

The Bookakery

Gingerbread

1/3 cup shortening
1 cup dark brown sugar
1 1/2 cup dark molasses (12 ounce bottle)
1/2 cup cold water
7 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground allspice
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons baking soda dissolved in 3 tablespoons of cold water

Makes: Two large houses plus some cookies. You might be able to get three houses out of it but it would be tight.

This recipe is also great to use for cookies (frosted and unfrosted). The cookies are a great solid cookie that makes them perfect for boxing up as gifts and are delicious dipped in your favorite hot holiday drink.

Mix together thoroughly the shortening, brown sugar and molasses. I highly suggest using a 12 ounce bottle of dark molasses so you don't have to pour it into a measuring cup and then into your bowl...they weren't kidding when they said "slow as molasses."

Stir in the cold water until fully integrated.

In a small bowl dissolve the baking soda in 3 tablespoons of cold water and set aside. In separate mixing bowl sift together the flour, salt and all the spices. Mix in the water-baking soda mixture.

Slowly add the dry ingredients into your wet ingredients, mixing after each cup or so. This dough gets really thick so you will want to switch to a dough hook if you have one and you will probably still need to mix in the last cup or so of dry mixture with your hands. You will get messy and you will get a work out so this is great in place of an arms day at the gym. Of course, in my book, baking is always better than going to the gym.

Once all the dough is well mixed divide it into 3-4 balls and press them into disks and put into Ziplock bags to chill in your fridge. To make it easy I start each disk with my hands, put it in the bag and then press it flat in the bag as much as possible and then seal the bag. This will help the dough chill faster and make it easier when it comes time to roll out your dough.

After your dough has chilled for a few hours or overnight you are ready to roll, cut and bake your pieces. Pre-heat your oven to 350 degrees. Prep your rolling space with flour to avoid sticking and take out one disk of dough to roll out. Roll dough to 1/8" - 1/4" thick and cut out your pieces. Bake pieces for 9-14 minutes. Gingerbread is done when you can light press in a fingerprint and doesn't leave a mark. Repeat rolling, cutting and baking till all our pieces are done. Let the pieces cool before assembling your houses. Pieces can be store in Tupperware if you are using them in the next day or two or wrap them separately in foil and freeze until you are ready to use.

Icing Cement

2 egg whites
1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
2 cups powdered sugar

Beat eggs whites and cream of tartar until stiff. Gradually beat in powdered sugar. Beat 10 minutes or more until very stiff. While using or storing cover with plastic wrap (or a bowl lid) to prevent drying. This icing cement will dry very hard and is perfect for building and decorating your houses. If you are planning on making cookies to decorate and eat I would use our Royal Icing recipe instead of the Icing Cement. You can find it on our Tea & Sugar Cookies post.

Assembling & Decorating your houses

Wrap a piece of cardboard (great use for all those Amazon boxes) or a cookie sheet in foil to use as base for your house. Set yourself up with your board in front of you, all of your house pieces within reach and your cement on a wide shallow bowl or plate and have a butter knife or spatula handy.

Most gingerbread cutters or patterns that you cut behind will be sized that you put the edge of the side against the back of the front and back pieces but check this before you cement your pieces to make sure you are putting them together in a way that will fit your roof pieces. Dip the bottom edge and one side edge of the front piece in your cement and then hold on your board. While still holding that with one hand (or working with a partner or friend) take one side piece and dip the bottom and one side in the cement and then place on your board with the front and side pieces meeting where you put the cement. Hold the front and side piece for a minute or two until they feel sturdy enough to let go without them falling over. Add in the second side and then the back piece the same way. After all four walls are together let them dry for about 5 minutes before you add the roof pieces. To attach the roof, use your knife or spatula to spread cement on the top of the walls and around the back edges of your roof pieces. Make sure to have a good amount of cement along the top ridge. Hold until sturdy. If you have a door or chimney pieces you can add now or wait till you start decorating.

Once the cement has dried on all your seams it's time to start decorating! There are no rules to decorating. You can coat your house in cement and stick candy to it. You can dip your candy in a bowl of cement and then place them on your house. You can get fancy and use piping bags, food coloring and carefully patterned candy pieces or you can simply see how much you can fit on to the house. Whatever makes you happy. Most any candy will work on the house but see the list below for some ideas.

Candy ideas:

- Candy canes
- Peppermint twists
- Sprinkles
- Licorice
- Gum drops
- Mini Nilla Wafers (they make great shingles)
- M&Ms
- Small gumballs
- Red hots
- Mini marshmallows (great for snowmen)
- Sugar cones (use upside down to make trees)