

BUILDING A GINGERBREAD HOUSE

with Susan Reid

What You'll Need

CONSTRUCTION GINGERBREAD FROM SCRATCH

3/4 cup (6 oz.) buttermilk
6 tbsp. (3 oz., 3/4 stick) butter or margarine
1 cup (8 oz.) brown sugar
1/2 cup (6 oz.) molasses
1 large egg
5 cups (21 1/4 oz.) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. ginger
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. salt

ROYAL ICING

3 egg whites*
1/2 tsp. cream of tartar
4 cups (1 lb.) unsifted confectioners' sugar
Food coloring (optional)
Vanilla, lemon, peppermint or other extract (optional)

*Meringue powder works just as well; use 1/4 cup meringue powder combined with 1/2 cup of cold water in place of the fresh egg whites.

CONSTRUCTION GINGERBREAD FROM OUR KING ARTHUR MIX

Construction Gingerbread
For each bag of mix, combine:
contents of the mix
1/4 cup (1 oz.) vegetable oil
3 to 4 tbsp. hot water

FIRST YOU NEED GINGERBREAD

Dough for gingerbread construction projects is perfectly edible; it just has more flour in it to make it sturdier than gingerbread cookie dough. It's simple to put together, and should chill for an hour before being rolled out for baking.

CONSTRUCTION GINGERBREAD FROM SCRATCH

In a large saucepan, heat the butter in the buttermilk until it is just melted and remove from the heat. Add the brown sugar and molasses and beat in the egg. Whisk the spices, salt and baking soda together with one cup of flour. Add this to the wet mixture and mix until incorporated. Add flour one cup at a time until you have a smooth, stiff dough. It should be stiff enough to be flexible, but not crumbly or sticky. Divide the dough in half, wrap it in plastic and flatten it out before chilling in the refrigerator for at least an hour.



This is the consistency the dough should have once it's mixed.



An easy way to wrap your dough for chilling is to put it in a plastic bag and press it out flat. The texture of the dough will change and become more malleable as it rests.

CONSTRUCTION GINGERBREAD FROM OUR KING ARTHUR MIX

In a medium-sized mixing bowl, combine the contents of the mix with the vegetable oil. Stir until evenly blended—the mixture will be crumbly. Add the egg and 3 tablespoons of hot water, kneading until dough becomes cohesive. Add the last tablespoon of water if the dough seems dry—it should be stiff enough to be flexible, but not crumbly or sticky. Divide the dough in half, wrap it well and refrigerate it for one hour or longer.

Bake the cookies in a preheated 350°F oven for 15–18 minutes; they'll be slightly soft when you remove the pan from the oven. Allow the cookies to cool for 5 minutes, then transfer them to a wire rack to finish cooling. *Two bags of mix will yield enough dough for an 8 1/2 x 5 1/4-inch tall house, with about 1/4 of the dough left over for people, trees and other decorations.*

CUT AND BAKE THE PIECES

If you have an embossed plaque for a gingerbread house, you can use it to bake your pieces. If you want to make a design of your own, you can print the templates below and use them as a starting point. Or you can print out the pages and attach them to some rigid cardboard. Use a utility knife or scissors to cut out templates. These can be placed on the dough and used as a guide to cut out the shapes for your pieces.

Take one of your bags of dough out of the refrigerator, and preheat the oven to 350°F. Divide the dough into two pieces. Put one of the pieces back in the refrigerator while you work with the other half. If you have a cookie sheet with no sides, you can roll your dough out directly on it. If your cookie sheets have edges on them, turn them over and roll out the dough on the back. You can also roll out the dough on a piece of parchment paper, and use the paper to transfer the dough to your baking sheet.

Checklist of Pieces for Housebuilding

- 2 long side walls, with windows cut out
- Cut a door out of one of these walls between the windows; save the cutout piece or use scrap dough to cut another with your template
- 2 gable end walls, with the point on top
- 2 roof panels
- People
- Trees
- Architectural details of your choice, such as chimney pieces or shutters

