

Bake Off Hinge Everything you need to look out for on the new Covid-safe GBBK

Full up a chair and prepare for a serving of comfort TV at its best, as the baking behemoth returns. Also: literally sanitised

By Hannah Russell
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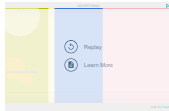
The Great British Bake Off (BBC) | BBC/YouTube.com/Production

For a while, it looked as if it might not happen. It would have been so like 2020 to have cancelled one of the nation's best-loved autumnal TV treats. But it seems not even a pandemic can get between the British public and the particular joy that only comes from watching an accountant from Luton sweat over a batch of carrot cake in a manor.

Next week, *The Great British Bake Off* hangs for its 15th series, and though to the casual viewer it may look as though nothing much has changed, since returned from the globe's worst a few clues as to the coronavirus effort that went on backstage in order to realise the next best Covid-safe one. In fact, it sounds as if they went to such lengths that the Bake Off "sanctuary bubble" may at some point have been the safest place in Britain.

Ahead of the first episode on Tuesday, here is everything you need to look out for when watching the new Covid-proofed Bake Off 2020.

The contestants looking suspiciously young



The show has always been beloved for the diversity of ages among its contestants. Who could forget Yvonne who used to "stare" to cakes to work out if they were done, or supergranular Pam who turned out to be an accomplished rapper? The oldest baker among this year's cohort is Linda, who is a mere spring chicken at 65. It's true that there was an official "two children in the tent" slogan handed down by Loose Productions' insurance advisers, but you have to imagine they deemed it sensible to recruit a younger bunch this year.

Paul and Pru proving not to notice a little Eau de Dental in the golden sponge

Producers chose as a study note "bigger than the Bible" before filming began. Everything was sanitised to within an inch of its life, with executive producer Lelly Kershaw insisting that even bags of flour were cleaned several times a day. Deep cleaning to order with some ingredients from others, even making like an alchemist of bleach to your lemon zest. One imagines that endlessly wiping down packets of self-raising can't have been the ideal fix but look, especially given that flour and water aren't exactly a marriage made in heaven – unless, that is, you're making a dough for flatbread.



Paul and Pru in costume, back with their Paul and Pru | BBC/YouTube.com/Production

People manually wiping down this golden syrup in the back of the shot

Olivia Van Der Werff, the show's health and safety adviser, says a four-page route of the golden syrup has been through quarantine and were regularly tested for Covid whenever full time was out, cleaning everything regularly and regularly. "Any bit that entered the channel with disinfectant wipes by our team. Everything that came to air was sent to their cleaning station, and it was an intensive exercise."

Towers of ingredients tumbling over

The team in charge of ingredients had to order everything for the entire series in advance to take account the delay on deliveries caused by the pandemic. Emma Moore, the chief home economist on the show, says her flat was stocked to the rafters with sugar and butter for days ahead of filming.

"We started prepping for Series 15 about two months before we started filming, and I began prepping things like flour – dried through for making all deliveries very well for," she recalls. "A lot of people in the food industry were furloughed, so it had a knock-on effect on ordering, but we tried to be as organised as possible."

"I was nervous that we wouldn't be able to get a delivery of extra flour during the filming of the series, so I phoned about a day ahead for 200kg of butter at the beginning, so I wasn't even here it would all work. We just needed enough extra for the bakers to practice with, thankfully, they always had enough."

A force field around Pru and a cap on Hollywood Handshakes

The contestants may be spring chickens, but, at 60, Pru and Lelly must be considered relatively high risk. She's a game girl, though, and Lelly will be delighted to see her back at the helm, finally getting to be filmed. Even Paul Hollywood's famous handshake (shook out seven times in the 2017 series) has been permitted to make a very occasional appearance. It was all made possible because the set was such a highly controlled zone. Van der Werff says the entire team and each of their households questioned for 14 days before filming began and were each given two Covid safety briefings travelling to the set. On arrival, each person involved in the show was given a Covid Covid test, "so we could be 99.9 per cent sure".

Contestants who look as if they haven't seen the outside world for a while

Down Hall Road in Essex was chosen as a new base for the show, housing the entire team, including bakers, hosts and judges. For the entirety of the shoot with temporary overnight accommodation set up in the car park. Usually on Bake Off everyone goes home during the week and returns to it at weekends, but this year producers asked bakers to take six weeks off work and filming for the duration.

The set was a "completely sealed location" for seven weeks, which would enter like a sieve for "superheroes" and that's before anyone tampers with a fellow contestant's baked Alaska. Van der Werff says: "In the day, we closed off all the entrance points, and health physical observations so no one could get in through a back door. Once everyone arrived on location, they would not be leaving until the end of the shoot. No one else was allowed on set at all. Everyone on camera and behind the camera could relax and do the job they had to do in our bungalow."

A new host in the tent

This season, Lelly returns to her Matt Lucas malice but absent as a Bake Off presenter, alongside Noel Fielding, having replaced Sarah Telling, who left the show to pursue other projects. Lelly described the experience as being rather like "summer camp" quite frankly as filming was delayed from April to July. Filming was "tough for the bakers," he says, but "we did things in the evening. I baked things one night, Pru did flowers arranging – and Paul made glasses."

The Great British Bake Off returns to Channel 4 on Thursday, 8pm

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