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GINGERBREAD HOUSE CUTOUTS

Prep: 35 minutes Chill: 3 hours Bake: 12 minutes per batch

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup shortening
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ cup molasses
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 recipe Royal Icing
- Desired candies for decorating

DIRECTIONS

In a large mixing bowl beat shortening with a mixer on medium to high 30 seconds. Add sugar, baking powder, ginger, baking soda, cinnamon, and cloves. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in molasses, egg, and vinegar until combined. Beat in whole wheat flour. Beat in as much of the all-purpose flour as you can with the mixer. Using a wooden spoon, stir in any remaining flour. Divide dough in half. Cover and chill about 3 hours or until dough is easy to handle.

Preheat oven to 375° F. On a large sheet of parchment paper, roll one portion of the dough into a 1/4-inch- thick rectangle, sprinkling top of dough lightly with flour as necessary to prevent sticking. Using a sharp knife, cut out desired house shapes. Remove excess dough. Slide parchment paper onto a large cookie sheet. Bake 10 minutes (cutouts will spread slightly during baking). Trim hot gingerbread cutouts to original shapes. Bake 2 to 3 minutes more or until edges start to brown and centers are firm. Carefully slide parchment paper onto a wire rack; cool. Repeat with additional dough, additional parchment paper, and any remaining house shapes.

Assemble house, using Royal Icing. Assemble walls first, using cans of food to prop up pieces. Let stand about 1 hour or until firm. Add roof pieces, pressing gently to secure and holding until pieces stay in place. Let stand about 1 hour or until firm. Pipe icing to fill gaps. If desired, use icing to make any finishing touches and to secure assorted candies. Let stand until icing is firm.



ROYAL ICING

Prep: 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 1 16-ounce pkg. powdered sugar (4 cups)
- 3 tablespoons meringue powder
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ½ cup warm water
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large mixing bowl stir together powdered sugar, meringue powder, and cream of tartar. Add the water and vanilla. Beat with a mixer on low until combined. Beat on high 7 to 10 minutes or until icing reaches a stiff piping consistency.

2. If not using immediately, cover bowl with a damp paper towel and then with plastic wrap; chill for up to 48 hours.

Tip: Look for meringue powder in the cake decorating aisle of hobby and craft stores.

Yield: about 3 cups