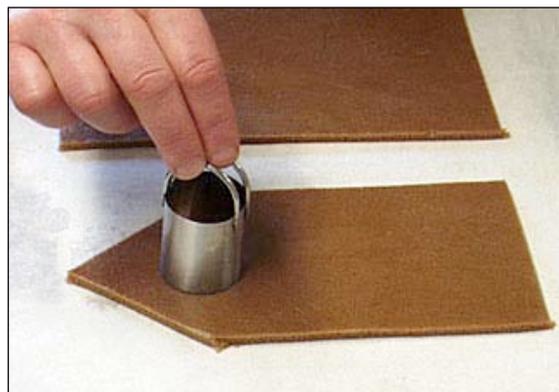
GINGERBREAD HOUSE TEMPLATE

Roll out the dough into a rectangle that's about 1/4-inch thick. Roll your dough as evenly as possible, covering as much of the baking sheet as possible. Cut out two side walls, and put windows and a door in one of them. Pull the cutout piece up off the baking sheet carefully and collect all the scraps. You can use them to roll out more pieces or people later. Take the reserved piece of dough out of the refrigerator and roll it out. Cut two roof panels into that piece. Take the reserved scraps of dough and roll out, cutting two end panels from it. You can cut a window into these if you want. *Use any remaining dough to cut out people and trees to decorate your scene. If you have a cookie cutter for a snowman or sleigh, those would work too.*

Bake the gingerbread pieces at 350°F for 15–18 minutes, until the edges just begin to brown. Remove them from the oven and place the pan on a cooling rack. After 10 minutes, run a spatula under the pieces to free them up from the baking sheets. Allow the pieces to finish cooling on the cookie sheets completely.



Make sure you leave at least half an inch between the pieces you cut, because they'll expand during baking.



Just be sure to leave at least 3/4" of dough intact on all sides of the window opening you cut.

ASSEMBLING YOUR HOUSE

To put everything together, your mortar/paint/primary tool is royal icing. It's made of egg whites, confectioners' sugar and an acidic ingredient (you can use either lemon juice or cream of tartar.) Meringue powder makes this recipe very easy to do, without the hassle of separating eggs.

Royal Icing

Royal icing needs to be kept covered, because it will dry quickly and become lumpy if exposed to the air. The easiest way to store the icing for long periods of time is in a plastic pastry bag or zip-top food storage bag. If you have disposable pastry bags, using an uncut bag as a sleeve for the bag you are piping from is an easy way to keep everything from drying out.

In a large bowl, whip the egg whites with the cream of tartar until foamy. Sprinkle in the sugar gradually, whipping all the while. The more you whip the icing, the stiffer it'll be and the faster it will harden up. If you want to "paint" with the icing, you can use food coloring to create different colors and thin the icing with a few drops of water so it will flow.



When properly whipped, this is how the icing should look.



Pastry bags can be awkward to fill. Use a tall, narrow measuring cup or vase to hold the top of the bag open, then pour the icing into the bag.

ASSEMBLY

You'll need a stiff piece of cardboard to use as a foundation for your house, a pastry bag to pipe the royal icing, and some props to hold the pieces in place while the "mortar" is drying. *If you want to do any detailed outlines on the walls, it's often easier to do so before putting the walls up. See the "Outlines" section.*

PUTTING UP THE WALLS

First, take a serrated knife and trim the edges of the walls, so any bumpy parts are squared off. This will allow for better contact between the surfaces that are going to be joined together. Next, pipe a generous line of icing along the bottom of one of the side walls. Place it on your board, and use a prop to hold it upright. Pipe another wide band of icing along the bottom inside edge of the wall to reinforce it. Repeat this process with one of the end walls, making sure to put some icing on the vertical edge where the walls meet. Check to make sure the two walls are at right angles before the icing starts to set.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

