

The Bungendore Show



COOKERY HINTS

Competition is always fierce in the cake judging at agricultural shows and here are a few tips from Pamela Clark, who was a recent judge at the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

It goes without saying that cakes etc. should be well presented with no obvious visual failings (the sunken, the burnt, the crusty, the rule-breakers will be quickly eliminated).

Plain scones. The scones have to look good first. The browning should be even and they should all be the same height and diameter. Those with a 'waist' will be rejected because the dough is too soft. They should be level and smooth on the top, there should not be any sign of excess flour. When you break one open, it should break without crumbling and the texture should be smooth and fine, not aerated or spongy. Then there's the taste: are they too salty? Too sweet? Too buttery? Too soapy (due to too much bicarbonate of soda or raising agent)? And so on.

Butter cakes. It's all about how the cake looks first. Has it risen and browned evenly? Are there any white spots (undissolved sugar), dark patches (over-handled scrapings from the bowl) or marks from the wire cooling rack on the top of the cake? Then the judges will look at the texture (the finer the better) and the size of the crumb (the finer the better) and the way the cake has risen. If there is a heavier layer of cake at the bottom then the butter has broken down either by over-creaming or because it was too soft before it was creamed, or the balance of the ingredients was out of kilter. If the cake is tough (caused by too much protein) then once again the balance is out: too much flour, not enough liquid, or too many eggs have been used.

Sponges. Like the butter cakes the judges look at the texture, the crumb structure and check if there is any heaviness at the bottom of the sponge. When it comes to taste, if they feel undissolved sugar in their mouths or taste a certain soapiness, it points to too much raising agent. Specks of custard powder can lose points. And you do not want globs of flour on the crust of the sponge. Tip: use a lightly greased (not floured) cake tin.

In regard to the **State Rich Fruit Cake** competition the following are points or faults in baking that would adversely affect the final presentation of your cake from a judging point of view so consider these before embarking on your bake-off:

- Carelessly prepared tin - wrinkled lining
- Careless measurement of ingredients - i.e. sugar becomes liquid when heated, so care must be taken not to exceed the recipe quantity
- Carelessly prepared fruit - not correctly cut and separated
- Insufficient creaming of butter and sugar
- Eggs not beaten in well after each addition
- Overpowering aroma of essences and/or spices
- Flour and fruit not sufficiently mixed in - leaves streaks and unmixed dry ingredients
- Carelessly filled tin - work cake well down (never leave the scrapings from the bottom of the bowl sitting on top of the cake. This will show a pale patch when cut)
- Oven too hot or too cold
- Insufficient cooking time - the cake will sink in the middle and be very soggy.