



## Carolyn Robb

Cooking with  
Lucy & Mandy

Carolyn Robb, the youngest of five children, was born and raised in South Africa. Always at her mother's side in the kitchen, she started cooking and baking at a very tender age. These days, she loves every minute she spends in the kitchen with her own daughters, Lucy and Mandy. They live in Oxfordshire, England, with their three cats and a dog. Carolyn has just completed her first cookbook, "A Trifle Royal: Simply Stunning Home Cooking from a Former Royal Chef."





Julia Child said, "A party without cake is just a meeting." Never has a truer word been spoken! Life without cake would be unthinkable dull. I love eating it, of course, but I also love making cakes, and now I have the even greater joy of baking with and for my two little girls, Lucy and Mandy. I grew up in a home where the cake tins were always bursting with delicious homemade treats. My mother was the best cook ever and I was always at her side in the kitchen, constantly begging her to "Let me do that," as she busily cooked and baked for a large family. I so loved helping her — though I'm sure my tiny hands often made a lot of mess and were not all that helpful. I was given specific tasks, such as measuring out teaspoons of baking powder and sifting flour. As I became more dextrous I graduated to other tasks. It sometimes seemed to me as if my progress was rather slow, but in my young mind, I felt as though I was capable of anything and I wanted to take charge of everything! ▶







Mum was a fantastic cookery teacher; she was very organized and tidy. I am so lucky that she taught me so much. She was wonderfully encouraging and generous with her praise, but, most importantly, she was completely honest with me and would always tell me when things I had made were not as good as they could be, which kept me striving for perfection. There were some fundamental rules, which were never to be broken. Rule number one was always get out all the ingredients you need for a recipe before you start baking. It is at your peril that you ignore this — it is maddening to discover, halfway through making a cake, that you are a couple of ounces short of flour or that you have run out of baking powder. I have done this more times than I care to admit. Mum was right and this rule applies to home cooks and professional chefs alike! ▶

## Flowerpot Cupcakes

Makes 18 cupcakes: 6 small,  
6 medium, 6 large

*Note: You will need six green paper drinking straws, a selection of small fresh flowers, and a selection of miniature terracotta pots lined with muffin papers or baking parchment. I use the following sizes:*  
base diameter ¾", top diameter 1¼", height 1½"  
base diameter 1", top diameter 1¾", height 1½"  
base diameter 1¾", top diameter 2¾", height 2½"

### CUPCAKES

2 oz. dark chocolate  
4 oz. soft butter  
4 oz. superfine sugar  
1 tsp. vanilla essence  
2 large free-range eggs  
4 oz. all-purpose flour  
1 TB. unsweetened cocoa powder  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1 TB. hot water

### BUTTERCREAM

1 oz. soft butter  
1¾ lbs. icing sugar  
1 tsp. unsweetened cocoa powder  
½ tsp. vanilla essence

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Melt chocolate and leave it to cool.
2. Either by hand or using an electric mixer, beat together butter, sugar, and vanilla until light and creamy. Add 1 of the eggs and beat it in, then add 2 tablespoons of the flour and the second egg, and beat further. Add cooled melted chocolate, stir it in, and then sift in remaining flour, cocoa powder, and baking powder. Fold in dry ingredients using a metal spoon. Lastly add hot water and mix well.
3. Spoon mixture into lined terracotta pots and place them onto a baking tray. Cook small ones for 5 minutes, medium ones for 12 minutes, and large ones for 15–18 minutes. Cool thoroughly on a wire rack.
4. While cupcakes are cooling, make buttercream. Combine all ingredients and beat together by hand or using an electric mixer. Buttercream should be very light and creamy. If it is too thick to spread easily, add a splash of milk. Keep on one side while cupcakes continue to cool.
5. When they are cold, neatly cover the top of each cake with chocolate buttercream. Using paper drinking straws for the stems of the flowers, cut them into the appropriate lengths, and stick them into the center of each cake. Just before serving them, slip fresh flowers into the top of each straw.



## TIP

For spreading buttercream and frosting on both large and small cakes, I always use a small cranked palette knife. This is my favorite kitchen gadget because the blade is not completely flat so it is possible to achieve a much smoother finish.



## Favorite Quote

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I think about my childhood with such joy and delicious memories come flooding back ... melting moments, cotton-reel cookies, jam drops, cinnamon-sugar cake, break-your-teeth crunchies (which could be rather hard), boil-overs (another kind of crunchie that regularly boiled over the sides of the baking tray), Mummy's favorite crunchies (self-explanatory), and lastly, my brother's least favorite version of these delicious oatly squares, "dull old crunchies." These are just a few of the things we baked together and I served at my numerous teddy bear tea parties, picnics in our tree house, and even midnight feasts with my brother. From no age at all it was clear to me that a good party needs great cakes and great cookies!

There is nothing I enjoy more now than cooking and baking with my two tiny assistants at my side. They each have their own ideas about how things should be done and these very seldom coincide with my plan, but we always have enormous fun together and nearly always end up with a great result! We love bunnies and so far we have had success making bunny-shaped bread, sugar paste bunnies, bunny cookies, cupcake bunnies, and bunny meringues — the latter being voted the favorite. ▶



## Meringue Bunnies

Note: You will need one large baking tray lined with baking parchment and a piping bag with a ½-inch plain nozzle.

Makes 8 to 10

7 oz. superfine sugar  
2 large free-range egg whites  
Black sesame seeds, for eyes  
Pink sugar balls, for noses

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line baking tray with baking parchment and pour sugar onto parchment. Put in oven for about 5 minutes until sugar is hot and just starting to melt at the edges.
2. Meanwhile, using an electric mixer, whisk egg whites in a clean bowl until they form stiff peaks.
3. Remove sugar from oven and turn heat down to 210 degrees. While whisking egg whites at full speed, add hot sugar 1 tablespoon at a time. Once it has all been added, whisk for another 5 minutes until meringue is very thick and glossy.
4. If the baking parchment you used for heating the sugar is still in good condition, you can reuse it and pipe the bunnies onto it. Otherwise, reline the baking tray with a new piece. Begin by piping a mound of meringue that is about 1½ inches long, 1 inch wide, and ¾ inch high. Add a small mound on front and back for the head and tail. For the ears, starting on the head, pipe a stripe on either side going back onto the body.
5. Using tweezers, position sesame seeds for eyes and a pink sugar ball for the nose on each bunny.
6. Bake at 210 degrees for approximately 30 minutes, or until they are crisp and cooked through. Leave to cool and then store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.





We are so lucky to have a wonderful garden; nothing short of paradise for a 6-year-old and a 2-year-old. Lucy and Mandy love the “secret passages,” fairies’ hiding places, rhubarb plants with leaves big enough to use as parasols, little beds specially designated for them to sow their own seeds in, and all the beautiful spring flowers so lovingly planted by Grandpa. It is a place to play, to hide, to skip, to run, to dance, to pick flowers, to tell the time by blowing on dandelions, to feed the robins, to harvest home-grown gooseberries, damsons, and apples, and to have picnics — especially afternoon tea picnics — with our favorite bunny meringues, flowerpot cupcakes, and best red-and-white spotty china.

I hope that in years to come, when we all reminisce about these wonderful garden parties, it will bring as big a smile to Lucy and Mandy’s faces as my childhood memories bring to mine, and perhaps the tradition will even continue on to the next generation. ✱

**Where Women Cook** would like to thank Carolyn Robb for her involvement in our autumn issue. To learn more, visit [theroyaltouch.com](http://theroyaltouch.com) or contact [carolyn@carolynrobb.com](mailto:carolyn@carolynrobb.com).

