

Christmas in St. Michaels

Gingerbread House Dough

Ingredients:

- 1 cup shortening (Crisco)
- 1 cup molasses
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 ½ teaspoons baking soda
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar



Method:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine sugar, shortening and molasses.
2. Add egg and mix well.
3. Add all of the dry ingredients and stir. When almost mixed, stir in the vinegar until well blended.
4. Use your hands to form the dough into a soft ball.
5. Slightly flatten the ball to about a 1-inch thick disc and wrap in plastic wrap.
6. Refrigerate several hours or overnight. (Dough will keep for a week.)

Cutting House Pieces:

- Let dough come to room temperature.
- Lightly flour work surface.
- Roll dough to a ½ inch thickness.
- Place template on rolled dough (various templates are found online).
- With a sharp paring knife, cut around template.
- Bake at 375 degrees for 8 to 15 minutes depending on the size of the pieces.
- Bake until completely dry.



Tips:

If using a hand mixer, add the dry ingredients a cup at a time. As dough gets stiffer, use a wooden spoon or turn out on a clean surface and mix with your hands. Try not to incorporate a lot of extra flour. Roll dough between two sheet-pan sized pieces of parchment paper.



Royal Icing (glue)

Ingredients:

3 ½ cups of confectioners' sugar (10X)
2 egg whites
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Method:

1. Whisk egg whites until they are stiff and form soft peaks.
2. Add sugar and lemon juice.
3. Beat for several minutes with a mixer.



Tips:

- Keep bowl covered with a damp tea towel.
- Keep all utensils grease free.
- An alternative to the above recipe is Wilton Meringue Powder. Follow the package directions for Royal Icing.

General Tips for Making Gingerbread Houses

- Handle cut gingerbread as little as possible, cut on parchment paper or silpats and remove excess dough around the template and bake.
- Cut out windows before baking.
- Use template to trim pieces while warm, just out of the oven.
- Color gingerbread with food color (gel) with a bit of egg white. Brush lightly on unbaked gingerbread and then bake. Re-apply after a few minutes in the oven for a darker color.
- Create glass windows by using crushed hard candy or Lifesavers. Sprinkle crushed candy into cut-out spaces after 3-4 minutes in oven, then return to oven and bake until gingerbread is done and candy is smooth.
- Let house pieces dry in the oven with JUST the oven light on – NO HEAT OR FLAME.
- Make house pieces 3-4 days before assembling the house.
- Add piped decorative details before constructing the house.
- Affix house firmly to base with Royal Icing.
- Use round peppermint sticks on interior seams for added support.
- To help stabilize your house while icing dries, use quilter's pins to temporarily hold the walls together.
- Let assembled house dry overnight BEFORE decorating.
- Look beyond the candy aisle. Cereal, cookies, crackers, nuts and spices all add interesting colors and textures.
- Icing covers a lot of gaps and candy or materials above will cover the rest.
- Gather family and friends and have a gingerbread party to share supplies and decorate houses together.
- Check out the gingerbread section at the St. Michaels Library.
- Most of all, HAVE FUN and remember that all imaginative gingerbread creations are welcome!

