Would your baking measure up to a masterclass with

Mary Berr

The queen of *The* Great British Bake Off. Mary Berry, shares some of her culinary secrets with Victoria Young during a oneto-one masterclass

My masterclass with the Queen of Baking doesn't get off to the most auspicious start. The night before, I set about making the crispy orange zest strips that will decorate her Orange Layer Cake, the cake we're baking. It's probably performance anxiety but, reading the recipe, I can't work out what "pencil thin" slices of orange look like.

Eventually I create some slices the width of a pencil. But that's wrong, as I realise the next day when I compare my inelegant orange tongues the width of pappardelle with the dainty spaghettisized strands that Mary has made.

Mary, who has bustled into the kitchen exactly as she appears on the Bake Off, trim and tailored with her trademark twin-set and coiffed hair, clasps my arm comfortingly and looks into my eyes. "Well you had a go," she says, kindly. And for that moment I do feel like that is the most important thing.

Mary devised the recipe for the cake we are making a couple of years ago. She loves fruit in cakes and wanted to get the

thin skinned kind) and blitzing up the whole thing, skin and all, to form part of the cake itself but also the mascarpone you have to use an extra one and a The cake itself is a four-tiered affair – the type that I would skim past in a cook book fearing it was beyond my abilities.

I have come to associate baking with sweaty panics about one of a catalogue of disasters – whether chocolate splitting, cakes not rising or leaky tins – that have

whole of an orange in, so she worked out a way to do that by boiling an orange (the icing (you can also try it with lemons, but drizzle icing to counteract the sourness).

Mary Berry for me to self-diagnose the problem: it's a combination of slapdashery and greed. I simply don't have the patience to do all the calm fiddly measuring, which results in me being very much a 'more or less' kind of a cook.

And it only takes a few moments with

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with Mary I feel

like I'm a world

masterclass

class baker

befallen me in the past.

According to Mary, any panic would evaporate if I simply do three things. 1) Weigh out the ingredients accurately



Marv shows

ow to prepare the orange, as well as how to mix and bake

before I start. 2) Read the recipe two or three times before I make it. 3) Make sure I find the right tin before I start to cooking.

It is – obviously, I now realise – very important to use the right size tin (I'm usually lucky to find any tin at all in our cupboards at home – whether it's the right size or not is largely down to fluke). If the tin is too big then the cake will be too thin. And if it's too small, the cake will overflow. "It's a bore to measure them each time," Mary says, "So just scratch the measurement on the bottom in metric and imperial, and then you know where you are." I pause, briefly, to imagine what life would be like if I could find it in myself to be that organised.

Mary is teaching me the 'all-in-one' method of baking, which means you put all the ingredients into a bowl at once the order isn't too important, although if you put the eggs in first it seems to work better – and then whizz them all together at once. This technique is perfectly suited to the slap-dash temperament – and is quite fool-proof.

We measure out flour, cinnamon, mixed spice, sugar and baking powder. This last is very important when it comes to accuracy, Mary explains as she clicks the bowl into the food processor base. If you add too much the cake is likely to rise up in the oven, then sink again before it finishes cooking. And it also makes it bitter. I resist the urge to heap the two teaspoons we are putting in.

Next, I discover the secret weapon in Mary's impressive baking arsenal: baking

spread (rather than butter or marg). Baking spread is formulated specially for baking, and Mary says it yields better results. And you can use it straight from the fridge which is an advantage. "I've made a Victoria sandwich using a spread and one using butter and it's gone to a tasting panel, who said they liked the spread better". The reason is that baking spread has a fairly high proportion of fat in it. "Don't pick up a low fat one, because the result will be awful!"

Mary Berry is kind and twinkly – those piercing blue eyes and long fluttery lashes – but firm and precise too. As we cook, she offers tips that, to within the baking community may seem obvious but to someone like me are invaluable: put the fat into the flour in chunks rather than one lump so it mixes more evenly; don't over-mix your cake because it squeezes too much air out creating a closer texture with smaller airholes: when you take the blade out of a food processor don't drop it in to a bowl of washing up water, because somebody will cut their hands; and, perhaps most importantly, "We're allowed to lick our fingers don't you think?"

