

Gingerbread House

Basic Instruction Manual



The Simsbury Celebrates Committee 2017

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Choosing Your Design

Equipment

- Poster board or cardboard (file folders and cereal boxes work as well).
- Paper
- Scissors
- Masking tape
- Ruler and/or T-square
- Pencil

Consider

- Size (max size- 2 feet x 2 feet x 2 feet)
- Complexity
- Style/Theme
- Time –to devote to building and decorating the house.

Creating a gingerbread design is not as difficult as one would imagine. There are two ways to proceed (outside of buying a premade kit).

The first way is to use a template or pattern. There are many online websites and books that have wonderful options (see Appendix). The second option is to create an original design.

You may skip the following sections of this chapter if you are planning on using a premade/store bought kit.

Using a Template/Pattern

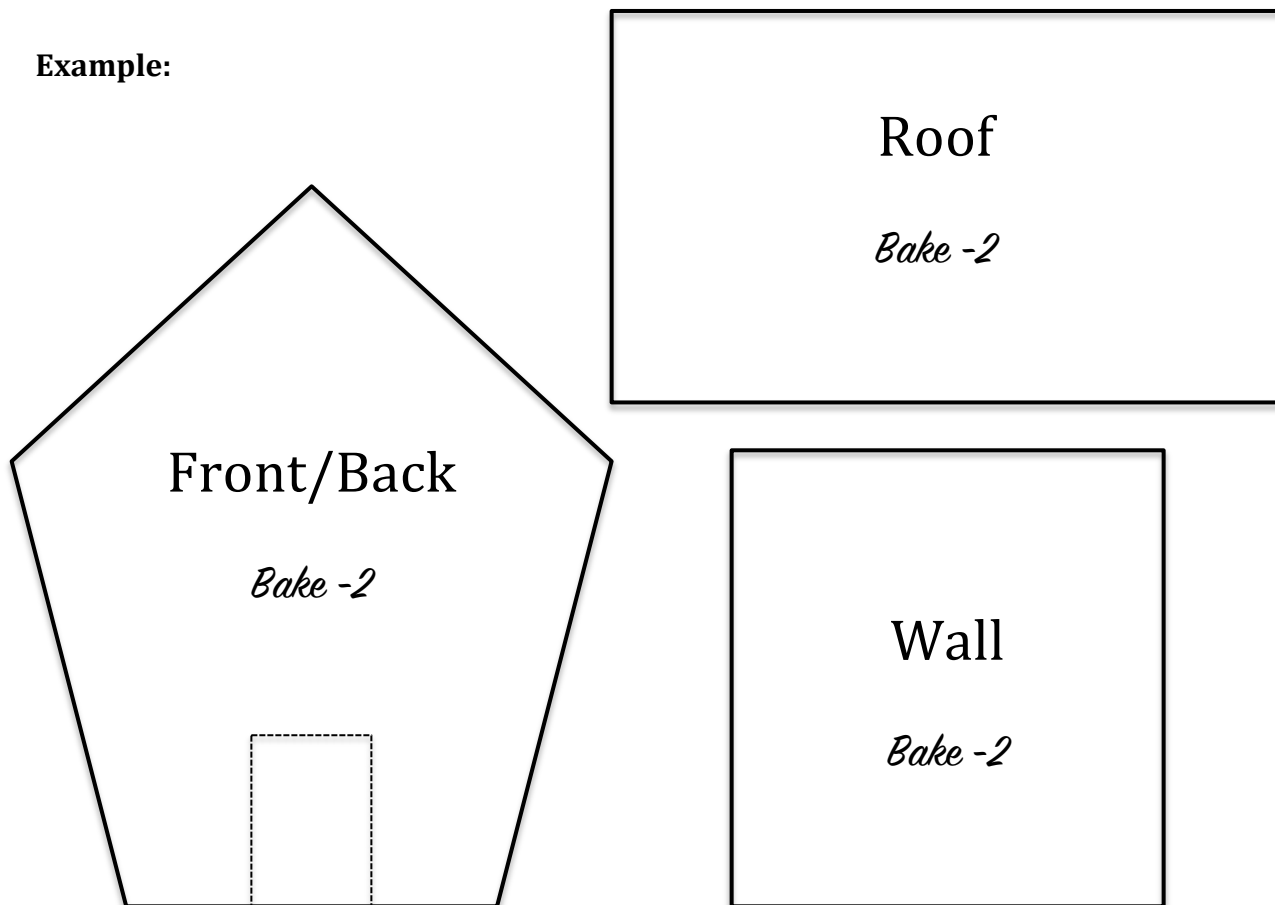
Print and cut out pattern templates. (If pattern needs to be enlarged, do so with a copy machine). Label pattern pieces. For additional guidance as to how to build the house, you can trace your templates on poster board or cardboard (file folders and cereal boxes work as well), then cut out and assemble house with tape. This allows you to be more familiar with how the house is to be constructed prior to baking. (See Appendix for links to websites and books that offer templates.)

