

GINGERBREAD WORKSHOP



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Gingerbread House: A “How-to” Guide

Making a gingerbread house consists of three general steps: (1) making the gingerbread pieces; (2) “gluing” the pieces together with frosting; and (3) decorating the final house. The whole process doesn’t have to take more than three and a half hours if you use your time well and plan ahead. If you want to try something grand, or just want to take your time, it can also take much longer

Gingerbread dough keeps well in the fridge for a couple of days (store it in an air tight plastic bag) so you can do your houses over several days if you want. The frosting also stores well, although it is best if used within 24 hours of when you mix it since it starts to get crusty pretty quickly. For best frosting results, store it either in a tightly closed bag, or in a bowl covered with a wet paper towel.

This instruction booklet is meant to give the beginner a complete guide to all stages of gingerbread house construction. The booklet includes different methods for particular harder steps. This guide will be most useful to you if you read it all the way through before you start. This will give you a better sense of what is involved and things to look out for as well as letting you know what options you have along the way.

Enjoy the process of gingerbread house making and good luck!

Making “The Parts”

The first step in creating your house is making the gingerbread pieces including the walls, sides, and roof of your house. One batch of “Basic Gingerbread Dough” will give you enough dough to make four small houses or two regular-sized houses, if you are careful about how you lay out your pieces.

For each house, you will need to cut the following: two end pieces, two side pieces, and two roof pieces. You may have extra dough, depending on how thick you roll out your pieces and how careful you laid out the templates before you cut. Any dough scraps can be used to make gingerbread people to go with your house.

Recipe and Ingredients

Basic Gingerbread Dough

2/3 cup shortening	1 egg
½ cup packed brown sugar	¾ cup molasses
2 tsp. ginger	3 cups flour
1 tsp. cinnamon	1 tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. cloves or allspice	½ tsp. baking powder
1 ½ tsp. salt	

Directions

Cream together the shortening, brown sugar, spices, and salt. Add the egg and mix thoroughly. Add the molasses and blend. Mix together the flour, soda, and baking soda. Add to the molasses mixture and stir until blended. Chill about an hour.

Preheat your oven to 375 degrees.

Start with a small amount of the chilled dough and roll it to 1/8 inch or slightly thicker on a lightly floured piece of waxed paper using a floured rolling pin. Another suggestion is to use a silicone mat instead of waxed paper, but the silicone mat should be at least 10x16 or larger. When you are just starting out, use only enough dough to cut one piece at a time. This will make transferring the dough to the baking sheet much easier, and will also be easier to keep a consistent thickness. When you are comfortable with doing one piece at a time, try using more dough and cut multiple pieces out of each rolling. Be careful not to roll the dough too thin or to roll it unevenly. Thin pieces tend to be very fragile, while pieces that are uneven thicknesses cook unevenly. Pieces that are too thick may crumble.

Lay out the template on the dough, and carefully cut around the pattern using a sharp knife or pizza cutter. (Templates are included in this booklet.) Peel away the excess dough and set it aside. When you have used all of your fresh dough, the scraps can be rolled out and cut into pieces as well. If the scraps are too dry to stick together when you go to roll them out, just add a little water.

Now you are ready to transfer the pieces. To do this, carefully pick up your piece of waxed paper and flip it over face down on to a greased baking sheet. Carefully peel off the waxed paper, leaving the dough on the baking sheet. As you lay each piece on the baking sheet, make sure the sides stay straight of the pieces. Wavy or irregular sides can be pushed into shape with a knife, or trimmed off using a straight-edge. It is important to make the lines as straight as you can get them at this stage; if you don't, your house will be more difficult to put together later.

Repeat rolling, cutting, and transferring cycle with the remaining dough. As soon as you fill up a baking sheet, go ahead and put it in the oven. Bake the gingerbread for 8-10 minutes or unto golden brown. When they are done, let the gingerbread cool for about 5 minutes on the baking sheet otherwise, the pieces could break because of being so hot. Then remove the gingerbread from the baking sheet and place on a cooling rack until they are completely cool.

When you are comfortable rolling out one piece at a time, you can try rolling out several at once. Roll out a large-sized ball of dough, positioning the cutout pieces so that you can use as much of the dough as possible with as little waste. Leave a little bit of space around each piece. How you cut them out is how they will lay on the baking sheet for baking. Once you have laid out the templates to your liking, cut around them using a sharp knife or pizza cutter. As soon as you have cut out one piece, you can move the template and use it to cut another piece. When all of the pieces are cut, pull away all the scrap dough and set it aside.

