

A gingerbread house is the background for the title. It is decorated with white icing for windows and doors, and various candies like gumdrops and licorice for accents. The house is set on a base of white icing.

Gingerbread

Tips

Tools

Techniques

& Recipes

Jan Haverty

October, 2006

PREFACE

Hi there –

Welcome to the Gualala Arts Gingerbread House Workshop.

When I hear the words “gingerbread house”, I think of the Nutcracker Ballet and “Candy Land”, the board game. I think of the colors and patterns of ribbon candy, and the penny candy of my childhood. I remember the candy I ate at the movie theater. I also think of the marvelous aroma of goodies baking in my grandmother’s kitchen on Christmas morning. In essence, I think of confections. And so the gingerbread houses that I design and construct are totally decorated in candy and other sweet treats. These help create an edifice that appeals to the eye, the nose, the taste buds (if I dare) and to my sense of nostalgia. Gingerbread houses can also be decorated in seeds, nuts, pretzels, cereals and dried fruit, among other edibles. To achieve replicas of actual buildings, those materials are a necessity, so when you are baking, building and decorating your own houses, have fun; use your imagination and don’t be afraid to experiment.

Most of the writing I’ve done in the past has been technical: journal articles, instruction manuals and that sort of thing. My writing style tends to be factual rather than folksy. (Sorry about that.) This booklet is not meant to be a volume that you sit down with over a cup of coffee but rather a reference document that you use while you work.

All citations of products or product vendors are for reference only and not meant as an endorsement by the author. All address information, URLs and Internet information are thought to be accurate at the time of publication.

Enjoy !!

Jan Haverty
October, 2006

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WHERE TO START?

So, ah, you want to build a gingerbread house and have no idea where to start. That sounds familiar. The first decision to make is whether the house will be edible or ornamental. This will determine what materials you will need and how they will be handled.

After determining edibility, you will want to give some thought to whether there will be openings in the walls for windows and doors and whether there will be illumination inside the house. These are purely personal decisions as there is no right and no wrong way to design a house. A house with solid walls and windows, outlined in icing, can be just as attractive as one with cutouts and illumination behind decorations in the windows.

If you do decide to cut out the window openings, there will be yet another decision; will there be “glass” in the windows and what that “glass” will be made of. Cellophane can be used as window glass as can gelatin sheets or melted hard candy.

The size of the house will be your next major decision. Houses that are tall will definitely need bracing. (Popsicle sticks or chopsticks inside the house serve well as structural supports. Just stick them directly to the walls or glue them together to erect a house-shaped frame that slips inside the gingerbread walls.) Houses that are larger than 8-10 inches in any dimension will probably benefit from bracing, as the last thing you want is a wall that cannot support the weight of the roof. (Some real-life engineering here might be helpful. If you need help, this is a good way to get friends and family involved who are technically savvy.)

Accessories in the landscaping around the house complete the illusion of a miniature home as well as making the house itself appear larger.

AFTER THE BEGINNING

Laying a Foundation

Now that we have the major decisions made, this is getting exciting. We need to look at the dimensions of the house. A good size for your first house would be about 5" x 4" x 5" high. I know this sounds REALLY small, but, trust me, it is big enough to easily work on yet small enough to get it built and decorated in a reasonable timeframe. It is also small enough so that if you hate it, you can throw it away (or eat it). If the footprint for your house is 5" x 4", the base on which you place it should be at least 9" x 8" (or about 4 inches larger than the house).

The base for the house can be anything that can support the weight of the house, the icing, the decorations and the accessories. Masonite works well for me as does plywood, heavy corrugated cardboard or particle board. It is a good idea to glue some feet to the bottom of the base so you can lift the completed project more easily. Four blocks of wood make fine feet. You will need to cover the base in heavy-duty aluminum foil to waterproof it. If your aluminum foil is not wide enough to cover with a single sheet, join two pieces rather than overlapping. I usually put the aluminum with the "dull" side up and the "shiny" side down so if it does show through its icing covering, it will look like ice on the snow. Make sure the aluminum wraps around all four edges. I usually fold the corners and tape them securely. After assembly of the house, yard and accessories, a ribbon around the edge of the base makes a nice decorative touch.

Getting Decorations

You could bake your gingerbread now or you could GO SHOPPING for all the tiny decorations that your house will need. This will not be an inexpensive trip so make sure your wallet can cover some expense. The decorations that I use are always candy, chewing gum and other sweet treats. They are colorful and tend to be sized correctly. The scale of the decorations and accessories relative to the house is important. How many times have we seen a real-life home with a yard full of Christmas decorations that seemed less attractive because they were either too large or too small? Lists of candies and vendors (of both candies and other decorations) can be found in the Appendix.

Plans, Patterns and Molds

There is still one more step before production can actually begin. You need a pattern or mold for your house. If you will be making many gingerbread houses or if gingerbread house construction will become a family tradition, consider purchasing a cast-iron mold. This will eliminate the need for rolling the dough and your house pieces are guaranteed to fit together. Sources for a mold are listed in the Appendix. If you feel that a mold is too confining and you want to create a larger or more complex masterpiece (You brave soul.), you will have to design and create a pattern. Unless you have architectural skills (or have a friend who does), I'd suggest using or adapting a pattern from a publication. Just about every book on gingerbread houses has patterns that can be copied directly. Cardboard (from a cereal box or a file folder) is good for a single-use pattern. Multiple use patterns can be made from very thin plastic. Be sure to test-fit the pattern pieces (taping them together) to make sure the house roof will fit the walls and the entire house

will stand. If you make your own pattern, if any house pieces aren't symmetrical, be sure to reverse the pattern for the opposite side of the house.

