

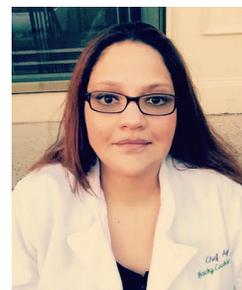
Rustic Floral Cookie Crate

By Aymee D. VanDyke aka Cookiepreneur

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Rustic Wedding Floral Cookie Crate



Aymee Vandyke aka Cookiepreneur is a Sugar Artist, Entrepreneur and Writer. She founded The Wacky Cookie Company® (www.WackyCookies.com) in 2009 and Cookiepreneur® a blog which focuses on helping women entrepreneurs.

I admit it, I have a long standing obsession with flowers. Buttercream floral cakes are all the rage this summer. So, I thought what a great opportunity to create a beautiful 3-D centerpiece, something that brings the same kind of beauty, depth and dimension to a guest's table that a cake does. I was inspired by repurposed wooden crates filled with a variety of flowers. I hope you will find that these cookie centerpieces are the talk of the wedding as they bring an earthy, rustic and slightly whimsical beauty to each guest table. What makes them extra special is that they taste just as yummy as they look.

Construction, Covering & Painting of Crate:

Here you will cut out your template, test it for accuracy, make your cookie dough, cut out and bake cookies, construct crate, cover crate, score and paint.

Cookie Recipe:

- 3 cups sifted all-purpose bleached flour
 - 1/4 cup added flour to dust your surface when rolling out your cookie dough
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 1 Large egg
 - 8oz Butter (unsalted)
 - 1 teaspoon Vanilla Extract
 - 1 Vanilla Bean*
(Split open and harvest caviar from inside)
 - 1/2 teaspoon lemon or lime extract
- *Optional but adds a beautiful boost of vanilla flavor to your cookie

Equipment:

- Electric stand mixer or hand mixer
- Icing Piping bags
- Piping tips (Wilton #1, #2, #352, #224)
- Small, heavy stainless steel pot
- Pyrex glass bowl
- 1 gallon Ziploc bags
- Cookie baking sheets
- Parchment paper
- Parchment cones
- 15- 8 oz. transparent plastic cups (disposable)
- Saran wrap
- Rolling pin
- Sharp knife or blade to score fondant and Cookie dough (X-acto knife works great)
- Paint brushes, hard flat, mini-angular, mini round and Fan Wisp brush if desired.

Pre-Cookie Baking Prep:

Cut out your custom cardstock pieces by measuring the base of your rectangle. Turn your rectangular cutter on its side and measure it from top to bottom, this way you will be able to map out a three dimensional crate and draw it out with a ruler, on a piece of cardstock.



You can use edible color markers, as I did, in case the cardstock with ink comes in contact with your dough when you are cutting out your shapes before you bake.

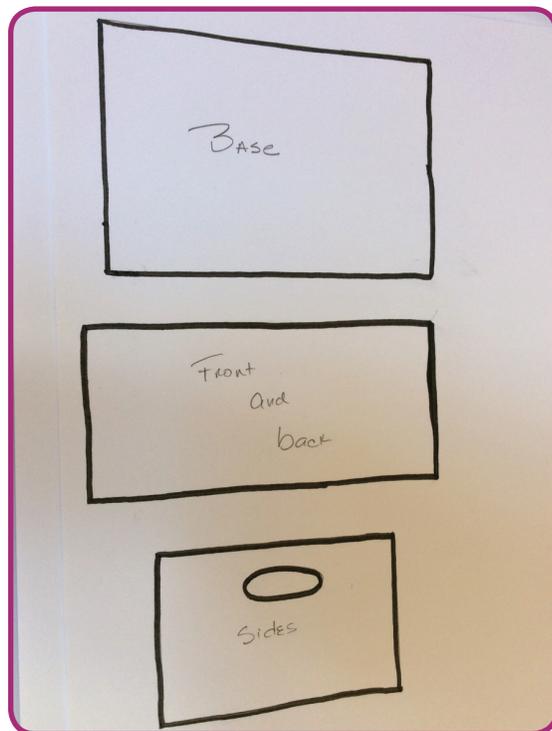
In order to make sure your cardstock templates are the correct dimensions, stick them together with tape as seen in (You can cut later with a scissor in order to cut out your cookies). This will ensure that your crate pieces come together and you will have the proper dimensions.

