



A Gluten Free Christmas: Gingerbread Houses



My son was flipping through my copy of Joy of Cooking a couple of months ago and came upon the recipe for a Gingerbread House. He was captivated! We read the entire recipe and instructions for his bedtime story that night =)

I do my best to keep all gluten out of my house, so David and I set out to make a gluten free gingerbread house. From scratch. It was a great project...and all of our kids ended up participating in some way or the other...even the 1 yr old. =)

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[A Complete Gingerbread House Demonstration](#) - the password is GFGBH

Equipment Needed:

- baking sheet
- parchment paper
- mixing bowl
- medium sauce-pan
- saran wrap
- measuring spoons
- digital scale (optional, but highly recommended)
- paper
- cardboard
- box cutter
- Scotch tape
- scissors
- sharp kitchen knife
- mixer (hand or stand)
- rolling pin
- two 1/4" wooden dowels (optional)

Ingredients:

- brown rice flour or garfava flour
- corn starch or tapioca starch
- sorghum flour or almond flour
- masa harina
- cinnamon
- ginger
- salt
- molasses
- brown sugar
- butter (non-dairy is fine)
- meringue powder
- cream of tartar
- confectioner's sugar

Gluten Free Gingerbread House Recipes

Gluten Free Flour Mix 1:

10 oz. brown rice flour
10 oz. corn starch or tapioca starch
6.65 oz. sorghum flour
3.35 oz. masa harina

Gluten Free Flour Mix 2:

10 oz. garbanzo/fava flour
10 oz. corn starch or tapioca starch
6.65 oz. almond flour
3.35 oz. masa harina

Here are the proportions for the flour mix if you need to mix up a batch just for this recipe.

Gluten Free Gingerbread Dough:

30 oz. (6 $\frac{3}{4}$ c.) Gluten Free Flour Mix #1 or #2
1 Tbsp. cinnamon
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground ginger
1/2 tsp. salt
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ c. molasses
7.5 oz. (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ c.) brown sugar
1 c. butter (or non-dairy butter like Earth Balance)

Add the flour, cinnamon, ginger and salt together in a large mixing bowl and thoroughly combine with a fork for several minutes to evenly distribute the spices. In a saucepan, combine the molasses, brown sugar, and butter over low heat and stir until the coconut oil is melted (assuming it was solid when you started) and the brown sugar is dissolved (i.e. no longer grainy).

Stir the sugar mixture into the flour and mix until everything is well combined. Refrigerate until the dough is no longer hot, but still pliable. Cut out your cookies according to the direction in the primer and bake at 350 degrees until the pieces are hard and have browned around the edges.

Royal Icing

4 – 6 Tbsp. water

3 Tbsp. meringue powder

16 oz. confectioner's sugar, sifted

In large mixing bowl, mix the sugar and meringue powder together with a fork. Add the smallest amount of water and beat all ingredients at high speed 7 to 10 minutes, or until very stiff. Add additional water if needed to achieve a consistency that is pipeable. If you need to thicken it, add more sugar. If you need to thin it, add water – a tsp at a time and stir until incorporated. Icing for gingerbread houses should be thick enough that it does not drip off of the spoon.

If you're not going to use the icing immediately, scoop it into a large sealable plastic storage bag, press the air out, seal, and refrigerate.

A Gingerbread House Primer

Making a Gingerbread House is a multi-step project. Let's not kid ourselves - this is not something that you're going to finish in one day! I would plan for short work sessions on at least 4 days, especially if you're doing this with small children.

Step 1: Cut Out Your Pattern

Print out the pattern included in this class. Or, if you want something more fancy, try one of these [free patterns](#). Cut out the pattern (or let your child help with this if they are capable), and then tape it to thin cardboard. Use a box cutter to cut around the pattern.

