

Gingerbread Houses

© 2012 Cindy Brown Bair

These notes are taken from several sources: a class taught by The Broadmoor's Chef Nathan Potter, articles I've collected over the years, and books. Every book, every article, and every online recipe is different. Some artists make interior supports, and some say it's cheating. Some want to eat their creations, and many say the gingerbread is too dry to eat. My experience is that most recipes work, and that any construction method is just fine. – Cindy Brown Bair

RECIPES & BAKING

Gingerbread Dough: Chef Nathan Potter's Recipe

This recipe is formulated for use at 6,000 feet – the altitude of Colorado Springs. *The two smaller recipes are based on weight-to-volume conversions, and both need to be tested.*

	Makes 25 pounds Builds one enormous, professional-size house	Makes 12 pounds Builds two fairly large houses	Makes 5 cups Builds one average-size house
In a 20 qt. mixing bowl, combine thoroughly:	2 lbs, 13 oz Canola oil	5 C Canola oil	1- $\frac{1}{4}$ C Canola oil
	2 lbs, 5 oz Sugar	4- $\frac{3}{4}$ C Sugar	1 C Sugar
	3 lbs Molasses	3- $\frac{3}{4}$ C Molasses	1- $\frac{1}{3}$ C Molasses
Next add:	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz Baking soda	2- $\frac{3}{4}$ t (scant 3 T) Baking soda	$\frac{3}{4}$ t Baking soda
	$\frac{1}{4}$ oz Salt	1- $\frac{1}{2}$ t Salt	$\frac{1}{3}$ t (scant $\frac{1}{2}$ t) Salt
	$\frac{1}{4}$ oz Powdered ginger	1- $\frac{1}{2}$ t Powdered ginger	$\frac{1}{3}$ t (scant $\frac{1}{2}$ t) Powdered ginger
	$\frac{1}{4}$ oz Nutmeg	1- $\frac{1}{2}$ t Nutmeg	$\frac{1}{3}$ t (scant $\frac{1}{2}$ t) Nutmeg
	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz Cinnamon	2- $\frac{3}{4}$ t (scant 3 T) Cinnamon	$\frac{3}{4}$ t Cinnamon
	5 lbs, 12 oz Bread flour	10- $\frac{1}{2}$ C (to 11 C) All-purpose flour	4 C (to 4- $\frac{1}{2}$ C) All-purpose flour
Flatten dough onto a sheet pan. Cover with a plastic bag. Roll pieces on a well-floured, parchment-lined aluminum sheet pan to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thickness. Cut shapes, remove excess.			
Bake 350° F for approximately 12 minutes. Dry in a slow oven until crisp throughout.			

Gingerbread Dough: Chef Randy Mikulas' Recipe

Blend these ingredients together with the paddle attachment on your electric mixer. Blend well, yet do not whip.

- 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. Butter
- 12 oz. Brown sugar
- 12 oz. Molasses
- 1 T. Baking soda
- 1 T. Ground ginger
- 1 T. Ground cloves
- 2 T. Ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ t. Salt

Finally, slowly and thoroughly, blend in:

- 4 lbs. all purpose flour
- 1 cup water

Do not refrigerate. Relax the dough for about 2 hours. It is now ready to roll.

Royal Icing: Chef Nathan Potter's Recipe

	Makes 3 pounds Enough for one big house	Makes 1 pound Enough for average-size house
Combine in an electric mixer. Beat until fluffy. Keep covered with a damp cloth and plastic, or a skin will develop and ruin the icing.	3 pounds Confectioners sugar	1 pound (3-¾ C unsifted) Confectioners sugar
	10 oz Egg whites	3-5 egg whites (large or jumbo eggs)
	Pinch Cream of tartar	1/8 t Cream of tartar
	¼ t Almond extract (optional)	

You'll need two types of Royal Icing: thicker for construction, and thinner for decoration. Thick icing should stick when a dab on your finger is turned upside down. Thin icing should barely flatten out when squeezed into a line.

Many recipes use meringue powder instead of eggs, because the raw egg whites aren't good to eat. But few gingerbread houses will ever be eaten (except for the candy decorations), so you can make either type of icing. In both types of recipes, the acidic cream of tartar is essential to drying the icing into a strong construction tool. If you want to color Royal Icing, use gel colors. If you texturize your gingerbread, make indentations at least 1/3 deep into your gingerbread pieces.

Baking

Gingerbread will usually grow a bit when it's baked. If the dough is overworked before baking, it may shrink. After baking, let your pieces cool slowly in the oven or on the counter. As the pieces cool they will become strong.