Once the cake is mixed we grease the tins - two 8-inch loose-bottomed - and put a pre-cut disc of non-stick paper >>

## Mary's golden baking rules

People who think they are bad at baking are usually not going into it saving 'I'm going to be successful'. It's like me with computers or with my laptop, or my iPad – I think 'I can't do it'... I press the wrong button and it's all gone wrong again. The thing with baking is that you've got to want to do it and you've got to expect the best of yourself.

Here are my rules of thumb: The most important thing is to choose a reliable recipe.

Don't choose something with too many ingredients and don't be too ambitious.

When cakes go wrong it's usually because you've been rushing it.

You've got to check, check, check: check you've got time to do it; always read the recipe through two or three times before you start; and check you've got the right size tin.

Weigh the ingredients accurately, and don't be over generous. It's tempting to add a bit extra because you think it will be better. But it won't.

You've got to be patient to get it right. The most important thing is to be accurate: baking is a very simple science, and you've just got to learn it.





in to, which I have always wondered about (why both?). It's insurance, says Mary, but also the paper gives the cake a nice finish and the grease underneath the paper keeps it in place. The two resulting cakes will then be halved, creating four tiers. Normally, I'd be terrified, but with Mary beside me I feel invincible!

When we divide the mixture between the two tins I'm all for just slopping it out until it looks about level but Mary says we need to weigh them to make sure they are equal. Then, we level it off with the spatula, otherwise you'll get an uneven rise. This level of attention to detail is making me feel thrillingly in control of our baking experience — and it's thoroughly enjoyable. I picture a future full of

effortlessly whipped up cakes, baked – by me (calmly and methodically) – to perfection and served at 4pm on the dot!

With our cakes safely in the oven we make the icing. The principle ingredient is full-fat mascarpone. Mary, it turns out, doesn't believe in low-fat anything. When I venture that lots of people might think that a low-fat version mascarpone might be healthier she just says, "Well hard luck. It's got to be the real thing."

We mix butter with icing sugar (butter over marge, apparently, for the best-tasting icing). It's news to me but apparently we don't need to bother sieving the icing sugar any more – as long as you've got a fairly fresh packet it'll be fine enough. And when it is all one

## Baking on a budget?

It's best to start with things like scones, or fruit flans. Be sensible. If you've got to buy a packet of blueberries and you're only going to use a few of them then it's a waste, but if you've got a glut of apples in the garden you could make an apple cake. Tray bakes made in a roasting tin are really great to make for a crowd – you make a lot of cakes in a short time.

colour we add the mascarpone and two tablespoons of the whizzed up orange.

We take our cakes out of the oven and leave them to cool. I have a minor panic at the prospect of removing the cake without it breaking but that is the glory of the removable base. Out they come in one beautiful piece.

The hardest part was the slicing of the two cakes in half to make four tiers. But Mary gave me instructions: get your head down to the level of the cake so you can check you are holding your knife absolutely flat: then insert it a bit at a time, revolving the plate around a notch before cutting again. Mary is so encouraging. "Well done! You're doing really well. Don't feel you've got to be a chef and do it quickly I don't do it at great speed at all, just do it patiently". By the end of the class I feel like a world class baker.

The cake has to be absolutely cool before icing. When it is, quick as a flash Mary has divided the icing into four and spread a quarter on each layer, including the top, stacking as we go. The most important thing is to go right to the edges. Then we cross-cross our crispy zest strips over the top (my last-night's attempts have been tactfully put to one side) and lift it on to a cake stand (use a fish slice if you are nervous, Mary says) and, somehow, in the space of 45 minutes, I have produced my own four-tiered cake.

Mary says we could have made the cake to *Bake Off* standards but she prefers the look of home-made and after all this is not a fancy cake. But it is fancy to me! I would never have attempted something so ambitious without Mary's help but I will try it again soon. **w**&h

## Love to try Mary's cake yourself?

- + For full recipe go to womanandhome.com/marvberry
- + See Mary cooking live in The Great British Bake Off Masterclasses at the BBC Good Food Shows (18-20 Oct, SECC, Glasgow; 15-17 Nov, Olympia, London; 27 Nov-1 Dec, NEC, Birmingham). Visit bbcgoodfoodshow.com or call 0844 581 1364.