MIXING, ROLLING AND BAKING

Choosing a Recipe

So, we now have the base for the gingerbread house, the pattern, the decorations for the house and it is time for what most people feel is the most challenging and least interesting part – making the dough, rolling and cutting the house sections and baking. This might not have the appeal of playing with the icing and the candy, but the kitchen will smell wonderful with the scent of warm gingerbread. (This is where you will have trouble with friends and family members who will want to do taste tests. Try baking some cookies from the “scraps” for them. More on this later.)

Check a few gingerbread dough recipes and find one that you will be comfortable with. You probably want to use readily available ingredients for your first house. Various books make a note that baking soda in the dough will cause it to rise and become “fluffy”. Also, eggs in the recipe will cause the gingerbread to be more of a cake and less of a cookie – not good for construction. So choose your recipe accordingly. If you want to tint the dough to achieve a color, use a recipe that uses corn syrup rather than molasses. Also, use light brown sugar rather than dark brown sugar. If you do tint your gingerbread, try using paste food colorings rather than liquid.

Mixing the Dough

If you can’t bear the thought of all that mixing and baking, there are pre-baked gingerbread house kits that are available. A list of sources is in the Appendix. However, if you like playing with your food, this may be the opportunity of a lifetime. Mix up the dough according to the recipe. Gingerbread dough is thick and stiff – almost crumbly. A “stand” type mixer will save you a lot of elbow grease (and perhaps the sorrow of burning out the motor of a less powerful mixer). If you don’t have a “stand” type mixer, be prepared to do the final mixing of the dough with your hands.

IF THE RECIPE CALLS FOR THE DOUGH TO BE REFRIGERATED OR CHILLED, THEY REALLY MEAN IT. I scrape the dough out of the mixing bowl onto a sheet of waxed paper and then roll the dough and paper into a log and pop it into the refrigerator. Whenever you are working with the dough, keep it as cold as possible. The cooler the dough, the less sticky it will be. Also, handle the dough as little as possible as the heat and oil from your hands will make the dough increasingly sticky.

Rolling the Dough – Measuring Thickness

After chilling the dough, it is time to find the rolling pin, an appropriate flat pan for baking, your pattern pieces, a knife or other dough cutter, a spatula and it is time to preheat the oven. If you aren’t an experienced baker, preheating is another step that is crucial to your baking success. (In other words, don’t mess this up by trying to save a few minutes.) If you are baking on dark colored cookie sheets, either adjust the oven temperature down about 25 degrees (and bring up the baking time a few minutes) or cover the cookie sheets with aluminum foil. This will help the baked product to not become too brown.

You want to roll the dough to 3/8 inch thick for walls that will support the roof and 1/4 inch thick for non-supporting pieces (like a chimney or roof). Thicker house sections might be necessary for bigger houses. Any rolling pin can be used. Marble pins can be chilled along with the dough.

O.K., so how do you measure dough thickness and make sure it is reasonably uniform? I've never had much luck with the direct measurement method so I purchased a set of rubber bands of different thickness that fit nicely over my rolling pin. Sources for these are listed in the Appendix. I slip the correct size band on each end of my pin and the pin is held exactly the correct distance from the sheet – magic. A second method is to find pieces of wood that are the correct dimension (3/8 inch or 1/4 inch) and place them on either side of the dough and roll the edges of the pin on those.

Gingerbread dough is fragile stuff. Be sure to roll gently and evenly. I generally find that rolling in one direction is easier on the dough than rolling back and forth. It will be obvious what direction is correct. Rolling in one direction, the dough will flake up and in the other it lays down nicely.

Cutting and Moving the Unbaked Pieces

Any places that the dough is patched will show in the final baked product so handling it carefully is important. If I do have to patch, I rub the joint gently with my fingers to heat the dough slightly. Also, the house sections will distort if moved with a spatula so rolling the dough directly on the cookie sheet or on a piece of parchment is important. (Hint: If you are rolling dough directly on the cookie sheet, place a damp towel under the cookie sheet to keep it from sliding across the counter top.) If you opt to use parchment, the parchment supports the house sections when transferring them from the rolling board to the cookie sheet. A totally elegant piece of equipment is a Silpat, a piece of silicone rubber that can be used to roll out the dough and the dough with the Silpat are placed on the cookie sheet. This can be used instead of parchment paper. It is expensive but can be used many times. Unless you have used a Silpat successfully, I'd recommend the parchment method.

All the references that describe rolling gingerbread dough assume that the dough will be rolled out across the entire cookie sheet with nice even edges. WRONG !! First, my rolling pins are 3 inches shorter than the width of the cookie sheet. Then, as I roll, my dough usually forms an oval with totally jagged edges (rather than a rectangle) so placing the patterns and cutting house sections can be difficult at best. So, what to do? WHAT TO DO? I have two suggestions:

Suggestion 1: Divide your dough in half. Place one half back in the refrigerator. You roll the first half of your dough over half of the cookie sheet (the top part – the part farthest from you); you place the patterns and cut those sections. You then repeat the process with the other half of the dough on the part of the cookie sheet closest to you. Be very careful not to roll over your earlier house sections.

