

YOUR GINGERBREAD HOUSE: BUILT TO LAST

Famous chefs help you avoid gingerbread pitfalls

Moisture Problems

Your gingerbread house
Chef Dana Herbert suggests air-drying pieces for two days before assembly in a low-moisture room.

Your real house
Set thermostat to 78 degrees F. to avoid mold problems in humid weather.

Collapsed Roof

Your gingerbread house
Janet D'Orsi suggests attaching roof peaks with a toothpick when drying.

Your real house
Signs of roof trouble include dark areas on ceilings and peeling paint on the underside of roof overhangs.

Wall Cracks

Your gingerbread house
Chef John Hart says mix royal icing with brown food coloring, then rub into cracks.

Your real house
If paint touch-ups stand out, paint the entire wall.

Cracked Panes

Your gingerbread house
Chef David Diffendorfer says gelatin sheets make colorful windows that look like antique leaded glass.

Your real house
Inspect window panes for cracks. If you find any, it's time to replace.

More gingerbread tips from the pros

Janet D'Orsi

Owner of the Gingerbread Construction Company in Wakefield, Mass.

- Roll wall and roof dough to 1/16-inch thick.
- Overlap Necco wafers for a tile roof.
- Melt Lifesavers candy to simulate stained glass.

Chef Dana Herbert

Winner of TLC's "Next Great Baker" show owner of Desserts by Dana in New Castle, Del.

- Cut gingerbread with pizza wheel and measure with level.
- Bake gingerbread until dark brown and cracker-like.
- Run dehumidifier while drying in humid climates.

Chef John Hart

Executive chef at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel

- Use margarine instead of butter for stronger walls.
- Use supports to prevent bowed roofs.
- Bake and dry two days before assembly.

Chef David Diffendorfer

Instructor at the The Art Institute of Portland, Ore.

- Strengthen gingerbread with molten white chocolate wash.
- Pipe chocolate onto display board to create foundation.
- Attach chipped pieces with white chocolate.