Original Design:

Design a house by cutting out pieces of poster board or cardboard for the walls, roof, and chimney using a ruler. For a basic house, cut out one front/back wall, one side wall and one roof piece. Trace these pieces on the remaining cardboard to complete your design. Once you have all the pieces cut out in cardboard and are happy with how they fit together, you can trace the original pieces on paper and mark with the number of duplications you will need to bake. For example, a front wall will need to be marked "Bake -2" to remind you to bake two pieces - one for the front wall and one for the back wall. This will give you all the pieces you need to build a full house. The paper templates are what you will be using when you are cutting out the dough.

Don't forget to cut windows and a door in some pieces, as well as an opening to add battery operated lights!

Example:



After you have made your paper templates, assemble your cardboard house pieces with tape to use as an indicator/reminder of how the pieces need to be put together for your final gingerbread assembly.

*The Base**

A Gingerbread House needs a strong steady base that can support the weight of the house. If the base bends, often it will fracture the royal icing on top and possibly cause the house to fall apart.

Here are some base options:

Remember the base may not be bigger than 2 feet x 2 feet in size.

- A cutting board
- A large serving tray
- Stacked foil covered cardboard or cake circles (Only recommended for houses that are small.)
- A Lazy Susan plate
- Plywood (Recommended for houses that are large.)

*** The base and the battery-operated lighting are the only non-edible materials allowed in the competition.**

Basic Gingerbread House Recipe

You may skip this chapter if you are planning on using a store bought kit.

Equipment

- Mixer or electric hand beater
- Parchment paper
- Rolling Pin
- Sharp knife or pizza cutter
- Spatula
- Cookie sheets
- Pattern/template pieces (from ***Choosing your Design*** section.)
- Impression mats (optional)

Gingerbread House Ingredients

This recipe makes a strong and dense cookie-perfect for building a sturdy Gingerbread House.

- 2 C granulated white sugar
- 1 C plus 2T brown sugar
- 1 C solid vegetable shortening
- 4 eggs
- 3 T molasses
- 1 1/2 t salt
- 2 t baking soda
- 1 T ginger
- 1 T cinnamon
- 6 C flour

Making the Dough

1. Cream the shortening and sugar in a stand mixer. Add one egg at a time, beating until fluffy. Add molasses.
2. In separate bowl- add flour, salt, baking soda, cinnamon and ginger.
3. Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients one cup at a time.
4. Once the dry ingredients are incorporated, turn off mixer. This should be very stiff dough. If dough is too soft - roll into large balls and cover in plastic wrap. Place in fridge for about an hour.

Rolling and Cutting

1. Roll and cut large pieces of dough directly onto lightly floured parchment paper that is the size of the cookie sheet. Using a slightly damp rag to wipe down counter underneath will help the parchment paper from slipping.
2. Lightly flour rolling pin.
3. Roll dough to a generous 1/8 inch.
4. Place parchment paper and dough on cookie sheets.
5. Set in freezer for about 15 minutes to harden slightly. This will make the dough much easier to cut.
6. Remove dough from freezer.
7. Lay the pattern pieces on the dough. Sprinkle additional flour on dough to ensure that pattern pieces do not stick.
8. Using a sharp knife or pizza cutter -trace around the paper stencils. (Don't forget to cut out any open doors or windows that are on your pattern pieces.)
9. Lift away excess dough with small spatula or knife.
10. Be sure to leave space between the pieces as the dough does expand slightly while baking.