Suggestion 2: Cut several pieces of parchment that are smaller than the cookie sheet. Use the parchment pieces one at a time, rolling dough and getting as many house sections on each piece of parchment as possible. Arrange the parchment with the house sections on the cookie sheet.

Most recipes call for lightly flouring the rolling pin, your hands and other implements that you use for the gingerbread. Excess flour should be brushed off the dough with a pastry brush.

To cut the individual house sections, place the pattern pieces directly on the dough. A light coating of cooking spray will help keep the pattern pieces from sticking to the dough. Allow at least ½ inch between pattern pieces to allow for expansion. Using a sharp knife for corners and a pastry wheel (or small pizza cutter) for straight edges, cut the dough along the pattern edges. If you have windows or doors to cut out, do them first. Pick up the dough from between the house sections as you cut. These “trimmings” can be re-rolled for more house sections or they can become wonderful treats for the friends and family who will soon appear in the kitchen for a taste test. If the “trimmings” are re-rolled, do so carefully as air pockets can be incorporated that will then become structurally damaging bubbles in the house.

Baking

You will want to bake small sections separately from large ones as the baking times will vary with size. When the sections are scheduled to come from the oven (per the recipe), check the dough. If you touch the house sections in the center (Don’t be afraid of this.) you shouldn’t leave a fingermark. If you leave a mark, keep baking. I usually bake the gingerbread house sections until they are almost burned as the longer they bake, the drier they become and the harder they are. When you do take the gingerbread sections from the oven, if there are any air bubbles, pop them immediately and press the piece with an oven mitt to flatten it out.

After taking the pan out of the oven, allow it to sit undisturbed for a few minutes to allow the pieces to “set” and harden. At this time, inspect them for flatness and fit to the pattern. While the gingerbread is still soft, you can “fine tune” the house sections trimming them if necessary so they match the pattern. After removing the sections with the parchment from the cookie sheet, place them on a flat, flat, flat rack to cool. This should be away from sources of water like a running dishwasher. (If you have the luxury of time, you might want to do this entire process of mixing, rolling and baking on a sunny, dry day as gingerbread dough is incredibly good at absorbing water.) After the house sections are cold, if they feel soft, reheat the oven and pop them in to bake again for a few minutes. Even after cooling do not stack the house sections. Keep them flat in a single layer.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

When the house sections are all totally cooled, LET THE FUN BEGIN ! Don't even think of keeping the kitchen clean during the next phase of construction. After you start working with the royal icing, you will find it all over the countertops, the cabinet fronts, the floors and perhaps even all over you. Assembling a gingerbread house with family or friends can be half the fun.

Test Fit the Pieces

Before I mix up the icing, I test-fit the house sections. I use a grater or micro-plane as a rasp to flatten the edges of the sections for nicer corners and better fit. I also angle the edges of the roof sections that will form the ridge of the roof. Check the flat sides of the house sections. One side will be flat and more browned. The other will be "lumpy" and more rugged-looking. Decide which side will be outside your gingerbread house and be sure to keep all the sections the same.

A major design decision comes next. Where on the base will the gingerbread house be set? Will the house be in the middle of the base with accessories all around or will it be in the back or corner with a decorated garden in front? If you are planning a Christmas tree as an accessory, be sure to give both the tree and the house sufficient space.

Mixing the Icing

Now it is time to mix the icing. This is both the "cement" that holds together the house sections, the "glue" that holds the decorations and the "snow" that covers just about everything. Traditional royal icing is made from egg whites and confectioners (powdered) sugar. My favorite recipe (found in the Appendix) also calls for cream of tartar. I have seen recipes for and arguments for using commercial meringue powder rather than egg whites. I have always had good luck with the traditional recipe and as my houses are for decoration and not for eating, the possible hazards of using raw eggs are not an issue.

So, once again, find a recipe that works for you. Also, find your "stand" type mixer or a similar electric mixer that can whip the eggs and sugar. Most of the references that I've read, state that royal icing cannot be overbeaten so don't worry about using a powerful mixer. You have to whip the egg/sugar mixture until really, really stiff peaks form (that don't sag a bit) when you pull out the beater. The color will also be glossy white. If your icing isn't stiff enough, it will fail to hold your house together.

Royal icing is incompatible with grease of any type. So, be sure your mixer bowl and beaters and tools are clean. (I run mine through the dishwasher.) Also be sure your pastry bag and tips haven't been used for butter cream icing. After mixing the icing, be sure to keep a damp towel over the top of the bowl (or use a tight fitting lid) as the icing will crust over quickly. Royal icing will keep for a long time without refrigeration. I've kept it for over a week. I just rebeat slightly before using it again. If you are coloring the icing, this is the time to do it. I always use paste food coloring rather than liquid.

Pastry Bags and Tips

Pastry bags can be purchased as disposable plastic or re-usable plastic or they can be made from parchment (Yeah, right. Maybe you can do origami.) I prefer to use disposable icing (or pastry) bags. They are inexpensive enough that I can dispose of them after a day's use and I can use several at the same time with different tips or different color icings. I also always use a tip coupler as it allows me the flexibility of changing tips without emptying the bag. I place the coupler inside the bag and cut the end of the bag just below the "threads" of the coupler. I place the decorative tip on the outside of the bag and secure it with the coupler ring. Be careful when you cut the bag. If you cut it too high, it will be useless. To change the tip, I unscrew the coupler ring, pop off the old tip and put on the new tip followed by the coupler ring. To fill the bag, hold the bag in one hand (or stand it up in a large water glass) and fold the top of the bag over your hand (or over the edge of the glass). With a spoon, place the icing in the bag. If you are doing delicate work, only use a small amount of icing. Either fold the top of the bag several times or apply a twist-tie to close the top.