Remember, it is preferable to cut a little larger than smaller, but try to be as precise as possible. Cookie dough always spreads in the oven so you may have to bevel your cookies with the X-acto knife before you construct your crate.

Keep in mind that this crate will be covered in fondant later on so it must fit together as neatly as possible in order to avoid bulges.

Cookie Preparation:

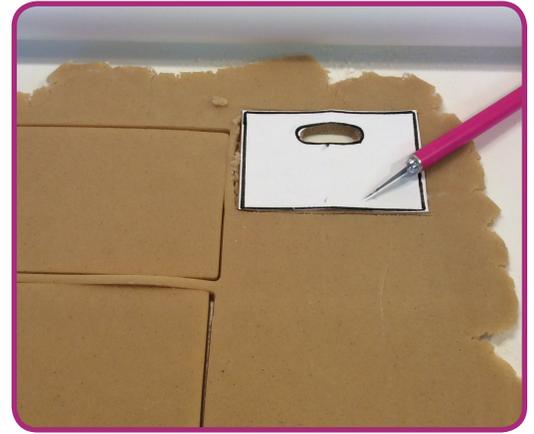
1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a mixing bowl, add butter, sugar, eggs, vanilla extract, vanilla caviar and lemon/lime extract. Beat at medium speed for about a minute or until well blended and creamy. Take care not to overbeat your butter.
3. Add baking powder to flour.
4. Add flour gradually in 2 parts. (Be sure to switch to a dough hook or heavy paddle attachment after creaming butter and before adding flour as cookie dough will become dense).



Rolling Out, Cutting & Baking Cookies:

This dough does not require refrigeration and will not spread as long as your butter is room temperature or colder.

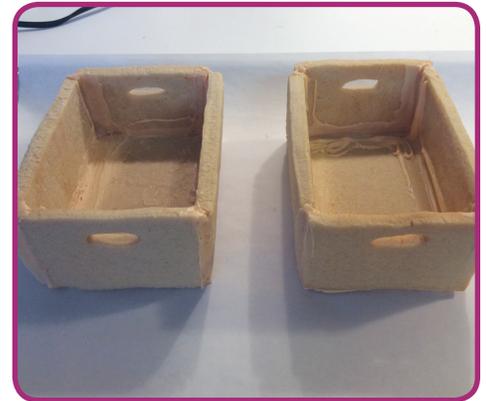
1. Flour surface and roll out dough to 1/4 inch thick.
2. Use a 4 - 5 inch rectangular cookie cutter to cut your base cookie shape for the crate. Take your custom cut cardstock paper molds and cut out two long pieces as shown for front and back. Cut out the two ends of the crate and be sure to cut the handles in them. Make a couple of extra of each cookie just in case a cookie breaks while trying to put the box together.
3. Bake cookies for 15-18 minutes or until golden brown.
4. Remove from oven and place on cooling rack until completely cooled and completely stiff.



Constructing The Crate:

Note: If you are using candy melts in order to glue the crate together, add about 1 cup of white Wilton candy melts in a small glass Pyrex bowl. Heat in 30 second increments until fully melted and insert in a disposable piping bag. Cut a small hole in the tip of the piping bag and use that as your medium to cement the cookie together. This should work well in a cool environment. If in a warmer climate, I would recommend you use stiff royal icing to cement your crate together.

1. Glue the base of the crate to one of the ends. Be sure to loosely construct the crate, first by fitting all four pieces together and beveling when necessary for a tighter fit. Use any kitchen items, such as an upside down glass or any other object that is handy and heavy enough to hold up the front and the sides of the crate temporarily. You want to make sure they fit well before you start cementing them together with your candy melts or royal icing.
2. Finalize by gluing together your crate and allowing it to dry overnight.



