

Allen County 4-H



Gingerbread House Project Manual

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Gingerbread House Project

Gingerbread Houses
(No State Fair Exhibit)

ALL LEVELS: (1) See Allen County General 4-H Rules: Label Rule, (2) A completed and signed Record Sheet must accompany each exhibit

Gingerbread houses for this project must be made of real gingerbread (not graham crackers or cardboard). All decorations must be edible, and Royal Icing will be used for glue. Gingerbread houses can be more than just Christmas decorations. You may choose any holiday theme, fairy tale castles, barns, churches, stores, forts, or other historical buildings. Decorations may be added to the yard and roof, and you may add people, trees, animals, etc., but everything must be edible.

All age groups must have their gingerbread house mounted on a sturdy base. The cardboard base needs to be covered with foil which is securely taped on the bottom side. People in the advanced division may have the option to use a base made of wood if they feel the gingerbread structure is too heavy to be safely transported on cardboard. A wood base still needs to be covered with foil. The gingerbread house and the extra items in the yard all need to be securely anchored to the base with Royal Icing. All materials in the house and the decorations must be edible. No plastics allowed.

Levels:

Beginner Grades 3 – 5

Intermediate Grades 6 – 8

Advanced Grades 9 -12

Exhibit Requirements:

Beginner – Grades 3-5

A simple house structure made of six pieces—2 sides, 2 ends and 2 roof pieces. No windows or doors to be cut out—they can be “drawn” on the walls with icing or framed with candies, or made of crackers or wafer cookies, etc. Use your choice of candies to decorate walls and roof. Your gingerbread house should be mounted on a covered sturdy base. In the yard around your house you need to add at least 2 different items, and up to as many as 6 items. Examples of these items might be a sidewalk, fence, trees, bushes, people (like gingerbread men), or animals. Beginners have the option of using a kit.

Intermediate – Grades 6-8

This age group will start with the basic house (as in beginners), but you may add extra decorations. Some suggestions might be a chimney, shutters, a porch, dormers on the roof, steps up to the front door, etc. Windows must be cut out of the house in this division. You could choose to have a door standing open—this is optional. Roof treatment needs to be more than just simply “snow” on the roof made of Royal Icing. Designs can be made with icing and candies, or shingles can be made with mini crackers, cereals, candy wafers, just to name a few. Your gingerbread house should be mounted on a covered sturdy base. In the yard around your house you need to add at least 4 items, but no more than 8 items. Some examples are sidewalk, fence, trees, bushes, people, animals, doghouse, mailbox, sled, a garden, etc.

Advanced – Grades 9-12

The houses for the advanced category need to be more complicated than intermediate. The house may have more than one section. The windows need to be cut out and filled with candy “window panes” made of melted hard candies (see manual). The walls of your structure may be textured to look like brick, stone, siding, or even log cabin, etc. You also have the option of using a colored Royal Icing glaze on your walls. Your gingerbread house should be mounted on a covered sturdy base. You have the option of lighting your house from the interior (see description in manual). If so, you may have your house lit during judging, but it will not be lit during fair week. You also have the option of doing a cut-away section of your house to view the interior and furnishings (all edible, of course). This would appear much the same as a doll house. In the yard around your house you need to have a minimum of 6 items, with no limit on a maximum number.

Basic Equipment and Supplies

Flat cookie sheet (If you only have cookie pans with shallow sides you will need to turn them over and bake on the bottom side. Large pieces of gingerbread cannot be lifted from the sheet without breaking. You have to slide them from the pan to the cooling rack.)

Rolling Pin

Parchment paper or aluminum foil

Cooling Rack

Electric mixer

Icing spatula (angled one work the best)

Decorating bag, coupler and tips—round and star (these can be purchased in a cake decorating beginner's kit)

Gel or paste food colorings (not liquid like what is found in grocery stores)

Cardboard for base (3 layers)

Candies

Ingredients for gingerbread dough

GINGERBREAD HOUSE SCORECARD

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Meets Requirements				
Baseboard				
Neatness				
Color Choice				
Attention to Detail				
Creativity				
Overall Appearance				

Decorating your Gingerbread

The gingerbread houses for this project MUST be made out of real gingerbread (not graham crackers or cardboard). All decorations must be edible—no plastic decoration or figures. There are many varieties of hard candies to choose from. Royal Icing is used like glue to hold everything together. No real glue is to be used.