To transfer multiple pieces to the baking sheet, lay your baking sheet face down on top of the rolled-out dough. Then, carefully lift up the waxed paper, dough, and baking sheet together, and flip over, so now the baking sheet is on the bottom and the waxed paper is on top. Once you peel off the waxed paper and straighten out any wavy edges, your baking sheet is ready for baking.

Baked gingerbread house pieces can be made far ahead of assembly. Let the pieces air dry. **DO NOT FREEZE.** Also, it is not necessary to lock them in plastic bags. They will get too soft. Just let them dry and get hard. They will be much easier to work with. When working with children, the baking can be done one day and the assembly and decorating another day. It may take the entire month of November (off and on) to prepare this gingerbread house for the Thanksgiving table.

Gluing it all together

Now that you have the entire gingerbread pieces ready for assembly, you need to make the "glue" to hold it together. The "glue" that works best is really a relatively simple-to-

make frosting. Since it not only dries quickly, but is very hard and very strong when dry. It is ideal for holding walls and roofs together and for holding candy decorations in place.

Recipe and Ingredients

Decorative Frosting (Royal Icing)

1 egg white

1 cup confectioners' sugar

½ tsp. vanilla (optional)

1/8 tsp. cream of tartar

Directions

Beat the egg white with the sugar, vanilla, and cream of tartar until the mixture is stiff and holds up in sharp peaks when the beater is withdrawn. This take a lot longer than you might think, sometimes ten minutes and sometimes longer. If the frosting doesn't seem to be thickening well, add a little more confectioner's sugar and beat it more. Be patient, it will work. Humidity plays a big part in how long it takes.

Carefully spoon the frosting into one corner of a quart size freezer plastic bag. Use a square-edged bag not one with a pleated bottom. If the bag is to be used by an adult, you can put a good deal of frosting in it. If a child is going to use it, keep the amount of frosting small. You want the child to be able to get his or her hand around the mass of frosting, otherwise, they won't be able to squeeze it out well.

Seal the bag shut; make sure all the air is out of the bag or it might bust.

Cut a very small hole in the tip of the corner that has the frosting in it. This is the hole that the frosting will come out of. It is important that the hole be small. If it is too big, too much frosting will come out that it will be difficult to control where the frosting goes and precision will be lost. If the hole is too small, it will be difficult to get any frosting out. It's best to cut a very small hole at first, test the flow, and then cut it larger if you need to.

Now that the frosting is bagged, you are ready to start assembling your house. You can build your house on several different types of surfaces. Foam core, double thicknesses of heavy-duty cardboard, and scraps of boards are all disposable options. Any of them will work fine if you cover it with tinfoil. Non-disposable alternatives include plates, platters, or cutting boards. If you plan on giving your house away, you might want to go with a disposable base. Whatever you use, make sure it is strong enough to support a small house with candy decorations without bending. You can purchase round cake bases made from cardboard at your local craft store.

Set whatever base you have chosen in front of you. Take one of you ends, put a line of frosting along its bottom edge and both side edges, and stick it onto the base. Since this will be the back of the house, you might want to place it near the back of the base. Support this back end with a cup or glass for the moment. Now take one of the side pieces and put a line of frosting along its bottom edge. Place it onto the base so that its end rests against one side edge of the back end. Do the same with the other side. Now put frosting along bottom and side edges of the front end, and put into place between the two sides. Push all the walls together so that they meet at right angles and are perpendicular to the base. At this point you should be able to remove the glass supporting the back wall, as the structure should be able to stand on its own. Fill in any gaps in the fronting seams and let it stand untouched for ten minutes.

Once the frosting has hardened and the structure is stable, you can put the roof on, one side at a time. Start by putting a line of frosting along the raised edges of the front, back and side. Then lower the roof piece carefully into place. The roof may not want to stay put. To prevent it from sliding off while it is drying, place a glass or cup underneath or pushed up against the roof for support. Repeat the gluing process with the other roof piece, making sure that the two meet as close together as possible at the top of the house. Sometimes the two don't come very close at all, don't worry about this; the gap can be filled by frosting. While the two roof pieces are drying into place, fill in the gap at the very crown of the house with frosting. Let the house set for 10 minutes or until it seem secure.

