS MEASURING CUP: Using a sturdy glass measuring cup with a handle makes pouring the glaze onto the Petit Fours effortless. (Pictured: [Anchor Hocking Glass Measuring Cup, 2-Cup](#).)

RIMMED BAKING SHEET: Designed to bake evenly, this beautiful, golden commercial-quality pan is crafted of aluminized steel for exceptional durability, making the pan ideal for baking the cake and makes the clean up after glazing the Petit Fours a breeze. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Goldtouch® Pro Nonstick Non Corrugated Half Sheet](#).)

OFFSET SPATULA: The slender, angled blade of an offset spatula gives you optimal control, helping you achieve a smooth top when making the cake, spreading the buttercream or preserves, and evenly coating the top of the cake with the buttercream. It's also the perfect tool for transferring the delicate Petit Fours from the wire rack to a serving platter. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Olivewood Offset Icing Spatula](#).)

SERRATED KNIFE: The small sawing motions from a serrated knife will help you cut your Petit Fours into neat squares and keep the filling from spilling out between the cake layers. (Pictured: [Zwilling Pro Bread Knife with Z15 Serration, 9"](#).)

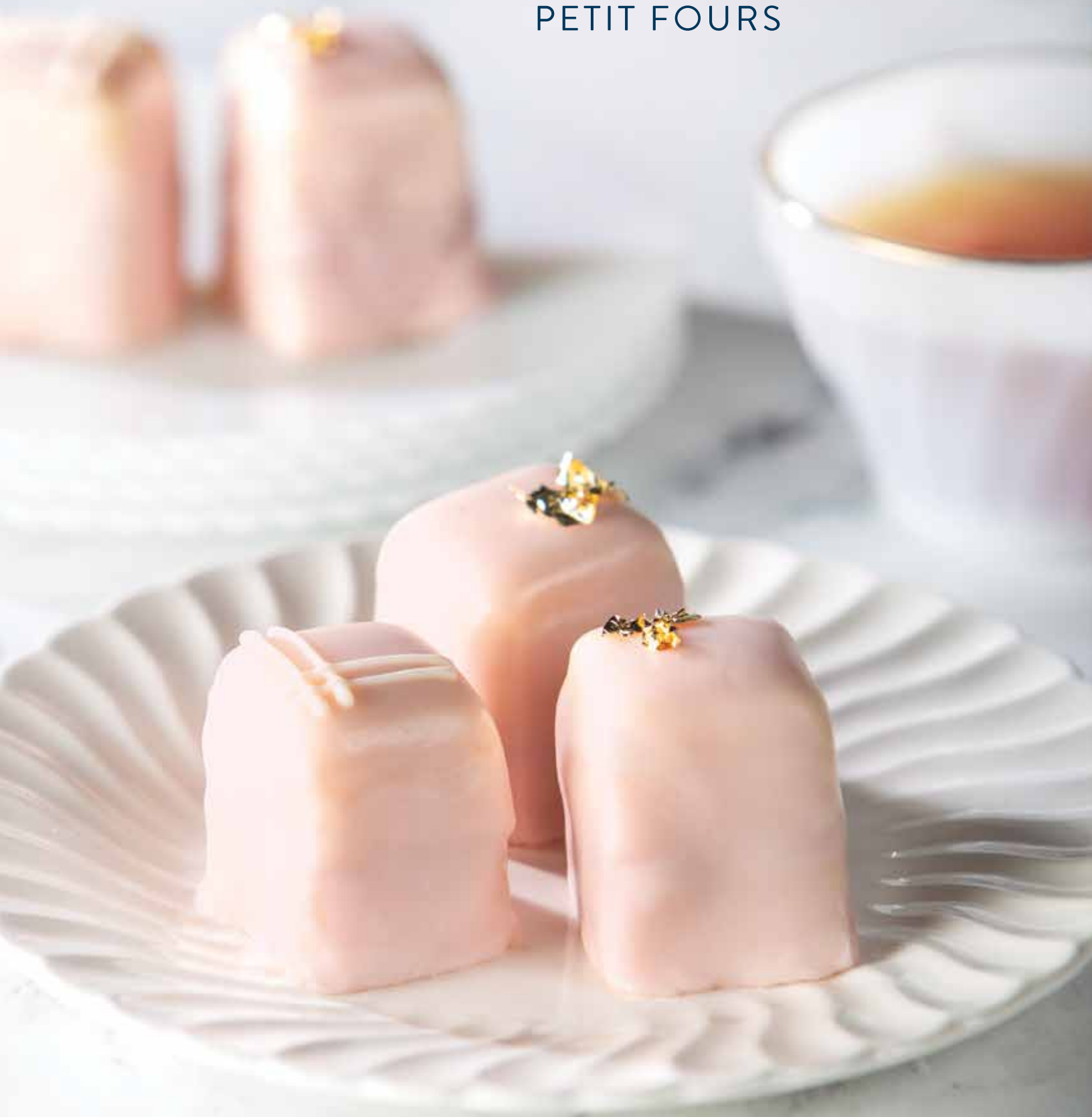
CHEF'S KNIFE: A chef's knife, with its remarkably sharp edge, makes quick work out of precisely cutting the Petit Fours into their adorable bite-size shapes. (Pictured: [Zwilling Pro Chef's Knife](#).)