Ease some icing out the tip of the bag by gently squeezing the bag from the top (like a toothpaste tube). Practice on a piece of aluminum foil or waxed paper until you get control of the icing and the desired effect. When you are done "piping" the icing, wrap the tip of the bag in a damp paper towel to keep the tip from clogging.

Unless you have a small table or island in your kitchen to work on, it might be good to place the base for the gingerbread house on a lazy Susan so you can turn it to easily work on all sides. I usually spread icing on the aluminum foil covered base before I start assembling the house. An angled spatula helps here. By assembling the house in its place on the base, you give it a firm foundation, you don't have to move it and you contain any icing that falls from the house on the base and not on your kitchen floor.

Assembling the Walls

Start by "piping" a line of icing on the base that is the length of the back of the house. A medium size "round" or "open star" tip will do this nicely. I prefer the "open star" #16 or #18 tip as the grooves give a more decorative appearance on the outside edges. Place the back of the house on this line. Pipe icing along the bottom of this wall in both the front and the back of the wall. Pipe a vertical line of icing up one edge of the back wall and a horizontal line of icing on the base where a side wall will be place. Attach the side wall to the back wall. Pipe a line of icing along the bottom of the side wall both inside and outside. Pipe another line of icing up the inside and outside of the corner. Repeat the procedure with the second side wall.

If you are going to put scenery or reinforcing Popsicle sticks or chopsticks inside the house, do it now before the front wall is attached. To attach the front wall, pipe a vertical line of icing along the edges of the side walls and pipe a horizontal line on the base where the front wall will be placed. Place the front wall on the base, press it gently against the side walls and pipe icing inside and outside along the bottom of the front wall. Also pipe icing along the inside and outside of the corners where the front wall meets the side walls. The front and back walls should overlap the edges of the side walls.

Your house should now stand on its own but care should be taken not to disturb it until the icing “cement” is dry – at least 30 minutes, enough time for a cup of tea or a glass of wine.

Raising the Roof

WHEN THE ICING ON THE WALLS IS DRY AND THE WALLS FEEL SECURE, check the roof pieces for fit. This is where you discover whether your house sections are REALLY FLAT. If a wall or the roof isn’t flat, the warp will be obvious. Never fear, that is why we have icing. You find the best fit that you can get and fill the gaps with lots of icing – a little at a time. Remember, the more icing you use, the more drying time you will need.

The roof might be designed to overhang the walls slightly and the overhangs need to be even on opposite sides. I usually use my fingers to judge when the roof is evenly set on the house. When you are comfortable with the fit, remove the roof sections and pipe icing on the top edges of half the house. Place one roof piece on the top and hold the roof piece in place while you carefully reach in the house to pipe icing on all 3 seams. Reinforce the outside of all the seams also. Just go slowly and carefully. If you waited long enough for the foundation cement to dry, this should not be difficult. If you didn’t wait long enough, or if your icing isn’t well enough beaten, you could knock the entire house down without huffing or puffing.

If you do knock the house down, DON’T PANIC. Just pick up the pieces and scrape the icing off the house sections. (This icing can be reused if it hasn’t hardened and dried. Simply put it back in the bowl with your remaining icing and beat slightly.) Wipe the last of the icing off the house sections with a slightly damp paper towel. Any icing that remains becomes the “snow” that always finds spots to rest on outside walls after a storm. If you really don’t want any snow on the walls, wait for the icing to dry completely and rub gently with a slightly damp cloth. The icing will wash right off. Allow the gingerbread to rest and try assembly again. Once baked, gingerbread is tough stuff. Besides, you can always cover up mistakes with candy decorations.

Allow this roof section to dry (another 30 minutes would be good) and then pipe icing on the top edges of the second half of the house. Place the last roof piece on the top and hold it for a few minutes. Reinforce the outside of the seams. You won’t be able to reinforce the seams inside as you did for the other pieces.

Please, please, please let your house rest overnight before you start decorating it.

DECORATING THE HOUSE

When the icing holding the house together is dry, dry, dry, you can start to play Candy Land” and starting decorating the house and placing the accessories in the yard. (If you want a chimney on the house, this is the time to assemble and install it.) The rule of thumb that I have always used with candy decorations is “the more the better”. I hate blank, brown gingerbread spaces. So I shingle the roof, decorate the ridge and eaves, outline doors and windows (adding muntins to separate the panes occasionally), add shrubbery, doghouses and Christmas “decorations” to just about every wall of the house.

Choosing the Candy

When I choose candy for decorations, I try to keep any house within the same color pallet i.e. I don’t mix pastels and bold colors. The bold colors make the pastels look washed out. When decorating a house, start at the bottom and go to the top. Also start on one side and go methodically around. I tend to do the major parts (windows, doors, roofs) on the first pass around the house and do the detail decorations (Christmas decorations, shrubbery etc.) next. If I feel that a house needs a little extra support, candy canes or stick candy can be “glued” to the corners of the house. These candy sticks also make great posts to hold up porch roofs. Decorating the eaves of the house (usually with icicles) and creating smoke for the chimney are last.