Covering The Crate:

1. Roll out your fondant to about 1/8 of an inch.
2. As pictured, make four diagonal cuts in the fondant and use a flat decorator spatula or icing scraper to add some icing to the sides of the crate in order for the fondant to adhere to it easily.
3. Allow fondant to dry for about 30 minutes



Scoring & Painting The Crate:

1. Using a ruler, score the fondant if you would like to give it a more realistic crate effect. You can add a bit of darker edible Crystal Colors Tree Bark brown powdered color or even brown powdered edible food coloring to give the box a more realistic effect when you paint it.
2. Take your vodka or Bacardi 151 and add a few drops to brown (Tree bark by Crystal Colors or any brown edible gel) paint to dilute. Dip your stiff square brush or a fan brush in order to create a crate/ wood effect and paint the entire box after it has been scored with your X-acto knife. Use your creativity to make it as light or as dark as you wish, always starting lighter and adding layers. Remember that you can always make it darker if you start out light, but once it is really dark, you cannot go back and must start over.



Filling Your Crate Modeling Chocolate:

Here you will prepare your modeling chocolate, allow it to set overnight and fill the crate the next morning. Be sure to follow the next step, as well. Prepare your flower extensions, so they are ready when modeling chocolate is ready to put in the crate. You will find further instructions below.

Preparing Modeling Chocolate:

1. In a stainless steel or heavy duty saucepan, preferably with a spout, add water.
2. In a Pyrex bowl, add 12 oz. of chocolate chips. (Note that I do not recommend a high quality chocolate simply because this modeling chocolate will be used to fill out the crate later and serve to anchor the lollipop sticks holding up the hydrangeas and to add height to your arrangement so you will only have to add small globs of royal icing to the bottom of your flowers and foliage to anchor them. This chocolate will more than likely not be consumed, however it is completely edible).
3. Put bowl on pot and allow chocolate to melt while stirring occasionally but be careful not to agitate it so it does not have air bubbles.
4. Once the chocolate chips are completely melted and smooth, add 1/2 cup of corn syrup and fold carefully until you have a thick, pasty consistency. Be very careful not to overmix it or you will ruin your modeling chocolate. Please refer to picture for final consistency.
5. Use your spatula to spread it out on a cookie sheet covered with parchment paper and cover it with another piece of parchment paper. Allow to set overnight.
6. First thing in the morning, knead out your modeling chocolate (microwave for 5 seconds if necessary) to make it pliable and fill out your crate, which should be sturdy and fully cemented by now.
7. Insert your partially piped out hydrangeas while your modeling chocolate is soft and pliable and continue piping (See step: Final Decoration of your Rustic Flower Crate)



Prepare Flower Extensions:

Your hydrangeas will need some extra height in order to look realistic. To accomplish that look, you will do the following.

- Melt 1/4 of Wilton candy melts.
- Dip the end of a lollipop stick into the candy melts and drive it all the way into a jumbo marshmallow (not breaking through to the other side but until you can feel the stick about to come out of the top). Repeat this with three marshmallows. Allow to set for about 30 minutes.
- Roll out enough fondant to cover three lollipop sticks and add a dab of royal icing to the sticks so the fondant adheres.
- Wrap the lollipop sticks in fondant and color with Foliage Crystal Color edible dust or use a green dust to color the fondant. If you prefer, before you roll out the fondant you can use avocado with a hint of juniper green and blend it into your fondant. Make sure to make nicks and cuts in the stems and dust with a bit of



brown to make them look like realistic hydrangea stems. Allow to set overnight and have ready so you can pipe out partial hydrangeas and bury into your modeling chocolate while it is very pliable.

