



Gingerbread Houses

by Marybeth Tew



HAVE YOU EVER wanted to be a candy architect? You could make pretzel bridges, cookie towers, and lollipop glass. Your couch would be a slab of chocolate, and your pillows would be big, fluffy marshmallows.

Sound like a dream? People all over the world make edible homes and villages out of gingerbread, a treat made with honey, molasses, or sugar, and lots of spices, including ginger, of course. Gingerbread can be a smooth, soft bread, but if you want to build a sturdy house out of it, you bake it as a flat, biscuit-like cookie.

Gingerbread has been delighting taste buds worldwide for centuries. Gingerbread likely came from the Middle East or Asia, where people have been making it for over a thousand years. Legend has it that gingerbread arrived in Europe in the tenth century, when a monk named Gregory Makar brought the recipe from Armenia to France.

So, what did you decide to be when you grow up, Sam?



A moth, I'll bet. Gotta love that nightlife.



No chance! Butterfly all the way. You can't beat those beautiful wings.



I think you should be a pretty flower, Sammy!



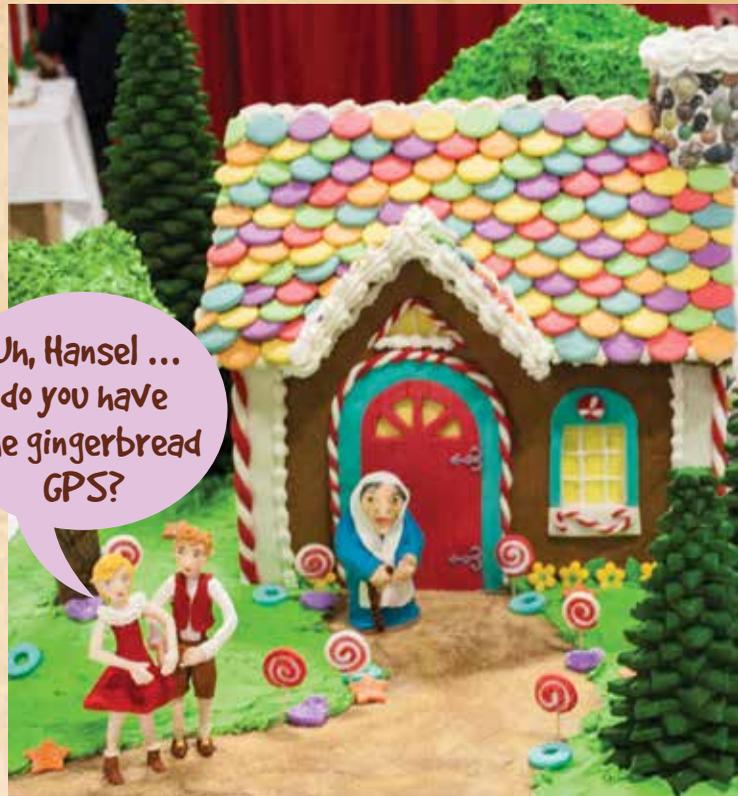


As the treat became more popular throughout Europe, gingerbread shaping became an art form. People would carve a picture into a piece of wood and press dough into the mold, and their cookies would come out of the oven looking like the picture. Some historians report that Queen Elizabeth I of England would serve gingerbread shaped like little men to visiting royalty. To delight her guests, she would even have the treats decorated to look like the people they were being served to!

Although gingerbread became popular in many parts of Europe, it really caught on in Germany. After the Brothers Grimm wrote the story of Hansel and Gretel, Germans began to make gingerbread houses just like the one in the story. They called the finished house a *Lebkuchenhaus* or *Pfefferkuchenhaus*. Later, when Germans immigrated to America, they brought this tradition along with them, and it became a tradition for many Americans as well, especially around Christmastime.



This wooden gingerbread mold of Queen Mary II of England was hand carved by artist Gene Wilson in the style of early European gingerbread molds.



Uh, Hansel ... do you have the gingerbread GPS?

What about an architect—a person who designs buildings?

Honestly, Sam, whether you become a moth or a butterfly, you should still be a scientist. It is what you are.

Zo what will you do now?

Nothing. It turns out that for both moths and butterflies, there's one delicacy that's not edible—able to be eaten...





Pepperkakebyen displays in Bergen, Norway
(top and bottom)



In 1991, the city of Bergen, Norway, started a gingerbread tradition of its own. Every winter, children ages eleven and under are invited to build an entire city out of gingerbread. This magical display is called *Pepperkakebyen*, which means “gingerbread town.” Under the protection of a big tent, the display stays open for all to see until New Year’s Eve.

Revehief is the Norwegian word for “fox lair.”



What can't they eat?

Pickles.

Noooo!

Deal breaker!

Mais, oui! When eet comes to pickles, Sam eez zee connoisseur—somebuggy who knows a lot about and appreciates zem.





Candy architects can also participate in the National Gingerbread House Competition in Asheville, North Carolina. Anyone age five or older can submit a creation, so long as the structure is 75 percent gingerbread and all the decorations are edible. Contestants have gone way beyond houses, too, building castles, barns, and birdhouses. One recent winner even made two panda bears!

Today, gingerbread house connoisseurs get really fancy when creating their masterpieces. They beat egg whites to make a fluffy snow-like concoction and cover the rooftops and chimneys with it. They make cobblestone pathways out of red beans and pinto beans. Some cut windows out of the gingerbread walls and then melt corn syrup, sugar, water, and food coloring together to fill the windows with stained glass. When they put Christmas lights inside the house, a warm light shines through the candy glass—a treat for the eyes.

From cookies to men to houses, and from Armenia to France to America, gingerbread has changed a lot over the past one thousand years. And people keep imagining new uses for the delicious dessert. The possibilities are endless! What gingerbread novelty will *you* invent? 🐌

First place winners of the 2019 National Gingerbread House Competition at The Omni Grove Park Inn, Asheville, North Carolina.



Child First Place (5- to 8-year-olds)
Adair Cary, Marshall, NC: *A Ride Through the Forest.*



Youth First Place (9- to 12-year-olds)
Anderson Adams, Raleigh, NC: *Coats of Many Colors.*



So you don't feel the need to change? You're staying a science-loving caterpillar.



I guess it's still a novelty—something new, original, or unusual—to me.



I'm not gonna be a flower yet either.