Shingling the Roof

After outlining the windows and doors, I usually shingle the roof next. Roof shingles can be anything that is reasonably flat. A list of possible shingle materials is in the Appendix. One of my favorite materials is chewing gum that I cut to size with a pair of scissors. When placing shingles, just put a dab of icing on the back of the shingle and stick it on. Start at the bottom and overlap the layers while staggering the joints just like the roof on your house. Also, like the roof on your house, be careful of the weight of the shingle materials. If the roof is too heavy, even the hardest, driest gingerbread roof section will sag. If you don’t want to shingle the entire roof, you can pipe a decorative pattern on the roof and use candies as accents. You can do the front and back roofs differently. Have fun and be inventive.

After covering the roof, I decorate the ridge. To do this, I pipe a large line of icing along the ridge. (This hides the top edges of the roof sections.) I then place candies all along the piped icing line. The side edges of the roof sections are similarly treated. Candy Buttons, Candy Kisses, Dots, or Sno Caps make a great effect.

Decorating the Walls

Shrubs can be made from tiny gingerbread trees or from gum drop-type spearmint leaves. Rice Crispy Treats and other candies that are conical will also work well.

There are several sources for the Christmas decorations for your house walls. Several vendors offer “sugar lay-ons” that are pre-made decorations (with good scale and detail) made entirely of sugar. These are fragile. An alternative are pre-made icing decorations that are less fragile but less detailed. Sources for both these are listed in the Appendix. A

third option is to make your own using “candy melts” and candy molds. Almost an infinite choice of Christmas theme candy molds are available. “Candy melts” are little discs of candy that are sold in chocolate or vanilla and various colors. These can be melted in a double boiler or in the microwave and poured into the mold. After refrigeration, the molded candy can be popped from the mold and “glued” onto the house. For multi-color molded candy decorations, a simple paint brush can be used to “paint” the inner surface of the mold with the desired colors in the desired places. The mold is then filled with whatever melted candy is available. (I use white as it won’t interfere with the color.) If you cannot get “candy melts” in the colors you need, you can always color the white candy after it is melted. Again, paste food coloring is preferred.

If you are truly creative, all sorts of shapes can be cut from fruit jells, gummies or fruit sheets and “glued” together. When placing decorations on the house, a pair of tweezers can be quite useful as are an angled spatula and pallet knives (available at art stores).

Icicles and Chimney Smoke

Icicles are great for hiding uneven roof lines on the front and the back. To make icicles, use the smallest round tip you have on your pastry bag. Squeeze some icing along under the roof overhang and periodically pull your tip away from the roof while still squeezing slightly. An “icicle” of icing will be created.

To make smoke for the chimney, you have two choices. You can pipe piles of round icing in a curve on a piece of aluminum foil (or waxed paper). Or you could pipe a pile of icing at the top of the chimney (attaching it to two walls in a corner). When this is dry, pipe a second pile (slightly smaller) on the top (and slightly beside) the first. Wait for this to dry and repeat, and repeat. The piles should decrease in size as you go along.

DECORATING THE YARD

When decorating the area around the house, start inside and work your way out. That way there is less risk of reaching over and destroying that lamppost that took you an hour to get to stand straight. (I know, I've been there, done that.)

Steps and Sidewalks

I always put steps and a sidewalk in front of my houses. At the end of the sidewalk there is usually a lamppost or two and maybe a fence or a mailbox. I put "toys" in the yard, planters (Reeses peanut butter cup miniatures), log piles (Tootsie Rolls or root beer barrels), blocks (caramels) signs (Alphabet pasta works well here if you aren't up to writing with a pastry bag and a very fine tip.) etc. as well as Christmas decorations. (Here the "sugar lay-ons" can be very useful.) Any of these items can be decorated with a pastry bag and icing. If you want to make decorations and apply them after they are dry, pipe the desired shape onto a sheet of aluminum foil (or waxed paper), wait overnight, remove them from the sheet and apply to the appropriate "toy". The key to making things look real is to build to scale. Your cute cottage-type house probably shouldn't have a huge front step or a huge Christmas decoration.

The front steps of a house can be Chiclets, chocolate rocks or pieces of a candy necklace cemented together as a stone front step would be. Haribo Pico-Balla are wonderfully colorful as front steps. The sidewalk can be "paved" in a similar material or just outlined in something like licorice laces and filled in with either shaped sprinkles (what I call edible "confetti", sanding sugar or just a thin layer coconut or edible glitter. Be sure to glue down the outline material with a thin line of icing as well as spreading a thin layer of icing to the sidewalk area before filling in with the paving material.

Lampposts and Fences

Lampposts are always a challenge. The trick is to keep them upright and straight until the "cement" icing hardens. A trick is to use a Life Saver or a Chuckles Ring as a base and to glue the lamppost inside with a mound of icing. Melted chocolate could also be used to help as cement. I usually wait until the lamppost is firmly attached before I attach the actual lamp. Anything that is long and straight can be used for a lamppost. Candy cigarettes make nice thin ones while stick candy or candy canes make thicker lamp posts with more presence. Gum Drops (both small or large) make excellent lamps. Although tricky to get to stay upright, marshmallow ice cream cones are wonderful as street lamps. I usually carefully cut the bottom of the cone and use a mound of icing to cement it to the base.

Fences can be made of anything that can be lined up. If something is tall and thin, turn it sideways. Fences can be made of a variety of different materials, set in a repeating pattern. Also a "wire fence" can be made of Gummy Spaghetti or licorice laces attached to "fence posts" like candy cigarettes using (You guessed it.) icing as glue. A list of possible fence materials is in the Appendix.