Gingerbread houses can be far more than just Christmas decorations. You could choose any holiday—Easter (perhaps a bunny house), Valentines Day, Saint Patrick’s Day (perhaps a Leprechaun's house), 4th of July, a Halloween Haunted House, or Thanksgiving. You might choose a fairy tale or storybook theme; for example, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Cinderella or Snow White. If you are in the advanced division, you may want to choose to make a replica of a local historic building or a replica of your own home, OR you may choose to do something other than a house, such as a barn, church, store, fort or castle. The possibilities are almost endless!

Decorations may be added to the yard of your house. You could make fences (pretzels or candies work well for this), sidewalks, trees, bushes, people, animals, snowmen, sleds, etc. Just remember that they must be made out of edible objects such as decorated gingerbread cookies or candies. Royal icing could be used as snow in the yard or it could be colored green for grass.

Following is a list of possible choices of candies you could use. You may think of others that are not listed here. It would be best to stay away from chocolate. Remember that fair week is often very hot and humid and the chocolate could melt. Please avoid using soft and easily perishable candies and stick with dry and durable varieties. And remember that everything must be edible.

Some good candies are candy canes, peppermints, gumdrops, red hots, M&M’s, Skittles, candy corn, caramels, Life Savers, jelly beans (some are made to look like stones), Necco wafers, Smarties or Sweet Tarts, Pez candies, chewing gum (these work well for shingles and shutters.) Some other items to decorate with could be Teddy Grahams or pretzels (pretzels work great for fences). Small crackers and cereals such as Golden Grahams, Chex or Bite-sized Shredded Wheat are great for simple doors or shutters. Nuts such as whole pecans or sliced almonds may be used as well. Fruit Roll-ups could be used as a sidewalk. Colored sugar crystals, sprinkles, nonpareils, silver dragges and other cookie decorations can be used.

Besides being used as glue to hold things together, royal icing sets up very hard and can be used to make decorations. Sugar molds may be used (this will be described more later on.) Marzipan may also be used to make figures. This material handles like clay or play dough (it will also be described more later on).

You can also use brown sugar for sand, green for grass, colored shredded coconut, crumbled Oreo cookies for dirt, piping gel for ponds or water.

If you need reference or sources, we would recommend the county library, internet and bookstores. A good reference book would be "Wilton" for techniques and ideas. There are also festival and bazars at Christmas time.

Royal Icing Recipes using Meringue Powder

3 Level Tablespoons meringue powder

1 pound (4 cups) sifted confectioner's sugar

6 Tablespoons water

Beat all ingredients until icing forms stiff peaks. For use with gingerbread houses it is advised to add 1 tablespoon light corn syrup into your batch of royal icing. This helps it to adhere better to the gingerbread. Do not allow grease to come in contact with icing: this will cause icing to break down.

Royal Icing with Egg Whites

3 egg whites

1 pound (4 cups) sifted confectioner's sugar

1/2 to 1 teaspoon of cream of tartar

In a bowl of your electric mixer (or with a hand mixer) beat egg whites with the cream of tartar until combined. Add the sifted powdered sugar and beat on low speed until combined and smooth. The icing needs to be used immediately or transferred to an airtight contain as royal icing hardens when exposed to air. Cover with plastic wrap when not in use.



Storage of Royal Icing

Meringue powder and royal icing should be kept refrigerated when not in use since they are an egg product. Royal icing made with meringue powder will keep in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Royal icing made with egg whites should be kept in refrigerator for only one week.

Because royal icing dries candy-hard and lasts for weeks without softening, it works great for mortaring your pieces together and decorating your house. Royal icing dries very quickly, so you need to keep your container covered with a lid or a damp cloth at all time.

Royal Icing Mix can be purchased.

Molded Sugar Recipe

2 cups granulated sugar

4 teaspoons water

Place sugar in a large mixing bowl. Mix sugar, making sure there are no lumps.

Make a well in sugar and add water (if you are tinting sugar, blend icing color into water at this point). Rub mixture in hands and knead for about 1 minute or until well-blended and mixture packs like wet sand. Be sure there are no lumps in mixture.

Note: Keep sugar mixture covered with a damp cloth when not in use.