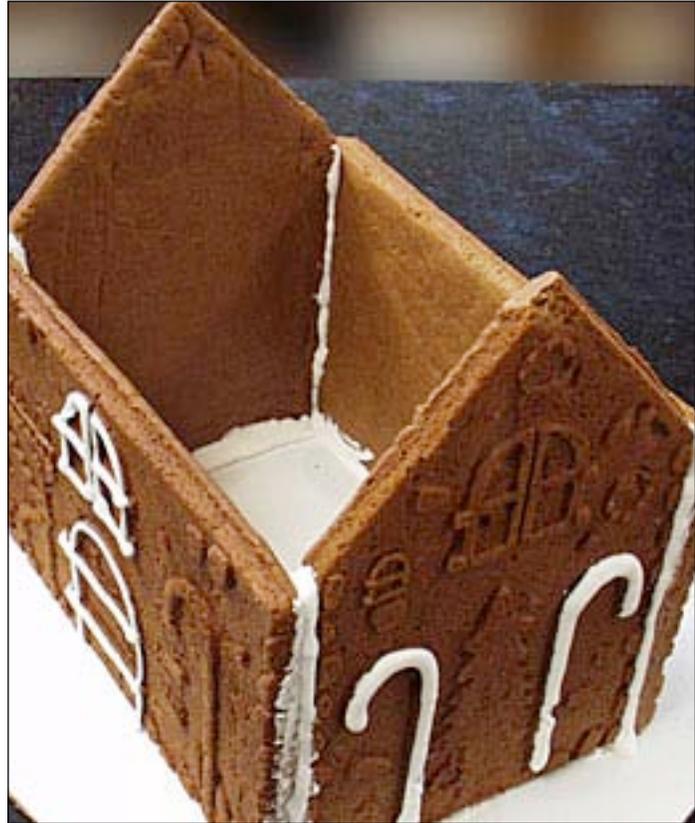


Figure 6

Figure 1: When you trim your pieces, don't press down so much as saw back and forth, letting the knife do the work; you don't want to crack or chip the walls.

Figure 2: Cut a 1/4- to 3/8-inch hole in the bottom of the pastry bag, and move slowly up the bottom of the wall as you squeeze out the icing.

Figure 3: Putting another band of icing along the inside bottom edge of the wall will help it to stay in place and make the house sturdier.

Figure 4: Place the end wall so its thickness is inside the side wall's length, for a stronger house. This will also allow you to have nice eaves when the roof panels are put on.

Figure 5: A cereal box is a handy tool to check that your walls are at right angles to each other.

Figure 6: Depending on the weather and how much icing you used, it can take between 4 hours and 12 hours before the house is ready to have its roof put on.

INSTALLING THE ROOF

Use a prop to keep the roof panel from sliding down and place the first half of the roof in place. Pipe more icing along the inside seam where the pieces meet, to reinforce the joint. Let the first roof panel dry in place for at least an hour, then repeat the process with the second half of the roof.



Pipe a thick line of frosting along the top of the side wall and up the points of the gable end.



An adjustable measuring cup is handy to make a support that's just the right height.



Putting more icing along the seam will help to hold the roof panel in place. Wipe away any stray drips with a damp cloth.

DECORATING

The only rule here is that everything you use should be edible. What better treat can there be than to go to the candy aisle of your favorite store, and buy anything that looks good? Gumdrops, fruit rollups, string licorice, mini marshmallows, green and red starlight mints, M&Ms, Necco wafers, Lifesavers, cotton candy, nonpareils, dragees—they all have a place in the palette of treats you can use. Colored sugars are good for landscaping help. Use anything you like; the candies shown here are only suggestions.

Before you begin, it's helpful to have some inexpensive art brushes and water on hand. Tweezers can be helpful for placing dragees and cotton swabs are handy for wiping up spills or correcting mistakes before they dry. You can use food coloring to tint some of the royal icing; you'll want some small containers with lids to mix them in. The lids are important to keep the icing from drying out.

OUTLINES

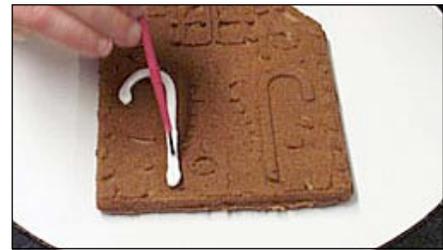
If you've used an embossed gingerbread house pan that makes panels with raised features, you may want to outline those features with royal icing. This is easier to do before assembling the house, since you can lay the sides down flat. Cut a very small hole in the end of your plastic or piping bag, and simply trace the outline of the windows and doors.



Make sure you cut a very small hole in the end of the pastry bag—remember, you can always make it bigger if you need to!



Highlight the embossed designs: windows, doors, big candy canes.



A small paintbrush is helpful to spread the icing evenly over the wall's features.

ACCENTING THE HOUSE'S CONSTRUCTION FEATURES

The four corners of the house where the walls are joined together are a natural place to decorate. Any candy you choose can be cemented to the seam where the two walls connect. Colored candies make great Christmas lights, and you can drape some royal icing off the eaves to make snow.



Put some wet royal icing on the seam where the two walls are joined.



Place candy into the icing, starting at the bottom and working your way up to the roof.

TREES

For colorful trees, color some royal icing a deep green, and thin it with a little water so it flows freely. Coat the tree shape with the help of a paintbrush; be sure to spread the frosting down over the edges for a more finished appearance (Figure 7.) Finish the tree by dipping it in green and red sprinkles (Figure 8.)



Figure 7



Figure 8

ANOTHER TREE IDEA

Sugar-style ice cream cones are good foundation forms for making trees. Cut green gumdrops in half, and press or roll them flat. Starting at the bottom, glue them to the cone with royal icing, working your way around the base and up to the top. Dragees make good decorations to finish.