Decorating

Now is the fun part – adding candy decorations to your gingerbread house. At this stage, there is no right or wrong way to do it. Everything is a matter of personal taste. A general suggestion would be to use as many different colors and as many different kinds of candy as possible in your decorations. Some common candy to use is red hots, gumdrops, candy canes, rectangle hard candies, chocolate bars, sugar wreaths, tootsie rolls, pretzel sticks, cereal, and whatever else is available or looks interesting. Lots of candies can be used to decorate; you might want to experiment to see what you like.

Chocolate bars...such as Hershey's plain milk chocolate bars can be used for windows and doors. For the front door, use three squares together, standing vertical. Windows can be single squares or bigger if you are getting more elaborate.

Red Hots...can be used everywhere on your gingerbread house. They are great lined up along the crown of the roof and then down the edges and along the bottom of the roof. If you are doing shingles on the roof, then you can put a red hot every place the lines of frosting cross. They can also be used as a door knob on the front door.

Tootsie Rolls...have multiple uses as well. They can be used to build a chimney on top of the house. A favorite idea is to make a log pile out of tootsie rolls on one side of the house. To do that they can either be used whole, or cut into quarters and rolled round

again. You can mold them by making them pliable with the heat of your hand. Either way, glue them into a pile and then add a generous pile of “snow” (icing) on top.

Sugar Wreaths...are a great idea to decorate the front door. They can be an inexpensive purchase at candy stores. The wreaths can be white, red, or green and are made out of sugar.

Rectangle Hard Candies...can be used as paving stones to make a path leading to the front door of the house. Place them side by side in a grid maybe three wide and wind a path out to the edge of the base. Then fill in the gaps in between the candies with icing and maybe add colored sprinkles on top of the icing for added color and sparkle.

Gumdrops...are great for bushes or as fence posts. As a bush, you can pile them into a pyramid and then pile “snow” on top. As fence posts, they can either line the base on their own, or alternate with candy canes laid on their edges to make a more varied border.

Candy Canes...can be used as part of a fence or propped up against the house for decoration. If you have a hard time getting it to stand up straight, use a gum drop as the base. Use frosting to stick the gum drop to the base of your board and then stick the candy cane into the gumdrop.

Icing...can be used in several locations on your gingerbread house. Use it to make icicles hanging from the roof, and to make shingles on the roof. Mostly, the frosting is used for snow on top of everything including windows, fences, bushes, log piles, and anything else. Also, you can add a thick pile of icing at the base of the walls. It will help make the house more stable and hide the edges.

Most of the candy is available at supermarkets, candy stores, and any other location that sells candy. Try experimenting with new candies and with new decorations. Remember, there is no right or wrong in making gingerbread houses.

If you have the time, allow a day or so in between steps. If the bottom of the house is dry and strong, you will have fewer problems with the roof. If the roof is dry and strong, it will hold the weight of all the candy you plan to put on it. You can work on the landscape while the house dries.

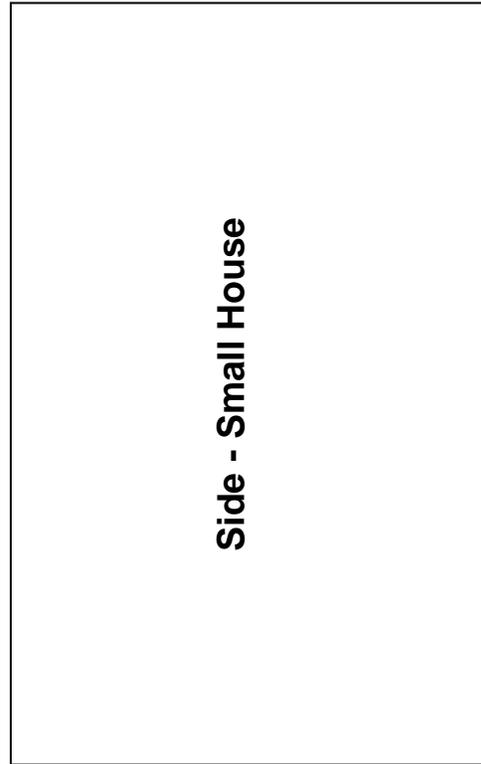
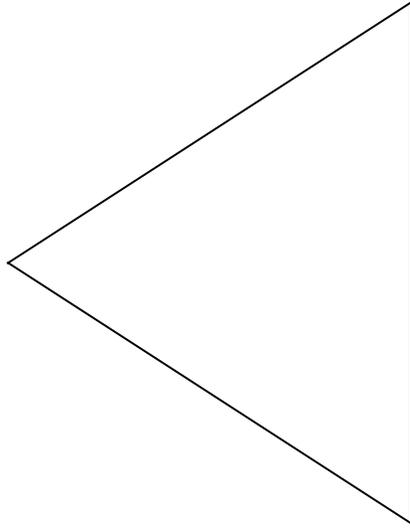
Books Related to Gingerbread Houses

