

A HOLIDAY TRADITION



What smells more like Christmas than gingerbread men baking in the oven?

The origin of Gingerbread dates back date back to ancient times when the spice, ginger, was known for its medicinal properties, often used for curing stomach aches. Small gingerbread cakes adorned with symbols of the sun were made to celebrate the Winter Solstice in pre-Christian Europe. In the 11th century Crusaders returning from the Middle East brought a new spice, ginger, with them.

Catholic monks baked gingerbread for special religious celebrations. The cakes were constructed in specific designs depicting saints and religious motifs. The early carvings were made with a large and elaborately carved "cookie board" that impressed the pattern onto a stiff rolled dough.

As the costs of exotic ingredients and spices dropped, gingerbreads slowly became more popular across Europe and Britain. The English added bread crumbs to the recipes. In the 16th and 17th centuries, gingerbread became lighter, with flour replacing breadcrumbs in the recipes. As early as 1573, treacle (molasses) was used instead of honey, and by the mid 1600s it had replaced honey altogether. Butter and eggs became popular additions to enrich the mixture.

The first gingerbread man is credited to the court of Queen Elizabeth I, who impressed important visitors with charming gingerbread portraits.

The tradition of baking a Gingerbread house began in Germany after the Brothers Grimm published their collection of German fairy tales in the early 1800s. Among the tales was the story of Hansel and Gretel, children left to starve in the forest, who came upon a house made of bread and sugar decorations. It is possible however that brothers Grimm were actually writing about something that may have already existed. Early settlers from Northern Europe brought the gingerbread tradition to the New World by the 19th century.



Recipe for Gingerbread "Man" Cookies

Ingredients:

½ C sugar	½ C shortening	½ C light molasses
1 ½ tsp. cinnamon	1 tsp baking powder	1 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cloves	½ tsp. baking soda	½ tsp. salt
1 egg		

Measure all ingredients into a large bowl. Using mixer at low speed, beat together until well mixed. Shape dough into a ball. Wrap in plastic wrap & refrigerate one hour or until dough is firm enough to handle.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. On a lightly floured surface, with a floured rolling pin, roll dough to about ¼" thickness. Cut out cookies using a gingerbread-man cookie cutter & place cookies on a non-stick, ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake cookies for approximately 8 minutes or until browned. After the cookies have cooled, pipe on the features with ornamental icing.

ENJOY!

Submitted BY Carolee Olsen #267