Embossing (Optional)

There are many textures that can be used for a Gingerbread House. Impression mats will create these textures. They are sold online or at crafting and hobby stores.

Some popular impression mat options include:

- Brick
- Stone
- Wood grain

Embossing is done prior to baking.

Baking

1. Bake at 375 degrees for about 10- 14 minutes. The intention is to slightly over bake (short of burning) the dough. If dough is under baked it may not be rigid enough for construction.
2. As soon as dough comes out of the oven, gently place pattern pieces back onto cooked dough and cut away any areas that have expanded. Careful, because cookie sheet is hot!
3. Let the pieces cool completely on a flat surface – overnight preferably. If you must cool a few pieces on top of one another make sure to use parchment paper in between.

Feel free to bake pieces in advance. Baked gingerbread will last months (for construction purposes) if stored in a cool dry area.

Basic Royal Icing Recipe

Equipment

- Mixer or electric hand beater
- Piping bags
- Rubber bands or bag ties
- Decorator tips for piping bag
- Toothpick
- Spatula

Royal Icing Ingredients

- 5 Tablespoons of meringue powder or dried egg whites (found at grocery and hobby stores).
- ½ to 2/3 cup of water
- 1 tablespoon of lemon juice
- 8 cups of powdered sugar
- Gel or paste food coloring (optional)

Making the Royal Icing

1. Combine the meringue powder (or dried egg whites) with the water and lemon juice in a stand mixer or with a hand beater.
2. Gradually add the powdered sugar on slow speed.
3. Beat the icing on medium speed until white, light and fluffy.

Icing used for construction must be on the thicker side and for some décor should be on the thinner side. To make icing thicker, add powdered sugar. To make icing thinner, add water.

Coloring Royal Icing

Icing can be changed into any color using gel or paste food coloring. (Liquid food coloring adds too much water to the icing.) Hobby stores and grocery stores sell several reliable brands.

1. Place a small amount of icing in small bowl or cup.
2. Add paste coloring with a toothpick and gel coloring by the drop. (A small amount of color goes a long way.)
3. Continue to add color and mix icing until desired color is achieved.

Royal Icing Consistencies

Thick Royal Icing

Thick royal icing is used to assemble the house. It is the correct consistency to cement together walls, roofs and anchor the house to its base. Construction icing must be thick enough to hold the gingerbread pieces together but fluid enough to travel through the piping bag.

How to tell: Stick a spatula into the frosting...it should remain standing.

Medium Thick Royal Icing

Medium thick royal icing is used to create trees, wreaths and other decor. It does not need to function as cement.

How to tell: When mixing the icing it should have stiff peaks that stay up. Just the top of the peak should bend.

Medium Thin Royal Icing

Medium thin royal icing is used to create icicles hanging from a house as well as more detailed scrolled icing work using a finer tip.

How to tell: When mixing the icing it should have peaks that sag. If the peak disappears into the icing, it is too thin.

Flood Royal Icing

Flood icing is as thin as syrup. It is used to “color in” a surface. Outline the area you want to “color in” with a medium thick royal icing and let it dry. Then add the flood icing with a piping bag. The perimeter you made with the medium thick icing will contain the flood icing.

Tip: use toothpick to drag icing into small corners.

How to tell: When mixing icing, the dropped icing melts back and disappears into a flat surface of icing in about 10 seconds.

Cover icing when not in use with slightly damp paper towel. For overnight storage cover with damp paper towel and plastic wrap.

*Decorating Ideas**

Browse through your supermarket's cereal and candy aisles. There will be plenty of inspiration for decorating the house, yard and accessories. Here are some ideas to give you a start.

Even if you have purchased a premade/store bought kit these ideas can help bring some uniqueness to your project.