Trees

Now, let's talk trees. There are at least as many different ways to make trees as there are people who make them. There are the trees made from ice cream sugar cones. (Turn them upside down and have fun decorating with your pastry bag, an "open star" tip and green food coloring.) Trees can also be made of green gingerbread by cutting various size stars and stacking them in decreasing size. (A drinking straw or chopstick is useful in the center to hold the tree straight. If you use a support, poke a hole in the center of each star before baking.) Three dimensional trees can be made by gluing a tree-shaped green gingerbread cookie with two lengthwise-cut half cookies. (Attach one on the front and one on the back.) After assembling the trees, individual pieces of edible "confetti" or sprinkles can be used to decorate them as can small candies or nonpareils.

Finishing, Preserving and Moving

When your masterpiece is complete, choose a narrow decorative ribbon to glue to the edge of the base. Here, your glue gun or some rubber cement will be required. I have never gotten the icing to hold the ribbon. In the front of the base, at the center, an additional decoration can be placed if desired.




Preserving your gingerbread house is controversial. Any preservative that you use will render the house inedible. Spray polyurethane (matte finish) or spray clear acrylic sealer (available in craft stores) are possibilities. I have no experience with either so my advice is to enjoy your creation and when it begins to sag, melt or fade, recycle as much as you can.



If you will be moving your gingerbread house outside your home, it is best to be ready to do repairs. A "gingerbread first aid kit" should include a pastry bag with a couple of tips, a container of icing and various decorative candies. Bring this along with the gingerbread house and allow time to effect repairs. You have worked hard baking and building your masterpiece and you probably want it to look its best.

I think you probably have the idea now. When you make a gingerbread house, be brave. Bake the house sections well; whip the icing like crazy and take the time to let everything dry. ABOVE ALL, BE CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN.

POSSIBLE GINGERBREAD HOUSE DECORATIONS

<p>Roofing Materials (for shingles, peaks and eaves)</p>	 <p>Gummy Pasta</p>	 <p>Necco Wafers</p>
 <p>Chewing Gum</p>	 <p>Licorice Pieces</p>	 <p>Sno Caps</p>
 <p>Candy Buttons</p>	 <p>Candy Kisses</p>	 <p>Smarties</p>
 <p>Dots</p>		
<p>Fence Materials</p>	 <p>Candy Canes</p>	 <p>Gummy Spaghetti</p>
 <p>Candy Corn</p>	 <p>Reindeer Corn</p>	 <p>Creme Savers</p>

<p>More Fence Materials</p>	 <p>Chuckles Jelly Rings</p>	 <p>Watermelon Slices</p>
 <p>Licorice Laces</p>	 <p>Candy Cigarettes</p>	
<p>Paving Materials (for sidewalks, roads and railroad tracks)</p>	 <p>Haribo Pico-Balla</p>	 <p>Candy Necklace</p>
 <p>Chicklets</p>	 <p>Chocolate “Stones”</p>	<p>Edible “Confetti” Sprinkles of various shapes Sanding Sugar</p>
<p>Accessory Materials (for street lamps, shrubs etc.)</p>	 <p>Gum Drops</p>	 <p>Spearmint Leaves</p>
 <p>Life Savers</p>	 <p>Marshmallow Ice Cream</p>	 <p>Stick Candy</p>

	Cones	
Other Miscellaneous Materials		
	Sugar “Lay-ons”	Icing Decorations

SOURCES FOR DECORATIONS FOR GINGERBREAD HOUSES

Old Time Candy Co.
350 Commerce Drive East
LaGrange, OH 44050
Phone: 440-355-4345

<http://www.oldtimecandy.com>

Source for candy from the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. Purchase on-line.

Taffy Town
55 W 800 S
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
Phone: 800-765-4770

http://www.taffytown.com/p_links.asp?pid=6

Manufacturer of Salt Water Taffy - wholesale only - url is for list of retail outlets.

Hometown Favorites, Inc.
1445 Miller Store Rd.
Virginia Beach, VA 23455
Phone: 888-694-2656

http://www.hometownfavorites.com/shop/candy_store.asp

Source for candy from the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. Purchase on-line.

HometownCandy.com
Phone: 215-392-4339

<http://nostalgicandy.com/>

Source for candy from the 1950's and 1960's. Purchase on-line.

Surf Supermarket
39250 S. Highway 1
Gualala, CA 95445
Phone: 707-884-4184
Source for interesting and decorative candies.

Gualala Supermarket
39225 S. Highway 1
Gualala, CA 95445
Phone: 707-884-1205
Source for interesting and decorative candies.

S & B Market
19400 S. Highway 1
Manchester, CA 95459
Phone: 707-882-2805
Source for interesting and decorative candies.

Cost Plus World Market
2685 Santa Rosa Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Phone: 707-526-0600
Source for interesting and decorative candies.

Beryl's Cake Decorating and Pastry Supplies
PO Box 1584
N. Springfield, VA 2215
Phone: 800-488-2749
<http://www.beryls.com/home2.htm>
Source for edible decorations and accents. Also a source for cake baking and decorating equipment. Purchase on-line.

