

Gingerbread Heart-to-House Plans

By T.B. Hickson

Note: This recipe is intended for adults or older children with adult supervision. Decorating the resulting houses is an activity suitable for all ages.

A gingerbread house can be as simple as a flat, house-shaped cookie, or as complex as a many storied mansion.

The plans included here provide the pieces to construct a simple gingerbread house.

If you would like to do as Hans does in the story of *The First Gingerbread House*, start with heart-shaped cookies using the heart pattern, and then trim the cookies while still warm to the shapes outlined within the hearts.

(You will end up with plenty of delicious trimmings to eat while you put together your house.)

As for the cookie dough, I have included a recipe adapted from one found in the 1972 *New York Times Heritage Cookbook* by Jean Hewitt. Using the pattern below, if you cut only the house pieces, it will make three houses. If you make the heart-shaped cookies, and then cut the house pieces from them, it will make two houses.

This spicy-sweet recipe makes a dry dough. While it may take some work to hold together and roll out, the result is

a cookie that doesn't spread much and which makes strong house pieces. It also tastes great.

You may find other recipes online for chocolate, honey or other suitable gingerbreads. If a dough is too soft, refrigerating it for 20 minutes or overnight will help.

Even using this recipe, your cookies will spread a little while cooking. You will have a much easier time constructing your house if you re-trim the pieces

while warm to insure you have straight lines to glue together. Use the patterns as a guide to trim.

Be sure the cookies are completely cool before decorating.

Use royal icing to glue the pieces together and attach candies. I've included a recipe below.

Want to eat your creation? As it dries, it will become tougher to eat. While a month-old gingerbread house may still be technically edible, dust and dryness may not make it an enjoyable snack.

A little history: While gingerbread houses only became popular after the Brothers Grimm published the fairytale *Hansel and Gretel* in 1812, there is evidence cookie houses were constructed long before then, possibly from as early as the 12th Century.

Gingerbread Cookie/House Recipe:

What you will need:

The pattern copied and cut out.
A mixer, or a good strong spoon for stirring
Two wooden dowels 12-18 inches long and 3/16 wide (optional, but so helpful)

Rolling pin
A knife to cut the dough in the pattern shapes
One or more cookie sheets
Saucepan
Spatula
Cookie racks for cooling

Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup molasses
- 3/4 cup butter (1 1/2 sticks)
- 3/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 large egg, beaten enough to mix white and yolk
- 4 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3 teaspoon ground ginger (1 tablespoon equals 3 teaspoons)



Directions:

1. Heat molasses, butter and sugar over medium heat just until butter is melted and sugar has dissolved. Set aside to cool.
2. Cut out your pattern pieces. (You will have about 20 minutes to wait for the butter mixture to cool.)
3. Measure and sift together into a large bowl flour, baking powder, soda, salt, cinnamon, and ginger. (Baking powder and spices can form clumps that don't always break apart with just stirring. Sifting breaks up the clumps and mixes everything together.)
4. Mix the egg in the cooled wet ingredients.
5. Stir the wet mixture into the dry ingredients. In order to mix this well, you may need to use your hands to knead the dough.
6. Let the mixture rest for 10-20 minutes. This allows the dry ingredients to soak up the liquids.
7. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
8. Roll out your dough 3/16 inch thick on a lightly floured board. This is where the wooden dowels come in handy. Place them



parallel no wider apart than the width of your rolling pin. Then roll out the dough between them. You will have cookies an even thickness.

9. Bake 10 minutes, until set. This will make firm, but soft cookies. If you want them crisp, bake them longer.
10. Trim the warm cookies using the patterns as guides.
11. Place on cooling racks.