CONSTRUCTION

Constructing a gingerbread house is not a quick project. Many steps require stopping long enough for the icing to dry, perhaps for an hour or two.

Use a piece of plywood for your base. If you can't get plywood, you can glue together two or three layers of foam-core board. Thick Styrofoam covered with foil will also work. Cardboard is always too flimsy.

One advantage of making an interior support is, well, the support. Another is that you have realistic measurements for your gingerbread pieces. If you use an interior support structure, make it out of cardboard or foam-core.

Putting together the first four walls is probably the hardest part of construction. If you use a support structure, it's easier – squeeze a zigzag line onto the support wall to attach your gingerbread wall. With or without an interior support, place a line of icing on the base plus lines where the walls attach to each other. For added stability run a bead of icing on the inside of your building where the walls attach. Let the icing dry for a while before you continue.

If you need to make a piece smaller, either cut it with a very sharp knife or (better) shave it with a nutmeg grater. Either way, remove a little at a time.

Chef Nathan recommends building your roof separate from the house, then adding it when both the house and roof are dry and solid.

DECORATION

Royal Icing

Use baggies, rather than purchased decorating bags, to pipe Royal Icing for construction.

Most gingerbread creations involve snow. Royal Icing is the best medium for snow; pipe zigzag rows of icing, then use a clean finger to gently flatten areas. To make icicles, pipe a thin line of icing on the edge of the roof (or wherever), then pipe a small ball of icing and pull it downward to make the icicle.

Fondant

Once fondant is opened it will last for 4 weeks, but humidity is its enemy. Store it at room temperature, not in the refrigerator. Store fondant wrapped well in 5 or 6 layers of plastic, then inside a plastic bag. If your fondant feels hard when you unwrap it, you may be able to cut off the outside to expose usable fondant inside.

Use flour to keep fondant from sticking when you roll it out, rather than sugar – sugar attracts moisture and will make the fondant get sticky. Adhere fondant pieces to gingerbread with a tiny dab of Royal Icing.

Toothpicks are great to hold assembled fondant pieces together, as when making a tree or person. Use a garlic press to make hair, fur, or grass.

Candy & Cookies

Most candies can be frozen for up to a year. Bring them to room temperature before using them.

- Candy canes: fences, logs, fantasy accents
- Caramels: bricks
- Gum drops: trees & bushes, especially with gum drops sliced into pieces
- Gum: bricks, shutters
- Gumballs: bushes, fantasy accents
- Jellybeans: rocks, stone walkways, chimneys
- Licorice whips: reindeer reins
- Lifesavers: wreaths
- Lollipops and Tootsie Pops: fantasy trees
- Necco Wafers: roofs
- Red hots: paths
- Ribbon candy: fences
- Small powdered sugar donuts: stacked, make snowmen
- Starburst candies: packages with piped ribbons
- Textured cookies: shutters
- Toblerone chocolate bar: fences
- Tootsie Rolls: Logs

Other Foods

- All-Bran cereal: thatched roofs
- Brown sugar: sand
- Bullion cubes: bricks
- Chex cereals: bricks, roofs
- Cinnamon sticks: logs
- Coconut: snow texture over Royal Icing
- Coffee: dirt
- Dried fruits and ginger: stones

- Lasagna noodles: curtains
- Nuts: rocks
- Pointed ice cream cones: tree bases, castle turrets
- Popcorn balls: trees, bushes
- Pretzel sticks: logs, boards, tree branches
- Red & black licorice: logs, tile roofs
- Shredded wheat: straw walls or roofs, bales of hay
- Sliced almonds: “wood” shingles
- Uncooked alphabet pasta: signs
- Uncooked linguini: logs, fences

Advanced Decor

- Crush Jolly Ranchers, then place the pieces into holes or indentations in your gingerbread when you bake it. Bake on parchment paper. The candy will melt into a translucent sheet that can be stained glass windows, shiny eyes, etc.
- Don't cover your roof with snow. Let the gingerbread or other roof product show, and add small patches of snow.
- Use hot glue, rather than Royal Icing, to adhere your gingerbread together.

RESOURCES

[Six Foot Gingerbread House in Memphis TN](#)

[Pinterest Gingerbread Ideas](#)

[How to Cook That.net](#)

[Woman's Day Magazine](#)

Sources for cool candies: Cracker Barrel, Spencer's, Dollar Store, and grocery stores after Easter and Halloween.

Try searching on the Internet for: “unusual gingerbread houses,” “gingerbread house ideas,” “other gingerbread ideas”