Sugarcraft, Inc.
2715 Dixie Hwy.
Hamilton, OH 45015
Phone: 513-896-7089
<http://www.sugarcraft.com/catalog/holiday/xmas/xmas.htm#sugar%20shapes>
Source for sugar lay-ons and edible "confetti" of various shapes. Purchase on-line.

Country Kitchen SweetArt, Inc
4621 Speedway Drive
Fort Wayne, IN 46825
Phone: 260-482-4835
<http://www.countrykitchensa.com/>
Source for sugar lay-ons, cake decorations and accents, edible "confetti" of various shapes, cake decorating tools and baking equipment. Purchase on-line.

Winbeckler Enterprises
4680 Yellowstone Drive
Redding, CA 96002, U.S.A.
Fax: 775-243-4159
<http://www.winbeckler.com/index.htm>
Source for pre-baked gingerbread building sections, lights for inside gingerbread buildings, cake decorating tools and accents. Purchase on-line.

Wilton Enterprises
2240 W. 75th St.
Woodridge, IL 60517
Phone: 800-794-5866

<http://www.wilton.com/store/>

Source for just about anything you need for baking or decorating a cake. A source for pre-made icing decorations. Also a source for pre-baked gingerbread house kits. Purchase on-line.

The Baker's Catalogue
58 Billings Farm Road
White River Junction, VT 05001
Phone: 800-827-6836

<http://shop.bakerscatalogue.com/>

Source for edible “confetti” and decorative accents. Also a source for baking tools and equipment. Purchase on-line.

Kitchen Krafts
PO Box 442
Waukon, Iowa 52172-0442
Phone: 800-776-0575

<http://www.kitchenkrafts.com/>

Source for decorative accents and cake baking and decorating equipment and supplies. Purchase on-line.

Michaels Arts and Crafts
2775 Santa Rosa Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Phone: 707-591-9382

Source for candy “melts” and molds and cake decorating equipment. Also a source for pre-made icing decorations.

Nancy's Fancy
3480 Airway Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Phone: 707-546-2253

Source for candy “melts” and molds. Also source for cake baking tools and equipment, cake decorating equipment and supplies.

GINGERBREAD EQUIPMENT LIST

Don't let this list frighten you. You won't need all these tools. This is a comprehensive list of everything I could think of. As you progress through making your first gingerbread house, you will refine this list and get an idea of what is most useful for you.

Cutting boards and paring knives (small boning knife ??)

Pastry bag

Pastry bag couplers

Decorative icing tips

Metal spatulas

Rubber scrapers

Small and medium bowls for icing and candies

Cloths to cover icing

Forceps

Rolling pin

Rolling pin "bands"

Wooden pastry board

Pastry cutter

Pastry scraper

Double boiler

Candy molds

Paint brushes

Gingerbread mold

Grater

Scissors

Food color markers

Pans to bake gingerbread

Angled spatula

Electric "stand" mixer

Toothpicks

Hard plastic bowl scraper

Cooking spray

Wire rack for cooling

Small palette knives

SOURCES OF TOOLS FOR BUILDING GINGERBREAD HOUSES

Beryl's Cake Decorating and Pastry Supplies

PO Box 1584

N. Springfield, VA 2215

Phone: 800-488-2749

<http://www.beryls.com/home2.htm>

Source for cake baking and decorating equipment. Also a source for pre-baked gingerbread house kits. Also a source for edible decorations and accents. Purchase on-line.

Country Kitchen SweetArt, Inc

4621 Speedway Drive

Fort Wayne, IN 46825

Phone: 260-482-4835

<http://www.countrykitchensa.com/>

Source of rolling pin "bands". Source for cake decorating tools and baking equipment, sugar lay-ons, cake decorations and accents, edible "confetti" of various shapes. Purchase on-line.

Winbeckler Enterprises

4680 Yellowstone Drive

Redding, CA 96002, U.S.A.

Fax: 775-243-4159

<http://www.winbeckler.com/index.htm>

Source for lights for inside gingerbread buildings, cake decorating tools and pre-baked gingerbread building sections and decorative accents. Purchase on-line.

Wilton Enterprises

2240 W. 75th St.

Woodridge, IL 60517

Phone: 800-794-5866

<http://www.wilton.com/store/>

Source for just about anything you need for baking or decorating a cake. Also a source for pre-baked gingerbread house kits and pre-made icing decorations. Purchase on-line.

The Baker's Catalogue

58 Billings Farm Road

White River Junction, VT 05001

Phone: 800-827-6836

<http://shop.bakerscatalogue.com/>

Source for baking tools and equipment. Also a source for edible "confetti" and decorative accents. Purchase on-line.

Home Depot.com

http://www.homedepot.com/pre180/HDUS/EN_US/jsearch/product.jsp?pn=100428621

Source for a gingerbread house mold. Purchase on-line.

Amazon.com

http://www.amazon.com/NordicWare-German-Gingerbread-House-Mold/dp/B0000UM05S/sr=1-1/qid=1158081833/ref=pd_bbs_1/104-1336203-3115149?ie=UTF8&s=kitchen

Source for a gingerbread house mold. Purchase on-line.

Kitchen Krafts

PO Box 442

Waukon, Iowa 52172-0442

Phone: 800-776-0575

<http://www.kitchenkrafts.com/>

Source for cake baking and decorating equipment and supplies. Source of rolling pin “bands”. Also a source for decorative accents. Purchase on-line.

Cooking.com

2850 Ocean Park Blvd., Suite 310

Santa Monica, CA 90405

Phone: 800-663-8810

<http://www.cooking.com/>

Source for cake baking tools and equipment and decorating equipment. Also a source for the rolling pin “bands”.

