

## Hints From The Gingerbread Lady

- 1 Go to the lumber yard **NOW** and get them to cut you an 18 x 18" Masonite or MDF board. (You can go as large as 24 x 24" if you have a large house). Cardboard is **not** satisfactory as many times as we have to move the houses once they get to the contest. Once you throw the house away, you can put the board in the garage and re-use it every year.
- 2 If you use a kit, there is never enough icing, and it is terrible. Go to the grocery store or to Hobby Lobby or Sugarbaker's and buy a can of Meringue Powder. The recipe for a great icing is on the back of this sheet. If you need to thin the icing, add a teaspoon of water at a time. If you need it thicker, add a bit of powdered sugar a little at a time. You can tint this icing with food coloring. Invest in a couple of icing bags, some couplers and 2-3 different icing tips, and you are in business! Keep it covered while you are working!
- 3 Don't limit yourself to the candy that is in the kit. Look at all the different candies, cookies and crackers and see which ones would be great on your house.
- 4 There is a great gingerbread recipe on the back of this page if you want to try to make your own. It's delicious and it bakes up like a dream.
- 5 When rolling out your gingerbread dough, roll it out on the back side of your thin cookie sheet. Just lay some parchment paper on the back of the sheet, flour lightly and roll out the dough. In order to get it all the same thickness, buy a small sheet of balsa wood and cut out some long strips about 1/4" thick. Lay a strip on either side of your gingerbread dough and roll out until the rolling pin is riding on the balsa strips. Then you will know you have it the correct thickness all the way across. Lightly flour your pattern and lay it on the rolled-out dough. Using a large pizza cutter or a sharp knife, cut out the pattern, removing the excess dough as you go. You can re-roll the excess dough several times. It gets a little tough, but it works great. Bake the dough the required time, take it out, lay your pattern (not floured this time!) on the piece of gingerbread and trim the piece to size. It ALWAYS grows a bit when you bake it! Then let it bake a few more minutes to really get cooked good. Let it cool 2-3 minutes on the pan and then slide off onto a good wire rack to cool completely.
- 6 When you go to the grocery store, go through all the aisles thinking architecturally! Green couscous can make great grass. All the great crackers can make roof shingles or walkways. Check out the candy figures at the Dollar Tree, Dollar General, etc. after Christmas. You can get some really good bargains, and once you remove the sticks (if they are suckers), you can "plant" the figures wherever you want them.
- 7 Don't overlook things like Pupperoni or dog treats. Everything has to be edible, but we don't quibble over who eats it! It's all in the details, so think waaaaay out of the box. One kid made a flying saucer using two upside-down gingerbread-covered disposable aluminum pie pans. She put the two together and decorated it. She made "aliens" out of candy clay (Hobby Lobby – cake decorating aisle) and a penguin out of a chocolate Rice Krispie treat.
- 8 VERY IMPORTANT!!!! If you use a box framework, NONE of the box should show or you will get points deducted by the judges. If there is a lot of competition in your category, it could mean the difference between winning or losing. Also, everything you can see must be edible – no glue and no plastic.
- 9 I have watched a whole generation of kids grow up during the time this contest has been going on. I have watched them start with a little bitty kit and end up making and baking their own gingerbread house, then assembling and decorating it – all by themselves! Try each year to learn a new technique!!!
- 10 Remember, 99% of the people in the world never EVER try to make a gingerbread house, either from a kit or from scratch. You are part of the top 1% in the world!!! Congratulations!!!!



## GINGERBREAD HOUSE RECIPE

5-5 ½ c. all-purpose flour  
1 t. baking soda  
1 t. salt  
2 t. ginger  
2 t. cinnamon  
1 t. nutmeg

1 t. cloves  
2 eggs, beaten  
1 c. Crisco shortening (not oil)  
1 1/4 c. unsulphured molasses  
(Grandma's Original)  
1 c. sugar

Thoroughly mix flour, soda, salt and spices. Set aside.

Melt Crisco in pan over low heat until just melted, not hot. Pour the shortening into a LARGE bowl. Add in order, sugar, molasses and eggs and mix well. Cool slightly, then add 4 c. dry ingredients and mix well. Gradually work in the rest of the flour mixture. (May have to use your hands; I do!), making a firm dough.

To make gingerbread houses, roll out dough on lightly floured parchment paper on flat (no sides) cookie sheet. (Remember to use 2 flat sticks so you will get the thickness right.) Lightly place pattern on dough and cut around the pattern with a pizza cutter. It helps to flour the pattern, too. Remove excess dough from around the pattern piece and bake in a 375 degree oven for about 8-10 min. You want these pieces completely cooked so they will be strong. After baking, remove cookie sheet to wire rack to cool. After about 10 min., slide parchment and pattern piece off the cookie sheet and let it cool completely on wire rack. Be sure you have really good racks so the pieces won't sag.

You can re-roll this dough many times, and it is still tasty. When I have all my house pieces, I bake the left over dough and chow down on it until it's gone!

**YUMMY!**

## ROYAL ICING

6 level T. Wilton Meringue Powder Mix  
2 lb. Bag of soft powdered sugar  
12 t. water

Beat meringue powder and water until powder is dissolved. Start adding part of sugar, gradually adding until you have it all mixed in. The texture is supposed to be that of marshmallow creme, and the icing is supposed to stand in firm peaks. This takes about 10 minutes. This icing can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator and re-whipped just before using. You may need to thin this some in order to use in the decorating bag. Use water a teaspoon at a time to thin. Use it in the thicker texture to put your gingerbread houses together.