Royal Icing I

- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 2 1/2 Tablespoons warm water
- 1 1/2 Tablespoons meringue powder

Royal Icing II

- 2-3 cups powdered sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 large egg white

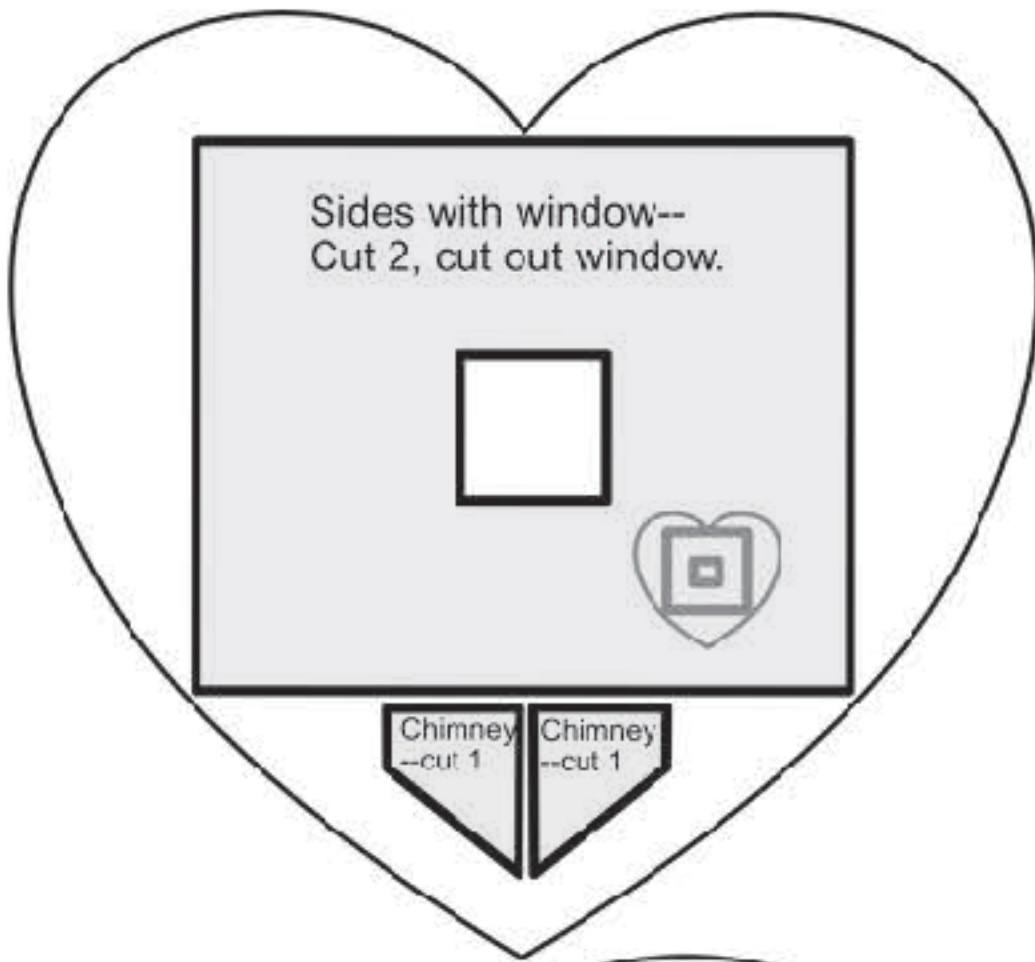
Directions: Choose one recipe above. Beat all ingredients together until the icing forms peaks. For glueing the houses together and candy onto the houses, stiffer icing dries faster. If needed, add more sugar to thicken your icing. For icicles or other decorations, you may thin it down slowly with a little bit of water.

Tips on constructing your house:

- Use a flat surface as your base. Foil-covered cardboard works well. (The raised edges on a plate make it hard to use cans for support.)
- You may decorate the pieces before or after putting them together. Decorating the pieces first, while flat, before constructing the house will keep candies from sliding down the walls while the icing is still wet. On the other hand, it might be more fun to just dig in.
- Glue the walls together and to the base using royal icing. Use cans to hold up the walls while they dry.
- WAIT! Let the walls dry before adding the roof.
- Now you can use those same cans to hold the roof pieces in place while the icing holding them dries.
- Add a chimney (using one or two pieces joined for the chimney).
- Decorate your house. Sift powdered sugar “snow” on top for a final touch, if you like.



Enjoy your gingerbread house!



Roof-- Cut 2



Front and Back -- Cut 2.

Cut out door on one or both pieces, as desired.

