

MERLE PARRISH



Merle Parrish has been competing from the age of 7 in state cookery competitions, and became a judge herself in 1988 when she completed her CWA Judges' Certificate. She has won just about every prize in every category in the competitive baking world and became a MasterChef sensation when the judges saw her amazing technique!

Merle lives in Cudal, near Orange in NSW, and continues to compete in shows. She is the author of the bestselling *Merle's Kitchen*.

Merle Parrish showed Australia how it was done when she appeared on *Masterchef* last year. The champion cake-maker has been a member of the Country Women's Association for 58 years and has taught cake decorating for 25 years.

According to Parrish, one of the biggest mistakes novice bakers make in the kitchen is "over-beating." That and "giving up when things don't work out. You just have to try again." The other important thing is timing and knowing your stove.

The *Masterchef* experience was something of a dream for Parrish.

"It was truly wonderful," she says. "I couldn't believe that something like that would happen to me."

Parrish's delightful book, which covers everything from scones to sponges to that ultimate comfort food - golden syrup dumplings - was a project that involved collating all of her handwritten recipes and "all the ones that were just in my head," says Parrish.

And as for everybody's favourite, according to Parrish, the peach blossom cake - as featured on *Masterchef* - is the winner.

MERLE PARRISH



Merle's Kitchen by Merle Parrish.

This is an edited extract from *Merle's Kitchen*, by Merle Parrish (Ebury, \$39.95).

Merle Parrish MasterChef bound

By Nadine Morton

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MERLE'S RECIPES

Never-fail sponge

This never-fail sponge only ever failed for me twice — pretty good odds for all the years!

3 eggs, separated

1 cup caster sugar

½ cup cold water

1 tsp vanilla essence

2 tsp baking powder

1 cup plain flour

1 tbsp cornflour

Jam and whipped cream to fill

Icing sugar, to dust



1. Preheat the oven to moderate (180°C). Grease two 20cm (base measurement) round shallow tins and line the bases with baking paper.
2. Use electric beaters to beat the egg yolks, sugar, water and vanilla for 10 minutes, until very thick and pale. Use clean beaters to beat the egg whites and baking powder until stiff peaks form.
3. Fold the sifted flours into the yolk mixture, then the egg whites. Divide evenly between the tins, and bake for 20 minutes, until springy to a gentle touch in the centre. Lay newspaper then a clean tea towel onto a wire rack, and turn the cakes out onto it. Leave to cool.
4. Spread one sponge generously with your favourite jam, and then whipped cream. Place the other sponge on top.

PREP TIME: 30 MINS

COOKING TIME: 20 MINS

SERVES 8

MERLE PARRISH

PEACH BLOSSOM CAKE

This is the cake I want to dedicate to my best mate Clyde. It also won me enough points on MasterChef to help me claim the immunity pin!

Ingredients:

190g butter, at room temperature, chopped	Pinch of salt
1¼ cups white sugar	6 egg whites
¾ cup milk	1–2 drops rose pink food colouring
1 tsp vanilla essence	ICING
1½ cups plain flour	1½ cups icing sugar
¾ cup cornflour	10g butter
1½ tsp baking powder	2 tbsp boiling water
	Few drops of rose pink food colouring

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to slow (150°C). Grease a 20cm (base measurement) round, deep cake tin (see note). Line the base with baking paper.
2. Cream the butter and sugar in the small bowl of an electric mixer until white and fluffy. Gradually add half the milk to help dissolve the sugar, and beat well. Beat in the vanilla. Transfer to a larger bowl.
3. Sift the flour, cornflour, baking powder and salt together 3 times. Fold into the butter mixture, then add remaining milk (don't worry if it appears curdled at this stage). In another bowl, use clean beaters to beat the egg whites to stiff peaks. Fold half the egg whites into the cake batter, then fold in remaining egg whites.
4. Transfer 1 cup of the mixture to a smaller bowl, and stir in 1–2 drops food colouring. Take about ¾ cup of the white mixture, and spread over the base of the tin. Take half the pink batter, and spoon it in a ring about 1cm in from the tin edge – it should be about 1–1.5cm wide.
5. Very carefully spread half the remaining white batter over, taking care not to disturb the pink ring. Spoon the remaining pink batter into the centre of the tin, making about an 8cm round. Spoon the remaining white batter over the whole top, again taking care not to disturb the pink round.
6. Bake for about 70 minutes, until the cake is springy to a gentle touch in the centre and comes away from the sides of the tin. It may appear slightly cracked in the centre, but will settle flat on cooling. (If not, gently press the top flat with your fingertips.) Turn out onto a clean tea towel lined with a sheet of baking paper. Leave to cool.
7. To make the icing, combine the ingredients until smooth. Spread over the top of the cooled cake, and leave to set.

PREP TIME: 30 MINS

COOKING TIME: 70 MINS

SERVES 8

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HER bags are packed, the cakes are cooked and Cudal resident Merle Parrish has headed off to take part in another episode of MasterChef.

Since her first appearance last year 79-year-old Mrs Parrish has become widely known as one of the country's best home cooks.

She's set to appear as a guest judge in an upcoming episode where contestants will pit their cooking skills against her in a bake-off.

Mrs Parrish baked four cakes yesterday - boiled fruit cake, madeira cake, lumberjack cake and lamingtons and today contestants will be challenged to create the same tasty treat.

"It's exciting but I'm not nervous," she said heading off to Sydney yesterday.

"The experience has been fantastic...I never thought in my wildest dreams I'd have an experience like that, the whole cast and crew are fabulous," she said.

Life has changed for Mrs Parrish since the show. She's even more famous since her book Merle's Kitchen was published earlier this year.

Since then the book has sold 25,000 copies.

"It's just a good simple cookbook," Mrs Parrish said.

"The simplicity of it is most housewives have the ingredients in their cupboard and they don't have to go down to the shops to buy anything."

The episode will appear on channel 10's MasterChef on August 19.



BAKE OFF: Cudal home cook Merle Parrish packed her bags and her famous cakes yesterday to head to Sydney for another episode of MasterChef. Photo: NADINE MORTON 0704nmmerle1