Wilton Marzipan Recipe

1 cup almond paste

2 unbeaten egg whites

3 cups confectioners' (powdered) sugar

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract or 1/2 teaspoon rum extract

In a bowl, knead almond paste. Add egg white, mix well. Continue kneading as you add flavoring and sugar; 1 cup at a time, until marzipan feels like heavy pie dough.

Note: In high humidity, you might want to either decrease the egg whites or increase the powdered sugar, but by increasing the powdered sugar, this lessens the flavor of the marzipan.

Marzipan can be purchased ready to use.

Wilton's Recipe for Grandma's Gingerbread

(note: Gingerbread should be baked 48 hours (2 days) before assembling)

5 to 5 1/2 cups all –purpose flour	1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon baking soda	1 cup solid vegetable shortening
1 teaspoon salt	1 cup sugar
2 teaspoons ginger	1 1/4 cups unsulphured molasses
2 teaspoons cinnamon	2 eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon nutmeg	

Thoroughly mix flour, soda, salt, and spices and set aside. Melt shortening in large saucepan over low heat until just melted, not hot. Add to shortening in order, sugar, molasses and eggs: mix well. Cool slightly, then add 4 cups dry ingredients and mix well. Turn mixture onto lightly floured surface. Knead in remaining dry ingredients by hand. Add a little more flour if necessary, to make a firm dough. If you're not going to make your gingerbread house right away, wrap dough in plastic and refrigerate. Refrigerated dough will keep for a week, but be sure to remove it three hours prior to rolling so it softens and is workable.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease your cookie sheets. It is best to roll out your large pieces directly on your cookie sheet or on the back of a cookie pan. To keep your cookie sheet from sliding around as you roll, place a damp dishcloth or dishtowel underneath it. Place about a third of the cookie dough on your cookie sheet. Keep the remainder of your dough covered with plastic so that it will not dry out. Press down dough with hands to flatten some. Lightly flour the surface to prevent your rolling pin from sticking.

As you roll, work the dough out from the center. Roll to approximately 1/8 inch thickness. Place your pattern piece (traced onto paper and cut out) on top of rolled out dough. Cut out around the pattern with a sharp knife. Carefully remove excess dough. It is best to have only one or two larger pieces on a sheet at a time. Lift smaller pieces to the cookie sheet with a spatula. Be sure to bake similar sized pieces together to avoid burning the smaller pieces. Bake gingerbread pieces in pre-heated oven; 10 to 12 minutes for large pieces and 6 to 8 minutes for average to smaller pieces. Check frequently to avoid over-browning. Right after removing pieces from oven, but before moving off of pans, place your pattern pieces on the gingerbread pieces to check sizes.

Wilton's Recipe for Grandma's Gingerbread—continued

Cookie dough usually expands when baking. If a piece has baked too big or crooked, carefully trim excess or uneven dough with a sharp knife. A serrated knife used gently like a saw on the dough works well. Remove gingerbread pieces from cookie sheet to cooling racks with a large flat spatula. The gingerbread pieces should be left on cooling racks for 48 hours before assembly. This helps them to harden up more. If you want a lighter colored dough, use mild molasses. If you want a darker colored dough, use blackstrap molasses.

Making Windows for Advanced Division

The easiest way to make window panes in your gingerbread house is to use hard candies such as Lifesavers, lemon drops, etc. Put a few candies in a plastic bag, place on a cutting board and crush with a hammer. Set aside in small bowl until needed. Using different colors in a window will melt into a stained glass effect. Use a single lighter color for regular windows. In order to make baked-in candy windows on your gingerbread, you **MUST** bake your wall pieces on lightly greased aluminum foil covering your cookie sheet. Otherwise you will not be able to remove your piece from the cookie sheet without destroying the windows.

Roll out and cut of your wall pattern as described previously. Also cut out the windows. Bake the piece for half the baking time, then pull it out of the oven and quickly spoon the crushed candy pieces into the window openings, being careful not to spill it on the dough. Put piece back into oven and finish the baking time. If the crushed hard candy is put into the oven for the full baking time it tends to look scorched. When you remove it from the oven at the end of the baking time trim the edges of your wall if needed, as described previously. Leave the piece on the foil, move to cooling rack. When the piece is completely cooled you can easily peel the foil off the back.



Examples: Basic Gingerbread House



Examples: Intermediate Gingerbread House—Exterior Extras



Examples: Advanced Gingerbread House