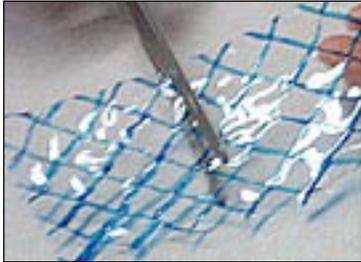
GINGERBREAD PEOPLE

You can attach mini-marshmallow “kickstands” to the back of your people, to help them stand up.



WINDOWS

You can glaze your windows with melted hard candies, which can look like stained glass when you combine different colors. To do this, cut different colors of hard candy into pieces, and arrange them next to each other on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake the candies at 250°F for 6–8 minutes, until they melt and run together. To install the gelatin, simply cut it to size with scissors and glue it into place with royal icing. *Just a hint: it's much easier to install window "glass" before putting the roof on!!!*



Gelatin cuts to size easily with scissors.



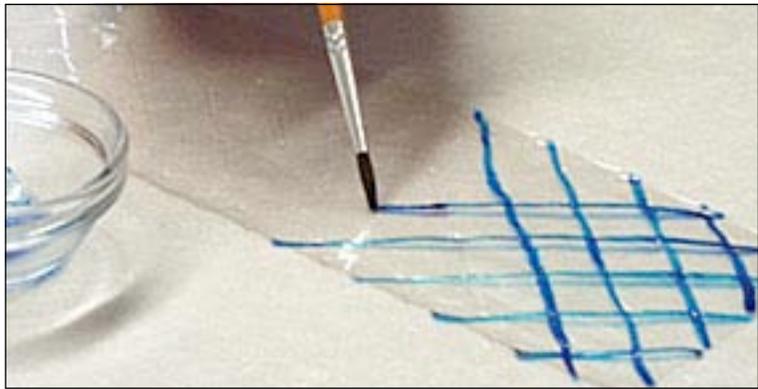
Pipe icing around the overlapping edge of the window's pane, and press into place.



Press window into place.



Combining different flavors of hard candies can give you a multicolored window pane.



Use a brush to paint muntins on a sheet of gelatin, or to color the windowpanes with food coloring for stained glass.

SILLS & SHUTTERS

To truly look finished, windows should have sills underneath and shutters on either side. Use whatever candy you like to make these. Here we've used licorice and fruit leather.



Cut fruit leather to size to make shutters.



The point of a paring knife is useful to help place the candy under the window.



The fruit leather presses into place with ease.

DOORS

Trim the pretzels to size, and lay them on top of a line of icing (Figure 9.) Tweezers are helpful to place the cross pieces (Figure 10.) A dragee is just the right size for a doorknob (Figure 11.)



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

ROOF PANELS

Anything that can be shingled can be used to give texture to the roof of your house. Just remember to start at the bottom edge of the roof and overlap the rows as you go up. Put the panels on the house before you get to the top two rows. Once they're installed, you can finish the last rows at the roof peak. Here are some roof treatments we like:



This roof is shingled with frosted cereal squares and finished with gumdrops.



If you have an embossed pan, the design it makes can be outlined with royal icing and sprinkled with sparkling sugar to suggest snow.



Frosted shredded wheat squares make wonderful roof tiles. Place them on the roof panel, starting at the bottom edge and working your way up.



Wafer candies in assorted colors make a Hansel and Gretel-style roof.



Bran cereal sprinkled on top of a pool of icing gives the look of a thatched roof. Allow the icing to set before installing the roof panel.



Nonpareils are an appropriate choice for chocolate lovers.

THE ROOF'S RIDGELINE

Since the ridgeline of the roof is a seam, it's a natural location to highlight with candy decorations. We've decided to use starlight mints in red and green to show off this house's roof, but gumdrops, chocolate kisses, or mini marshmallows are good candidates, too.



Use a sharp knife to cut the mints in half.



Pipe a line of frosting down the roof's ridgeline seam.



Place the mints into the frosting, alternating red and green.

LANDSCAPING

There are a number of things you can do to make your gingerbread house look more finished. It should be connected to the ground, by having a path up to the door and some form of landscaping to show texture on the surface of the cardboard. Cotton candy or coconut can serve for snow, as well as colored sugar sprinkled over wet royal icing. Cobblestones can be made out of all kinds of candies, as this page demonstrates. Placing people (or snowmen, angels or reindeer) and Christmas trees nearby completes the scene.



For snow, paint the cardboard surface with thinned royal icing, and sprinkle colored sugar on top.