SAUCEPAN AND MIXING BOWL: To keep the poured fondant at an ideal consistency, we make a double boiler by placing a mixing bowl over a small saucepan with 1 inch of water warmed over very low heat. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Signature Thermo-Clad™ Stainless-Steel Saucepan 2-Qt.](#) and [Open Kitchen by Williams Sonoma Stainless Steel Mixing Bowls, Set of 3](#).)

SPATULAS, STRAINER, AND WHISK: For all your mixing needs, you really can't beat the basics. A reliable whisk is essential to have in your baking arsenal; spatulas are the ideal tool for simple stirring and folding; a small sieve is perfect for straining the strawberry preserves. (Pictured: [Williams Sonoma Ultimate Silicone Spatulas with Stainless-Steel Handle, Set of 4](#), [Williams Sonoma Silicone Mini Spatula & Spoonula with Stainless-Steel Handle](#), and [Williams Sonoma Olivewood Whisk](#).)

PETIT FOURS



PETIT FOURS

Makes 48 cakes

Bring the enchantment of a French pâtisserie straight to your kitchen with these dainty and delicious bite-size cakes.

- 1 cup (227 grams) unsalted butter, softened
 - 1¾ cups (350 grams) granulated sugar
 - 4 large eggs (200 grams), room temperature
 - ¾ teaspoon (3 grams) almond extract
 - ½ teaspoon (2 grams) vanilla extract
 - 3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour
 - ½ teaspoon (2.5 grams) baking powder
 - ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
 - ¾ cup (180 grams) whole milk, room temperature
 - 3 tablespoons (45 grams) sour cream, room temperature
- Almond Buttercream (recipe follows)
White Chocolate Poured Fondant (recipe follows)
Garnish: edible gold leaf, melted white chocolate

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). Spray a 17½x12½-inch rimmed baking sheet with baking spray with flour. Line pan with parchment paper.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar at medium speed until fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in extracts.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, whisk together milk and sour cream. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with milk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating just until combined after each addition. Spread batter into prepared pan.
4. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 27 to 30 minutes. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto a wire rack, and discard parchment. Let cool completely.
5. Using a long serrated knife, trim cooled cake on all sides to create a 15x10-inch rectangle. Cut cake in half to create 2 (10x7½-inch) layers.

6. Spread half of Almond Buttercream (about ¾ cup or about 170 grams) on top of 1 cake layer. Top with remaining cake layer, lightly pressing to adhere. Spread remaining buttercream on second layer, smoothing as much as possible. Freeze for 1 hour. (Alternatively, tightly wrap assembled cake in plastic wrap, and freeze for up to 2 months. Unwrap cake, and let it thaw in the refrigerator overnight before proceeding.)

7. Using a long sharp knife, cut cake into 48 (1¼-inch) squares, and return to freezer.

8. Line a rimmed baking sheet with plastic wrap; place a wire rack on top. Place no more than 12 petit fours at least 1 inch apart on prepared rack. Carefully pour White Chocolate Poured Fondant onto petit fours, making sure all sides are completely covered, reheating and re-pouring fondant as necessary. (See Note.) Let stand until set, 10 to 15 minutes. Remove wire rack, spoon used fondant into liquid-measuring cup, and reheat as needed in the top of a double boiler or microwave to maintain a temperature range of 105°F (41°C) to 110°F (43°C).

