

Kid's KOrner

CONNIE LEINBACH

Berks Co. Correspondent

READING (Berks Co.) —

Creating a gingerbread house may be too awesome a task for some kids. But take heart. Young ones can test the water by first building a cottage out of graham crackers.

Very young children will need a lot of adult supervision. Children in the middle elementary grades will need an adult to cut crackers to size. And young ones may need help squeezing the icing out of the pastry bag.

But no matter. The idea is to have fun and build an edible house complete with candy decorations.

"Each one may take from one to two hours to complete," says Pat Golembiewski, a professional cake maker and wedding planner of Redwood Drive, Wyomissing. The total length of time is needed because the icing glue should dry for 30 minutes or more before decorating the house.

Pat's cookie cottage designs are patterned after the cookie house designed by the Gingerbread Lady of Lancaster.

Pat says that the houses don't need to be made out of graham crackers. They also can be made out of club crackers, or even pretzel sticks for a log cabin look.

You are limited only by your imagination!

Here's what you'll need:

- A piece of cardboard covered with tin foil on which to build your house. If you want to use colored foil, make sure it is lead free.

- Graham crackers or Club crackers or pretzels

- Assorted small candies: Tootsie rolls, gum drops, spearmints, fish crackers, M&Ms, Necco wafers, Twizzlers — whatever you want to decorate your house with.

- Royal icing made from the Wilton meringue powder mix, which is available in the cake decorating sections of craft stores. (Pat says if you are going to eat the house, you should use this powder because of the threat of Salmonella poisoning if you use raw eggs.) Also, use Domino's 10X confectioner's sugar in the icing. Pat stresses a name brand because she says this one works the best. (She should know, being a

professional).

Here's the recipe:

3 tablespoons meringue powder
1 pound Domino's 10X confectioner's sugar

5½ tablespoon warm water (if needed, you may add 1/2 tablespoon or more)

Follow the directions on the meringue powder box carefully. A double batch of this icing will make six houses.

To form house

Cut two whole graham crackers in half to make four house sides.

To cut them so that they don't break, place them on a clean, folded towel and use a sharp, serrated knife to saw through it. Pat emphasizes you must not press down on the cracker or it will break) just hold it gently by the sides.

Next (and this is the part for adults) cut one-fourth off two whole graham crackers to make two rectangles 3-inches long. These will be the two roof pieces. Cut two small remaining pieces into triangles. These will support the roof pieces.

Start by squeezing the icing "glue" on the board on the spot where your house will be. Pat says for best control of the icing, don't fill the bag full. Less is better.

Stand up the four sides of the house in the icing, gluing the bottom edges to the base and at the side edges (house corners), gluing generously with icing. Let them stand until the icing is hard.

Meanwhile, cut a roof. Ripple icing along all the top edges of the front and back house pieces. Place onto this icing ripple ledge the two triangle graham pieces. Put icing along the two triangle edges and one side edge of house. Place on these iced edges the one roof graham piece. Repeat, putting icing along the remaining four edges (including long center roof edge) then put the second roof piece in place.

Meanwhile, make a Christmas tree with a sugar ice cream cone. All you need is to add green food coloring to a portion of the icing. Mix it and fill another cake decorating bag. Squeeze small peaks all around the cone for a Douglas Fir look or just spread the icing in the



Samantha Dillman, 5, of West Lawn, prepares to build her graham cracker house with the help of professional cake maker Pat Golembiewski. First, the four walls are set up and allowed to dry for at least a half hour.

cone and decorate with sprinkles.

Frost the roof with icing. For a snowy yard look, spread icing all around the house on top of the cardboard. Now the fun begins as you decorate your house before the icing hardens.

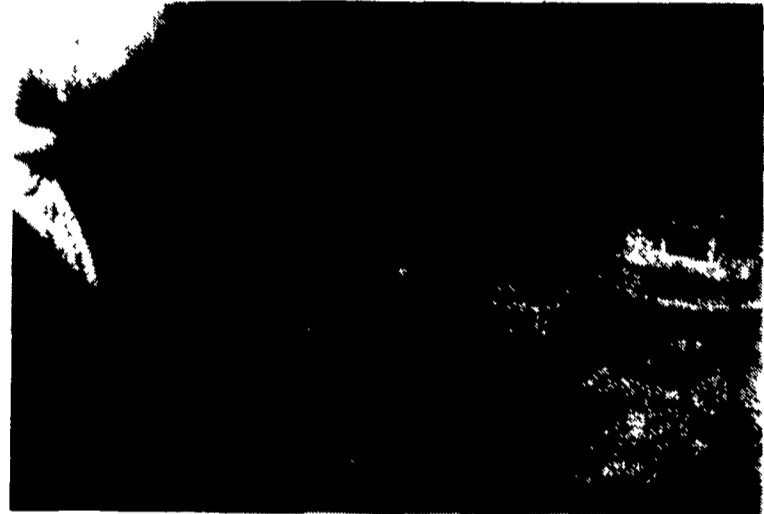
One imaginative thing Pat does is make fences out of cut Tootsie rolls. With the colored Tootsie rolls, she cuts them and kneads them, and molds them into bushes.