Flattened gumdrops can serve as paving stones.



Chocolate buttons flanked by gumdrop borders form the path to this house.

PHOTO GALLERY

Here are some more pictures of the assembled houses, to give you more ideas. The circular gable window is outlined with miniature coated candies (Figure 12.) A gingerbread house becomes a home when there's a gingerbread person to live there (Figure 13.)



White chocolate chunks are used here for masonry.



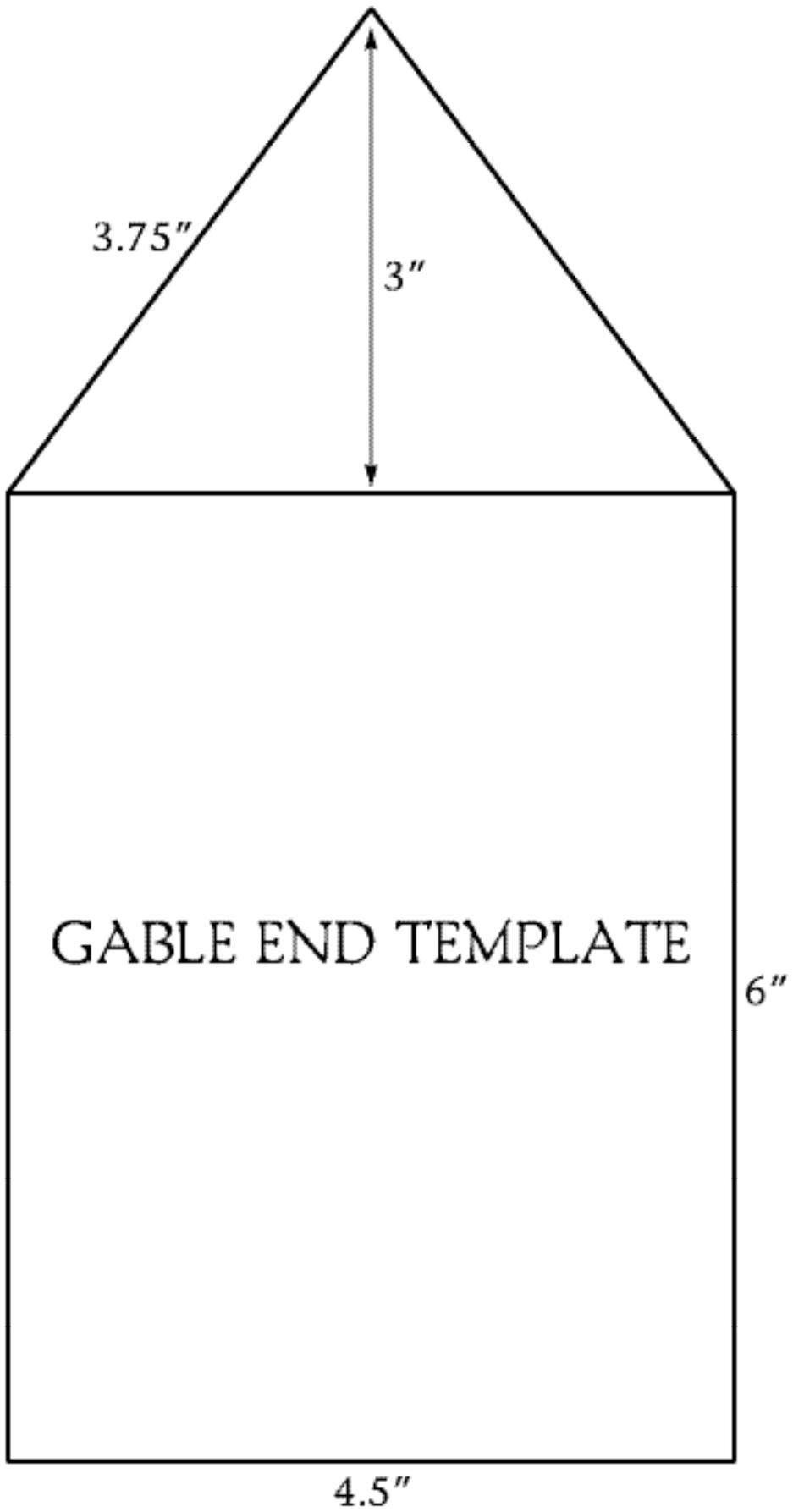
Figure 12



Figure 13



Small strips of fruit leather placed over royal icing form the candy canes on this house.



ROOF TEMPLATE

4"

10"

SIDE WALL TEMPLATE