Royal Icing Recipe:

- 14 cups confectioners or powdered sugar
- 10 Tablespoons Meringue Powder
- 10 Tablespoons warm water
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 3 drops of glycerin
- 1-1.5 teaspoons of clear vanilla extract

IMPORTANT: Prepare a batch and a half if you will be using royal icing as cement for your crate instead of the candy melts.

Royal Icing Preparation: Recipe should yield approximately 5-6 cups of stiff consistency icing

1. Add powdered sugar, meringue powder and cream of tartar to mixing bowl. (Make sure that mixing bowl is 100% free of fat or oil as this will cause your royal icing to not set properly).
2. Using wire whisk attachment, start on lowest speed and begin adding water until meringue starts coming together. Add vanilla extract and continue adding sugar, beating and increasing speed gradually until icing is thick and forms stiff peaks.

Coloring & Preparing Royal Icing for Piping Bags:

Separate royal icing into the see through 8 oz. plastic cups as listed below. Amounts below are approximate. To be safe, mix extra of each color as it can be difficult to rematch the color later.

Gel colors: **Americolor**- Dusty Rose, Avocado & Royal Purple. **Wilton**- Juniper, Aster Mauve. **Crystal Colors Edible Color Dust** - Apple Green, Hydrangea pink, Tree Bark, Sunflower, Stargazer & Lavender Mist.

You will need the following approximate amounts to complete the project as pictured.

1/2 cup Juniper Green, 1 1/2 cups Hydrangea pink mixed with a hint of dusty rose, 1/2 cup Apple green with a hint of Avocado, 1/2 cup Aster mauve, 1 cup Royal purple, 1/4 cup white

I used Wilton tip 224 to pipe the hydrangeas and #352 to pipe the wisteria and foliage. I also used tip #59s to pipe the white center of the open wisteria and a dab of Crystal Colors Sunflower dust diluted with Bacardi 151 to paint the inside. Stargazer dust was used on the small mound of plum colored flowers in the rear corner.

Hydrangea Piping Bag - Use the hydrangea pink/dusty rose mixture and use a 2 tone bag technique in order to have a more realistic finish to your flower. Use Wilton tip #224. You can accomplish that by taking a large piece of saran wrap and spreading a generous amount of pink on the flat piece of plastic.

You can prepare these colors and put them in the 8 oz. transparent plastic cups as holding receptacles before you add them to your piping bags. Doing this will ensure that you have achieved the proper hues you would like, as some of these colors become deeper an hour or two after initially mixing.

You then add the Apple green on top of the pink by piping the green into a parchment cone and cutting a large hole in it, and placing it in the middle of the pink as a long tube (Imagine a long hot dog in the center of the pink). Roll up the saran wrap (To look like a sausage) at this point the pink should be on the outside and you will not see the green on the inside. Tie the back end off in a knot. Take the front end and pull it through your prepared piping bag for the hydrangeas, and cut the end off before you place the tip on.

You can use these colors I have suggested above as used in my arrangement or mix and match. I encourage you to get creative and try combinations of your favorite colors. I chose the plumb and purple along with the pink as it is very on trend for this summer. Your interpretation of wisteria or any other cascading flower works beautifully with this arrangement, as you want to cover up part of the crate.

Add the piping tip and fasten the coupler to it. Squeeze out flowers on a practice surface until the flower that is being piped out is two tone.

Final Decoration of Rustic Floral Crate:

1. Take your flower extensions (marshmallows on a stick) and cover the inside part of the hydrangea that will touch the others. As soon as you are done, immediately bury it into the modeling chocolate. Start piping in your foliage as you bury your hydrangeas as it will become much more difficult to reach between the three stems later, and remember to pipe your leaves on as you insert each one. Repeat the process with the two other hydrangeas and then you can start piping from the inside out to start forming a rounder looking bunch of flowers by using your artistic skill and creativity.
2. Start piping base foliage and add flowers. Adding any kind of cascading flower works beautifully. In this case, I chose to make my interpretation of wisteria (open in the front with white at the heart and a bit of yellow to add more interest and sheer purple in the back of my arrangement).