"I like to do this stuff," Pat says about her cottages and the gingerbread houses she makes every year at Christmas. "I like to create."

Roof shingles can be made with Quaker Toasted Oatmeal flakes or Necco wafers. Pat even uses Cap'n Crunch for roofing.

She suggests that when you aren't using the icing in the bowl or in the bag, keep it covered with a damp towel so that the icing doesn't dry out. Leftover icing can be saved in a tightly covered container at room temperature while you are ready to make the houses. Just beat it to bring it back to consistency.

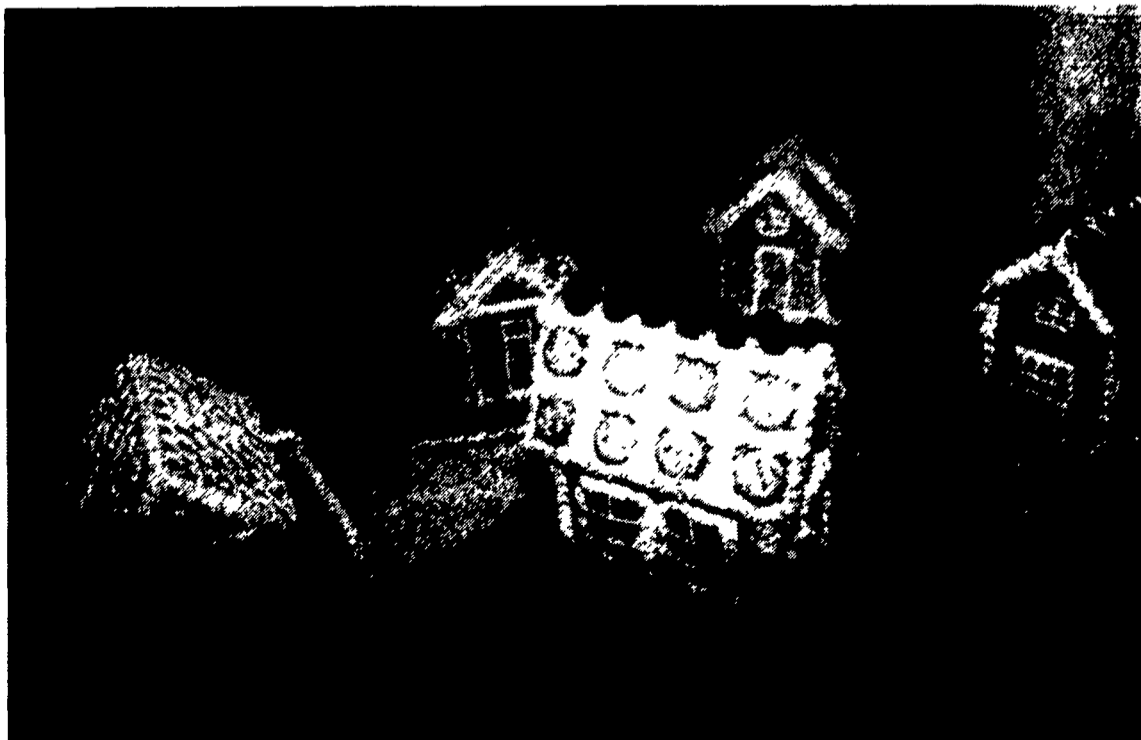
If you don't want to eat your cookie house, Pat says it will keep for years if covered with plastic and stored in a dry place.



Pat demonstrates how to cut graham crackers with a serrated knife so that they don't break. Place cracker on clean, dry towel and hold gently by the edges while cutting using a sawing method.



A paper cup or a sugar ice cream cone can be used to make a Christmas tree. Paper cups can be cut to whatever size you want. Coat with white or colored frosting.



Your creativity in designing your house is limited only by your imagination, as you can see by the variety of these cottages Pat made.