

# How To Build a Beautiful Gingerbread House

By Amy Kennedy

Building a gingerbread house is a fun project for the whole family. Before you start, pick a time period where you can devote several hours over two or three days to baking, assembling, and decorating your creation.

Copy gingerbread house templates from cookbooks or draw your own. You will use the template and a pizza cutter or straight knife to cut the baked gingerbread into sections for the house. You can design your gingerbread house to look like a Victorian cottage, a ranch, castle, or any architectural style you like, but it's probably best to choose a simple design for your first attempt.

Preheat oven to 300¼F. Beat the whipping cream and vanilla on high speed with a mixer until it forms soft peaks and set aside.

In a large bowl combine sugar, baking soda, ginger and cinnamon. Fold in molasses and reserved whipped cream. Stir in 8 cups of flour gradually and mix well. Knead the dough by hand, adding 1/2 cup of flour until smooth.

Line cookie sheets with aluminum foil. Divide the dough into six parts and roll out directly on baking sheets to 1/4-inch thick rectangles (approximately 10 x 12-inches). Bake rectangles for 30 minutes. Remove pans from oven and cut gingerbread into desired shapes with a knife. Cut two 12 x8-inch pieces of the gingerbread for sides and two 12x6-inch pieces for the roof. For the ends use an 8x8-inch square on the bottom topped with an 8-inch wide x 4-inch high triangle. (This basic pattern can be used to form the front and back of your house and you may place windows and doors wherever you choose.) Return the pans to the oven for an additional five minutes. Remove pans from oven and cool.

Some people like to make mini-size cupcakes or small loaves of gingerbread to cut into shutters, trees, chimneys, turrets, walkways, etc. You can bake additional gingerbread or use any cake recipe you choose for extra shapes.

Combine all the ingredients for the icing in a saucepan or stainless steel bowl over a pan of simmering water. Stir until the mixture is smooth. Remove the bowl from the heat and store the icing in an airtight container until it is needed.

Before you begin assembling your house make sure you have a firm cardboard box wrapped in foil for the base. You will also need to place lightweight cardboard under the roof to help support it. As you put up the walls of your house, use frosting to help "glue" it in place. Spoon icing into a pastry bag and use a 1/4-inch

tip to squeeze icing out evenly down the edges of the walls. Use thick lines of icing along all edges and hold the pieces together for five minutes to set. Pipe lines of icing inside the house at the four intersections of walls, along the base, and on the outside at vertical joints to ensure stability.

Refrigerate unused icing and let the house set for a few hours before applying additional decorative icing, candies, etc. Use extra icing to apply trim around windows, doors, roof, etc.

Use scraps from the cut cake pieces and different shapes of cookie cutters for making roof tiles, stairs, doorways, shutters for windows, etc. Remember that the gingerbread can be prepared a couple of days ahead and stored airtight at room temperature until you have time to work on the house assembly.

You will find a wide variety of decorative candies at your local supermarket in the baking aisle. Depending on the style you've chosen for your house, you can use striped candy canes to fit corners of the house under the roof, or use hard peppermint candies cut in half to form borders, ledges, etc.

Use cinnamon candies, chocolate kisses, fruit rings, or candy rocks to create other fun decorative effects. Chocolate nonpareils work great for making a walkway to the front door. Be creative with the landscaping. Create a beautiful snow-covered lawn around the house using brown and green coconut for "grass," alternating with mounds of white icing and powdered sugar for "snow." Rice Krispie treats dyed green with food coloring and coated lightly with corn syrup work great as bushes and trees.

If you plan to keep the gingerbread house as a decoration throughout the holidays, spray it with varnish and warn everyone that it's not for eating. (Bake a separate batch of gingerbread for munching!)