Step 2: Make the Gingerbread Dough

Make the dough according to the recipe directions above. The dough will need to cool, so refrigerate it or leave it on the counter to cool. When the dough is cool enough to roll out, you'll be able to pinch a big section of the dough into a peak, and the peak will not fall down after several minutes. If the dough cools down too much in the refrigerator, it may be impossible to roll out. In that case, leave it out on the counter until it warms up and regains some pliability.

Step 3: Roll Out the Dough & Bake Your House

Once your dough has cooled down, you can go ahead and roll out the dough and cut out the pieces for your gingerbread house. Separate the dough into two or three pieces so that you have a manageable piece to work with. Lay a sheet of parchment paper out on your counter. Place the dough on top of the paper and roll it out until it is 1/4" thick. This is where the dowels come in handy - as you'll see in the video.

Place the pattern pieces on top of the dough and hold them in place while you cut around them with a knife. A sharp chef's knife works best, but you can use a table knife if your children are too young to be trusted with weapons => Peel the unused pieces of dough up and then transfer the parchment paper and cookies onto your baking sheet. Bake according to the recipe instructions.

Step 4: Make Royal Icing & Put the House Together

Royal Icing is the glue for your Gingerbread House. Most recipes use egg whites or meringue powder. I've used meringue powder in this course, because I know that my children will want to eat the icing. I could not find meringue powder at our local (rural) grocery stores, but the nearest Walmart Supercenter carried it in the cake decorating area of the craft section.

If your family cannot use eggs, then use an egg replacement powder. I have made Royal Icing with Orgran's No Egg and it worked reasonably well. It was my first attempt at Royal Icing, so the fact that it didn't completely harden might have been due to my lack of skills at the time – not the egg replacement itself. See the note in the Royal Icing recipe, about the consistency that we're looking for. (And watch the video too, of course!)

When you're putting the house together, put the walls together first and then let that dry. Then add on the roof pieces and pipe icing across the top of the house where the roof pieces meet. You may need to hold the roof pieces on, or prop them with something, so that they don't slide down while the icing is hardening.

Let the icing dry for at least 12 hours before you start decorating. Oh, and tell the kids to keep their hands off. Too much touching can lead to catastrophic engineering failures. I speak from experience!

Step 5: Decorate!!!

You'll use the rest of your royal icing as glue for your decorations. Find one of the many Gluten Free Halloween Candy lists online and make your candy choices from there. You may even still have leftover Halloween candy that you can use. Just be sure to use gluten free candy if there is anyone around who will want to eat the candy and who needs to be gluten free. Remember, not all that candy is going to make it onto the gingerbread house! Make sure you're not going to tempt your GF friends and family with off-limits decorations.

5 Ways to Prevent Catastrophic Failure of Your Gingerbread House

1. **Do not let lean on the House!** Seems obvious enough, but it won't be obvious to your 5 yr old. Demonstrate the light touch that is required when decorating the Gingerbread House.
2. **Do not bake on a rainy, humid day!** Gingerbread Houses are full of sugar, and sugar is hygroscopic – meaning it soaks up water like a sponge! In an humid environment, that stiff, hard, break your teeth, gingerbread turns into something that is more like the consistency of a slice of bread. Not good!
3. **Let the icing dry!** I was completely serious about the 12 hour minimum drying time before decorating can begin. The roof is heavy and not well supported. If you add the extra weight of candy on top of that, then a cave-in awaits.
4. **Do not try to move the Gingerbread House.** Ideally, you will construct your Gingerbread House in the place that it will ultimately wait out the holiday season. If not, then be sure to build your Gingerbread House on a platform that you can move. The less swaying and bending that you subject the Gingerbread House too, the better.
5. **Use Royal Icing to repair any breaks.** If, despite your best efforts, a piece of your Gingerbread House breaks, use Royal Icing to repair it.

If the Gingerbread has softened, then you might want to put that piece back into the oven for a while before you repair it. Just be sure not to put any pieces into the oven while they have Royal Icing on them. It will melt, puff up, and burn, which is not the look we're going for. If you need to, you can gently scrape/peel off the Royal Icing so that you can rebake the piece.