

Gingerbread chalet is fun, easy to make

Hansel and Gretel were lured, the tale goes, into the nefarious clutches of a wicked witch who built her house of gingerbread and who caught them nibbling at her home.

This little gingerbread chalet, decorated with candy canes and gumdrops and fenced with licorice, should prove equally alluring to children in your household.

The gingerbread recipe makes plenty for the house, with enough left over for a few cookies. Red and green gumdrops, candy canes in various sizes, licorice "logs," peanut brittle and flaked coconut are used to decorate the A-frame.

Another decorating idea is to cover the roof with tiny cookies, frosted and decorated with colored sprinkles.

This simple A-frame is a modernized version of the traditional four-sided house. The "deck" is tricky but can be made easier with the help of a temporary support from a candy cane.

Use the photographs as guides and the step-by-step directions to make your own holiday house.

GINGERBREAD DOUGH

- 5 cups of sifted all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tps. baking soda
- 1 1/2 tps. salt
- 2 1/2 tps. ground ginger
- 1 1/2 tps. ground cinnamon

- 3/4 tsp. ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp. ground cardamom
- 1 cup plus 2 tps. butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup dark molasses
- 1 tbs. grated orange zest

Sift together the flour, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, cloves and cardamom. Beat the butter until it is creamy and beat in the sugar until the mixture is fluffy and light. Beat in the molasses and orange zest.

Add the flour mixture to the butter mixture, adding one-third of the flour mixture at a time and blending it in. The dough will be stiff.

Refrigerate the dough several hours or overnight.

ROYAL FROSTING

- 3 egg whites
- 1/4 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1 (1-lb.) pkg. sifted confectioners' sugar

Beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar until they are frothy, then beat in the sugar until the mixture forms very stiff peaks.

Keep the bowl covered with a damp cloth.

Baking the gingerbread: Following the chart, cut paper pattern pieces. Remember, you will need to bake two roof pieces, two walls and two chimney

sides. If you wish to add a deck, cut a pattern 1x1 1/2 inches.

Place about one-third of the dough on a foil-covered board, press it down and cover it with wax paper. Roll it to about quarter-inch thickness.

Roll off the wax paper and place a pattern over the dough. Carefully cut around the pattern, removing any excess dough.

Carefully bake the dough, still on the foil, onto a baking sheet that will not warp (we used the bottom of a roasting pan). Bake it at 350° F for eight to 10 minutes. Baking time will vary with the thickness of the piece.

When the cookie is baked, remove it from the oven and let it cool a few minutes on the pan before removing it to a rack. When the cookie is completely cool and firm, carefully peel off the foil.

Repeat the step with each pattern piece.

CONSTRUCTING the house: When the gingerbread pieces are completely cool, prepare the frosting. Fill a cake decorating bag, fitted with a plain or star tip, about one-third full of frosting. When not in use, cover the tip with a damp towel.

Place the base on a foil-covered flat surface. Pipe a line of frosting along the bottom edge of the back wall and along the back edge of the base. Place

the wall on the base, holding it upright a few minutes. It should stand up without support after a few minutes, as the frosting hardens quickly.

Decorate the front wall now. Pipe on a front door outline, a window or any other decorations that you wish.

If you add a deck, remember that this wall will be divided. Use colored frosting to make a wreath on the door or fashion some other decoration from candies and frosting.

Pipe frosting along the wall bottom, and in a line on the base, about one inch in from the end. Place the wall on the base, allowing the frosting to harden. Reinforce connections by piping frosting along the edges.

When the walls seem solid, pipe frosting along the edges on one side and press on one-half of the roof. You may have to prop it up (we used licorice candies) until the frosting hardens. Repeat with the other roof piece. Don't be alarmed if there is a gap at the center of the roof. Ours had about a three-eighth-inch gap.

After the frosting hardens enough that the roof pieces don't slide, pipe reinforcing frosting along all the seams.

PIPE FROSTING along each edge of the gap in the roof and place gumdrops along the top in a decorative pattern. They will fill in the gap and simulate roof tiles.

To attach a deck, pipe frosting on three sides and carefully slide the deck piece into place. Prop it up with a broken candy cane and let the frosting harden. Reinforce the seams with more frosting.

For rails, break candy canes into

short pieces of the same length. Dab frosting on one end of each piece and stand them up along the deck edge.

Let that stand to harden while you construct the chimney.

Pipe frosting along the back and side edges. Place the back flat on the table and attach the sides, holding them upright a few minutes. Let the chimney harden while you go around the house with frosting, covering all the exposed edges and reinforcing any doubtful seams.

When the chimney is solid, pipe the edges that will touch the roof and place the chimney on the roof. Hold it a few minutes until the frosting hardens. Trim the chimney back piece to fit. To trim the gingerbread, use a sharp paring knife and run it over the line several times, cutting more deeply each time until it is completely cut through.

TO DECORATE the house, use frosting to glue each piece of gumdrop or candy cane to the house. We cut green gumdrops in half and placed them in a circle for the wreaths, then used a red gumdrop in the center of each.

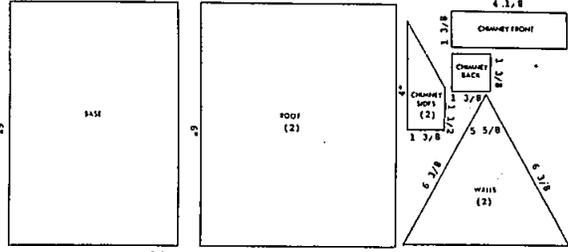
Candy canes were broken to fit and attached with frosting.

Pipe frosting in a decorative pattern along the deck edge.

Break pieces of peanut brittle and place them on the base by the front wall. Use more brittle to make a path to the edge of the foil-covered base.

Alternate gumdrops and licorice logs to make a fence, stacking two gumdrops at one corner to make a gate. Sprinkle coconut all over the base to simulate snow.

Take a deep breath and remove the deck support. All that's needed now is a pretty tabletop.



Use this pattern design as the base for creating your own gingerbread chalet.

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