9. Using a small offset spatula, move glazed petit fours to a serving platter. Repeat procedure with remaining petit fours and remaining White Chocolate Poured Fondant, only removing cakes from freezer when ready to pour. Garnish with gold leaf or melted white chocolate, if desired. Store in an airtight container for up to 2 days, or refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

Note: *The glaze will seem far too thick to pour. If it is too warm, the glaze will simply slide off the cake and leave you with lumpy or translucent sides. It is OK if you pour more than is needed to achieve full coverage; the excess will drip off.*

ALMOND BUTTERCREAM

Makes about 1½ cups

- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 1¾ cups (210 grams) confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons (30 grams) heavy whipping cream
- ½ teaspoon (2 grams) almond extract
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter at medium speed until creamy, 2 to 3 minutes. Gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until combined. Add cream, almond extract, and salt, beating until smooth, fluffy, and lightened in color and stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl and paddle.

WHITE CHOCOLATE POURED FONDANT

Makes about 6 cups

10 cups (1,200 grams) confectioners' sugar
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (226 grams) light corn syrup
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (160 grams) water
2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups (397 grams) white chocolate chips

1. In the top of a double boiler, combine confectioners' sugar, corn syrup, $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (160 grams) water, and vanilla. Cook over simmering water, whisking constantly, until smooth. Add white chocolate chips; cook, stirring frequently, until chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth. Reduce heat to low.

2. Spoon 2 cups (661 grams) fondant into a liquid-measuring cup. Let cool until an instant-read thermometer registers 105°F (41°C) to 110°F (43°C); use immediately.

STRAWBERRY PETIT FOURS

Makes 48 cakes

Petit Fours batter (recipe precedes)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (160 grams) Bonne Maman® Strawberry Preserves

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup (170 grams) Almond Buttercream (recipe precedes)

Poured Strawberry Fondant (recipe follows)

1. Proceed with Petit Fours recipe through step 5.

2. Spread preserves onto 1 cooled cake layer. Top with remaining cake layer, lightly pressing to adhere. Spread Almond Buttercream on top in a smooth layer. Freeze for 1 hour. (Alternatively, tightly wrap assembled cake in plastic wrap, and freeze for up to 2 months. Unwrap cake, and let it thaw in the refrigerator overnight before proceeding.)

3. Continue Petit Fours recipe at step 7, using Poured Strawberry Fondant.

POURED STRAWBERRY FONDANT

Makes about 6 cups

10 cups (1,200 grams) confectioners' sugar
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (226 grams) light corn syrup
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (120 grams) water
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (80 grams) Bonne Maman® Strawberry Preserves, strained
2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups (397 grams) white chocolate chips
Pink liquid food coloring*

1. In the top of a double boiler, combine confectioners' sugar, corn syrup, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (120 grams) water, preserves, and vanilla. Cook over simmering water, whisking constantly, until smooth.

2. Spoon 2 cups (661 grams) fondant into a liquid-measuring cup. Let cool until an instant-read thermometer registers 105°F (41°C) to 110°F (43°C); use immediately.

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*We used Wilton Color Right Performance Food Coloring.



THE CAKE COMPONENT



1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). Spray a 17½x12½-inch rimmed baking sheet with baking spray with flour. Line pan with parchment paper. Lining pans with parchment and coating them with baking spray with flour ensures that our cake releases cleanly from the pan after baking.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar at medium speed until fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in extracts.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, whisk together milk and sour cream. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with milk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating just until combined after each addition. Spread batter into prepared pan. Whisking dry ingredients together removes any lumps. This also ensures that the flour mixture is well blended and helps the final batter to be smooth.
4. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 27 to 30 minutes. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto a wire rack, and discard parchment paper. Let cool completely. Letting your cake cool before frosting is essential; otherwise, your buttercream will melt when applied.

BRINGING TOGETHER THE BUTTERCREAM



1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter at medium speed until creamy, 2 to 3 minutes. Gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until combined. Add cream, almond extract, and salt, beating until smooth, fluffy, and lightened in color and stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl and paddle.

ASSEMBLING THE PETIT FOURS

1. Using a long serrated knife, trim cooled cake on all sides to create a 15x10-inch rectangle. Cut cake in half to create 2 (10x7½-inch) layers.
2. Spread half of Almond Buttercream (¾ cup or 170 grams) on top of 1 cake layer. Top with remaining cake layer, lightly pressing to adhere. Spread remaining buttercream on second layer, smoothing as much as possible. Freeze for 1 hour. Spread ½ cup (160 grams) Bonne Maman® Strawberry Preserves on top of the first cake layer for a lovely, fruity strawberry version of these perfect Petit Fours.
3. Using a long sharp knife, cut cake into 48 (1¼-inch) squares, and return to freezer.