<http://www.cooking.com/products/shprodde.asp?SKU=143030>

Purchase on-line.

Amazon.com

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0000DDZUD/qid=1138328907/sr=8-2/ref=pd_bbs_2?n=507846&s=home-garden&v=glance&tag2=culinarinthe-20

Source for rolling pin “bands”. Purchase on-line.

Michaels Arts and Crafts

2775 Santa Rosa Avenue

Santa Rosa, CA 95407

Phone: 707-591-9382

Source for cake decorating equipment and candy “melts” and molds. Also a source for pre-made icing decorations.

Nancy’s Fancy

3480 Airway Drive

Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Phone: 707-546-2253

Source for cake baking tools and equipment, cake decorating equipment and supplies. Also source for candy “melts” and molds.

SOURCES FOR GINGERBREAD HOUSES AND KITS

Wilton Enterprises
2240 W. 75th St.
Woodridge, IL 60517
Phone: 800-794-5866
<http://www.wilton.com/store/>

Country Store Catalog
5925 Country Lane
P.O. Box 990
Greendale, WI 53129-0990
Phone: 800-558-1013
<http://www.countrystorecatalog.com/>

Casual Living
5401 Hanger Court
Tampa, FL 33634
Phone: 800-652-2948
<http://www.casuallivingusa.com/>

HearthSong
PO Box 1050
Madison, VA 22727-1050
Phone: 800-533-4397
<http://www.hearthsong.com/>

Create a Treat
215 Jardin Drive
Concord, Ontario
Canada L4K 1X5
Phone: 905-761-8270
<http://www.createatreat.com/>

Beryl's Cake Decorating and Pastry Supplies
PO Box 1584
N. Springfield, VA 2215
Phone: 800-488-2749
<http://www.beryls.com/home2.htm>

RECIPES

Jan's favorite Gingerbread Recipe:

½ cup shortening
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup dark molasses
2 tablespoons cold water
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon salt

Cream together shortening, sugar, molasses and water.

Sift flour, spices and salt. Gradually add dry ingredients to shortening mixture and mix well. Dough will be stiff.

Chill overnight.

When using mold:

Grease or spray mold with vegetable spray. Press dough into the mold or roll out for 5 x 4 x 5 inch house.

Bake in pre-heated 350 degree oven for 25 minutes. Let gingerbread cool in mold for 10 minutes. Carefully remove each piece to cooling rack, flat side down.

Repeat process for second half of house.

When rolling dough and using patterns:

Roll dough to 3/8 inch thickness and cut out pattern pieces.

Bake in pre-heated 350 degree oven for 20-25 minutes. Let gingerbread cool on pan for several minutes before removing to wire rack for complete cooling.

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Jan's favorite Royal Icing Recipe:

3 egg whites at room temperature
¾ teaspoon cream of tartar
1 pound of 10X confectioner sugar – sifted

Combine ingredients in bowl and mix on high speed until very stiff peaks form (7 to 10 minutes). You can't overbeat.

Cover tightly and store at room temperature.

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Gingerbread Dough Recipe (for light or colored gingerbread)

6 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon cinnamon
1 teaspoons ginger
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups light corn syrup
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups packed light brown sugar
1 cup margarine

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Combine first 4 ingredients (flour through salt) in mixing bowl.

Combine remaining ingredients in a 2-quart saucepan. Stir constantly over medium heat until margarine is melted and sugar is incorporated.

Stir the liquid into the flour mixture. Mix well using “stand” type mixer or hands. Dough will be stiff.

Chill overnight. Roll the dough out to $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{8}$ ” thickness on parchment paper. Cut into shapes.

Bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until golden brown. Check for air bubbles after baking and poke them with a toothpick. When baking is done, allow pieces to cool for a couple of minutes then slide the parchment with the hot pieces onto a large cooling rack. Make sure all pieces lie flat.

PAST FESTIVAL GINGERBREAD HOUSES

Below are photos of gingerbread houses that were part of the Gualala Arts Festival of Trees in 2004. They are presented here as ideas for decorating and inspiration for your construction.











MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

Website dedicated to gingerbread creations:

<http://www.gingerbreadlane.com/>

Website with links to many things gingerbread:

<http://search.about.com/fullsearch.htm?terms=GINGERBREAD%20HOUSE>

Website with links to gingerbread and icing recipes:

<http://allrecipes.com/gingerbread-house.asp>

Website with instructions for designing and building a gingerbread house:

<http://allrecipes.com/advice/coll/all/articles/171P1.asp>

Website with link to “on-line” gingerbread house class:

http://www.kingarthurfleur.com/baking/online_list.php

Web address for photos of national champion gingerbread houses:

<http://www.abcnews.go.com/GMA/popup?id=348647&content=&page=1>

Web address for photos of Seattle, WA gingerbread house exhibit:

<http://www.syndic8.com/~jeff/blog/?p=368>

REFERENCES

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Christa Currie, Gingerbread Houses, Broadway Books, New York, 1994.

Aaron Morgan and Paige Gilchrist, Making Great Gingerbread Houses, Lark Books, New York, 2001.

Noonie Cargas, Gingerbread Houses: Baking and Building Memories, Krause Publications, Iola, WI, 1999.

Teresa Layman, Gingerbread For All Seasons, Abradale Press, New York, 1997.