The House

Siding

- Royal icing with food coloring
- Cut out strips of fondant (Can be purchased online or in craft stores.)
- Brick embossing (Done prior to baking.)
- Large pretzel sticks for the appearance of a log cabin

Roofing

- Necco Wafers
- Cereal (i.e. Shredded Wheat, Honey Grahams)
- Sticks of gum
- Colorful candies

Windows

- Melted hard candies- for glass
- Gelatin sheets- for glass
- Royal piping to make window panes
- Gum- for shutters
- Round cookies cut in ½ and faced backwards- for shutters

Porch Steps

- Wafer cookies
- Rectangular cookies

Chimney/Stonework

- Jelly beans
- Brick embossing
- Raisinettes
- Nuts
- Candy rocks
- Pieces of Necco Wafer
- Pieces of red licorice
- Colorful candies

Porch Pillars

- Peppermint sticks

Landscape

Ground Cover

- Shredded coconut- for snow
- Shredded coconut with green food coloring- for grass
- Green or white sprinkles - for grass or snow
- Crushed chocolate cookies- for dirt
- Ground coffee- for dirt
- Crushed graham crackers- for sand
- Brown sugar- for sand
- Blue icing or piping gel- for water
- Melted blue hard candies- for water
- Blue taffy candy flattened and shaped- for water
- See Chimney/Stonework for stone walkways

Trees and Bushes

- Sugar cones with piped green icing
- Green fondant
- Rice cereal treats made with green food coloring
- Rolos for potted plants

Other

Snowmen

- Marshmallows with pretzel arms

Fences

- Round pretzels connected

Snow

- A dusting of confectionary sugar
- Royal icing- for icicles (adding snow and icicles are also helpful for hiding any imperfections.)

** Attach decorations with royal icing with or without food coloring.*

Assembling the House

Before assembling a Gingerbread House it is crucial that you first decorate all four walls. It is a lot easier to work with gravity rather than against it. Just make sure your decorated walls are fully dried and the icing is completely hardened prior to assembly.

You Will Need

- A supportive base
- Decorated gingerbread walls
- Gingerbread roof panels
- Thick royal icing in piping bag with large open tip
- Canned food and jars to use as temporary support
- Clean dishtowels

Attaching to Base

1. Lay soft dishtowels around base to gently place pieces you are not using.
2. Cover a can with a towel to provide padded support to exterior/decorated wall. This padding will help protect the decorations from being damaged.
3. Pipe a thick line of icing along bottom edge of your front wall.
4. Push wall firmly yet gently onto base.
5. Support interior side of wall with can and exterior side of wall with padded can.
6. Pipe royal icing in a zigzag pattern on interior side of front wall on edges where sidewalls will attach.
7. Pipe thick line of icing on bottom edge of sidewalls.
8. Press the sidewalls onto the base, lined up with the frosting on the front wall.
9. Use cans to support walls.
10. Continue assembly of the rest of the walls in the same manner.
11. To reinforce walls add zigzag icing along the inside corners of house.
12. Let walls dry. If roof is large and heavy, let walls dry over night. (Placing a roof on prior to structure completely drying could cause your house to collapse.)

Attaching Roof

1. Once walls are completely dry, attach roof panels one at a time.
2. Pipe a zigzag line of thick royal icing on top edges of front and back wall panels.
3. Press one roof panel in place and hold for 30 seconds. Support roof with can. (If roof continues to slip, the icing will need to be thickened with more powdered sugar.)
4. Attach the second roof panel. Hold in place for 30 seconds.
5. Pipe a line of icing across the top center ridge of the roof to cement the two roof panels together. Hold for additional 30 seconds.
6. Use cans if necessary to continue to support roof while it dries.

You have completed assembling your house. Now decorate the roof and add any additional accessories.

Good Luck!

Appendix

Books

A Year of Gingerbread Houses

By Kristine Samuell

Gingerbread Houses: *Baking and Building Memories*

By Nonnie Cargas

Making Great Gingerbread Houses: *Delicious Designs from Cabins to Castles, from Lighthouses to Tree Houses*

By Aaron Morgan and Paige Gilchrist

Websites

The Gingerbread Journal

www.thegingerbreadjournal.com

Gingerbread House Heaven

www.gingerbread-house-heaven.com

Sweetopia

www.sweetopia.net

For additional information and templates search the Internet for “printable gingerbread house templates”.