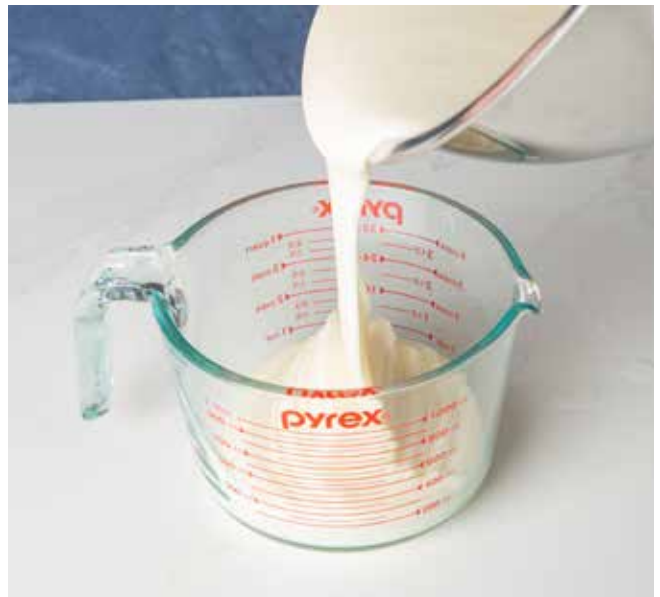


DON'T FORGET TO FREEZE

The freezer is your best friend when making Petit Fours, as these are easiest to slice and glaze after being chilled. Don't be tempted to skip this step or cut the freezing time in any way. If you do, the layers may slide around when slicing and the Almond Buttercream coating will melt when you glaze it with the warm poured fondant. If they sit in the freezer for too long and you notice some condensation that forms on the surface, don't fret. Simply blot the surface dry with a paper towel before glazing.

MAKING THE POURED FONDANT

1. In the top of a double boiler, combine confectioners' sugar, corn syrup, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (160 grams) water, and vanilla. Cook over simmering water, whisking constantly, until smooth. Add white chocolate chips; cook, stirring frequently, until chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth. Reduce heat to low.
2. Spoon 2 cups (661 grams) fondant into a liquid-measuring cup. Let cool until an instant-read thermometer registers 105°F (41°C) to 110°F (43°C); use immediately.



TIME TO GLAZE AND DECORATE



1. Line a rimmed baking sheet with plastic wrap; place a wire rack on top. Place no more than 12 petit fours at least 1 inch apart on prepared rack. Carefully pour White Chocolate Poured Fondant onto petit fours, making sure all sides are completely covered, reheating and re-pouring fondant as necessary. (See Note.) Let stand until set, 10 to 15 minutes. Remove wire rack, spoon used fondant into liquid-measuring cup, and reheat as needed in the top of a double boiler or microwave to maintain a temperature range of 105°F (41°C) to 110°F (43°C).

2. Using a small offset spatula, move glazed petit fours to a serving platter. Repeat procedure with remaining petit fours and remaining White Chocolate Poured Fondant, only removing cakes from freezer when ready to pour. Garnish with gold leaf or melted white chocolate, if desired. Store in an airtight container for up to 2 days, or refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

MASTER POURED FONDANT

Poured fondant may sound intimidating, but it is a majestic, forgiving glaze. It gives Petit Fours a slightly lustrous appearance, yet they're dry to the touch and can be easily handled once set. The glaze beautifully gives way when bitten into, revealing the layers of cake and gorgeous filling. Follow a few simple rules, and you will be golden.

1. Keep the glaze warm in a double boiler over low heat. The steam from the water underneath the bowl will heat the glaze just enough to keep it at that perfectly smooth and pourable consistency. Poured fondant hardens as it cools, but you don't want the glaze to set in the bowl before having time to coat each cake. To take the guesswork out of it and keep your eye on the temperature of the glaze using your trusty thermometer.
2. Pour a generous amount of glaze onto each Petit Four. The viscosity of the glaze pulls it down the sides of the Petit Fours, creating an even coating. Don't worry about the excess glaze pooling at the bottom of the rimmed baking sheet under the wire rack; gently lift the plastic wrap and scrape the glaze back into the bowl, reheat, and reuse it!
3. If you notice your layer of glaze is uneven, don't be tempted to add more glaze. Pouring a second layer of glaze will only make it look more lopsided.
4. After glazing the Petit Fours, let them stand for 10 to 15 minutes to fully set before transferring them from the wire rack to a serving platter. Moving the Petit Fours too early will result in the glaze sliding around.
5. If you notice any stubborn bubbles forming in the glaze, simply use a wooden pick to pop it before the glaze has a chance to set fully.