Gingerbread Things to Make and Bake - Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992; Teresa Layman and Randy O'Rourke

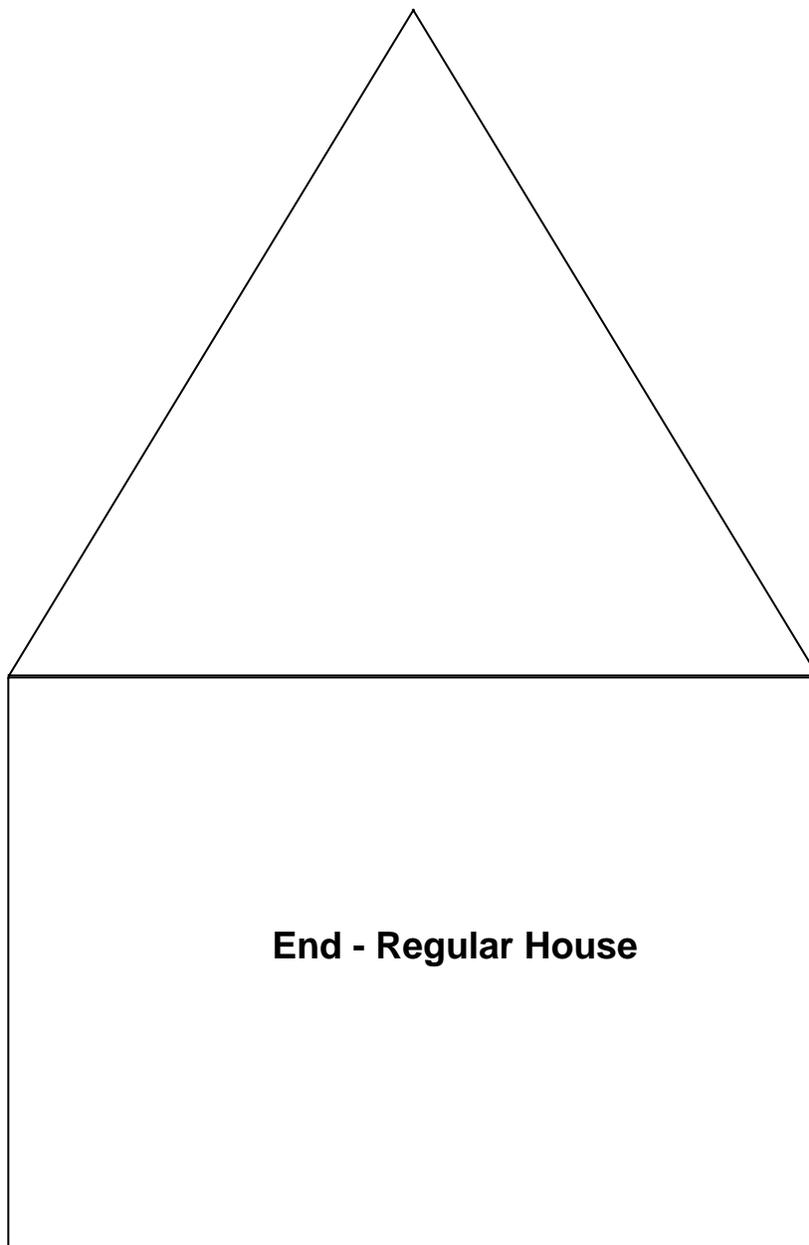
Joy of Gingerbread Making - Patti Hudson, 2714 Royal Road, Lancaster, PA 17603

The Making and Baking of Gingerbread Houses - Crown Publishing Co., 1984; Lauren Jarrett, Nancy Nagel

Cut-out Pieces for Small Gingerbread Houses



Cut-out Pieces for Regular Gingerbread Houses



Cut-out Pieces for Regular Gingerbread Houses

