



DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION

University of Arkansas System

Gingerbread Fun Facts and Recipes

Fun Gingerbread Fact #1- December 12th is National Gingerbread House Day.

You heard me right! There really is a day given to celebrating the sweet and spicy creations. While the originator and history of how National Gingerbread House Day started is unknown, it is recognized on the National Day Calendar as a fun food holiday complete with its own hashtag for sharing on social media.

To celebrate you might follow the 2020 National Gingerbread House Contest. It's virtual this year and you can also view last year's winners. Of course, you can also make your own gingerbread house and share your fabulous creation as **#GingerbreadHouseDay**. Be creative and make it a family holiday!

[Link for the 2020 Gingerbread House Contest](#)



Fun Gingerbread Fact #2 – Gingerbread has a history that goes back to ancient times.

The history of baking with ginger and spices goes back to ancient Egypt and Rome. Gingerbread is thought to first have been brought to Europe in 992 by an Armenian monk. He moved to France and taught the French Christians how to make gingerbread. Returning crusaders also spread the spicy treat across Europe. Gingerbread soon became associated with religious culinary traditions as often it was monks and priests who prepared it.

By the 1600s, Nuremberg, Germany was recognized as the “Gingerbread Capital of the World” when the guild used master bakers and skilled workers to create elaborate works of art from gingerbread. By the 17th century only professional bakers could make gingerbread except at Christmas and Easter, when anyone could make it.

Fun Gingerbread Fact #3 – The Brothers Grimm are credited with the tradition of gingerbread houses or at least making it popular.

In the early 1800s the fairy tale, “Hansel and Gretel” in which two abandoned children found an edible house made of sugar and bread stirred the imagination of German bakers and a new holiday tradition of houses made of lebkuchen (gingerbread) became a holiday tradition. When the Pennsylvanian German immigrants came to America, they brought the decorated house tradition with them and it quickly became popular.

Fun Gingerbread Fact #4 – Queen Elizabeth I is credited with the first gingerbread men.

Gingerbread was popular across Europe and had been formed into many shapes or religion icons. It is commonly thought that the first time the sweet bread was formed into the likeness of a man was on behalf of Queen Elizabeth I of England. Visiting dignitaries were each presented gingerbread shaped to resemble themselves to honor and mark the occasion.



Fun Gingerbread Fact #5 – The gingerbread man shape is the most popular shape for gingerbread in the U.S.

In an 1875 issue of the St. Nicholas magazine, a popular American children’s publication the “The Gingerbread Boy” story was the first published. Today, there are many versions of “The Gingerbread Man” with its dark moral of “be careful who you trust.” This story has been a contributing factor for the *man* figure being the most popular shape for gingerbread in America. Of course, The Gingerbread Man, aka “Gingy” from Shrek, hasn’t hurt his popularity.

Fun Gingerbread Fact #6 – You are only as limited as your own creativity when it comes to gingerbread houses.

Making gingerbread houses is no longer restricted to the professionals so what are you waiting for? Making a house totally from scratch is more time consuming than it is difficult and there are lots blog experts willing to share their vast knowledge of all things gingerbread.

Inexpensive kits are also available to simplify the process. Since they come with all the candies and icing needed, you really do save money by not having to buy a bunch of decorations. If you are using a kit, the whole family can work together or let everyone pick out their own style. Some kits even come with the house already constructed and you only do the decorating



By the way: If you are really pressed for time, hot glue works amazingly fast at getting your house to stay together without all the holding and drying time. *Be sure to only use glue if you aren’t going to eat it!*

Maybe you don’t really care for the smell of gingerbread, well, graham crackers serve as a tasty substitute. If you have a favorite rolled cookie recipe, you can probably use it to form the walls. (You can try adding a little more flour to the recipe to help firm up the walls.) I’ve even heard of people decorating a house out of the large pretzel sticks. Gingerbread houses aren’t limited to just cute little

cottages. I decided to make a doghouse personalized with a cookie to look like my dog, Sleet.

I used an easy gingerbread recipe and a basic pattern for cutting out the pieces of the house. Instead of cutting windows and a regular door, I cut out a large rounded door in one end and decorated the house with a *Christmassy* doggie theme.

Instead of buying a bunch of different candies, I found a set of Christmas themed decorating candies that can be used for cookies, cakes, etc. and picked through some leftover Halloween candy for the red, green, and yellow pieces. The stocking, presents, wreath and dog cookie were made from the leftover dough from cutting out the doghouse and I just cut and shaped until it looked like something intentional. I already had food coloring paste and a base board, so the gingerbread doghouse cost me less than ten dollars.

Basic Gingerbread Recipe and Pattern

Instead of throwing away the leftover scraps of dough, I used a small round cookie cutter and made cookies. My daughter cut out snowflakes that were about one and half inches across out of paper. Laying the snowflakes on the cookies, we sifted powdered sugar over them and then carefully lifted the snowflake off. This is an easy decorating trick that can be done on any of your plain baked goods with all kinds of patterns or themes.



One thing my family liked about this recipe was that the ginger flavor was not super strong. If you are a really big fan of ginger or other spices, you can adjust the amount of spices added to the recipe. This recipe calls for allspice. If you do not have it on hand, you can substitute a mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg and ground cloves.