

3-D Gingerbread Menorah (or Kinara*) Cookies

This is at least a three-day project, with several hours dedicated each day. Day one: cut out the template, make the dough, roll out, and refrigerate (steps 1 to 3). Day two: cut and bake dough, allow to cool, make sugar glue, and assemble (steps 4 to 15). Day three: make the icing and decorate (steps 16 to 21). Recipe makes eight menorahs plus additional small cookies for decorating and nibbling.

INGREDIENTS**

For the gingerbread

Dry ingredients

- 6 3/4 cups all purpose flour
- 4 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt

Optional: 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves

Optional: 3/4 teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg

Wet ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups unsalted butter, softened (can also use solid vegetable shortening)
- 1 1/2 cups dark brown sugar
- 3/4 cup robust (dark) molasses
- 3 large eggs

For the assembly “glue”

- 3/4 cup granulated white sugar
- Enough water to melt sugar, plus 1 cup

For the royal icing decorations

- 3 tablespoons Meringue Powder
- 4 cups (about 1 lb.) confectioners' sugar
- 6 tablespoons **warm** water
- Food coloring

For the decorations

- For the candles, at least 20 inches of hollow licorice OR 37 mini marshmallows per menorah.
- For the flames, 9 banana-flavored Runtz, lemon drops, or LemonHeads per menorah.
- Nine toothpicks per menorah for holding up the candles.
- Other assorted candies and sprinkles for decorating.

You will also need:

- 1 roll parchment paper
- Rolling pin (even better: Wilton's 24-inch fondant rolling pin with 3/16" ring)
- Template printed on card stock & scissors to cut it
- Small amount of additional flour so that template doesn't stick to dough
- Rolling cutter (e.g., fondant cutter, pizza cutter, or cleaned paper scoring tool)
- Sharp knife or cleaned plastic modeling tools (e.g., by Sculpey)
- Assorted cookie cutters
- Cookie sheets
- Dispensers for icing, with lids (either decorating bags and tips and silicone covers, or Wilton's mini squeeze bottles)

DIRECTIONS**

Gingerbread:

1. Cut out two sets of the templates on cardstock or cardboard and set aside. Each menorah requires two cookies of each shape.
2. Sift together all dry ingredients for the gingerbread in a medium bowl and set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer, cream the butter until fluffy then add the sugar and molasses and mix until well blended. Add eggs one at a time and beat until well blended. Turn mixer to lowest setting and spoon in dry ingredients (in at least four additions). Beat at low speed until dough forms. Divide dough into six equal pieces.
3. Roll out one dough piece between two 15-inch-long sheets of parchment to scant 1/4-inch-thick rectangle, turning over dough and parchment occasionally. If parchment wrinkles, peel off, smooth wrinkle, and reposition parchment over dough; continue to roll out dough to required thickness (a fondant rolling pin with rings makes this super easy). Repeat for all six pieces, then wrap in plastic wrap (or large zip-top bag if they'll fit and remain flat) and refrigerate 2 to 24 hours.
4. Remove one piece of dough from refrigerator. Peel off top piece of parchment, leaving the dough on the bottom piece of parchment. Dust dough **very lightly** with flour. Position all eight template pieces (enough for one menorah) on your dough, leaving at least 1/4 inch between the pieces. Use the rolling cutter to trim the edges and the knife/modeling tool to finish inside corners. Peel up scraps— trying your best NOT to disturb the cookies so they retain their shapes— and

set the scraps aside to be rerolled. Place parchment paper with dough onto a cookie sheet and return it to the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes (while you work with the next piece of dough).

5. Repeat step 4 for all six pieces of dough. Scraps from *three* pieces of dough can be combined to make another menorah (repeating steps 3 **and** 4 for this purpose twice, since you started with six pieces of dough).

6. Scraps remaining from the already-rerolled dough can **AGAIN** be combined and rerolled as many times as desired-- as long as you add no more flour. Use standard cookie cutters to make cookies for nibbling and embellishing your menorahs— think dreidels, Magen Davids, Maccabees aka gingerbread men, shields. This dough **CAN** be refrigerated before baking, but doesn't **HAVE** to be, as it won't matter as much if the cookies spread a lot during baking.

7. Preheat oven to 350F. You want cold dough going into a hot oven to minimize spreading.

8. Bake one menorah set on parchment on a cookie sheet for 10 minutes then pull out of oven. Carefully place template on pieces A and C, and use a small serrated knife to trim/straighten the ends of the menorahs (Tabs 3 on piece A) and the wedge piece edges (Tabs 1 on piece B). Return to oven and continue baking until dry looking, firm to touch in center and just beginning to darken around edges, another 2 to 6 minutes. You may have to pull the smaller pieces out earlier. When done, slide parchment with cookies onto rack to cool completely.

9. Before placing parchment for next batch on baking sheet, rinse baking sheet under cold water to cool; wipe dry. Repeat steps 8 and 9 for each menorah, and for the nibbling/embellishing cookies.

10. Allow cookies to cool.

For the assembly

Caution: *Please be careful when working with hot sugar. Sugar burns are nasty. Hot sugar is almost impossible to quick rub or rinse off the skin, and thus continues burning long after it comes into contact with your skin. Please don't allow yourself to be sloppy or distracted when working with hot sugar, and avoid dangling hair, jewelry, or clothing over the work area.*

*If you are not comfortable with the risks of working with hot sugar, instead make extra icing to use that as glue. The icing requires much longer drying times so you might need extra time in your schedule, but icing is a **lot** safer to work with.*

11. Have a tea kettle or small saucepan at the ready with a cup of water at just under a boil, in case it's needed during steps 12 to 15.

12. Combine sugar and water in small sauce pan and boil until it forms a syrup (I'm guessing 230F to 235F is target temperature— thread stage, i.e., blow or soufflé). Leave the pan on the stove, but turn the temperature down as much as you can at this point. Then work as quickly as you can do so safely. (You may find you need to occasionally add a tablespoon or so of boiling water and stir well, if the sugar concentration gets too much higher in the syrup.)

13. The general rule is that the “slots” go over the “tabs” when assembling. To start, place a menorah cookie (piece A) face-down on a piece of waxed paper or parchment next to the stove. Dip a wedge piece (Tab 1 on piece B) into the syrup, then quickly place it onto the back of the menorah cookie (Slot 1 on piece A), perpendicular to the menorah, with the wider bottom edge of the wedge piece aligned with the bottom edge of the “foot” of the menorah. Repeat with another B piece, matching it to Slot1 on that menorah. Allow to cool and set while you repeat for each menorah.

14. Place the other menorah cookie (A) face-up on top of the wedge pieces (B)-- matching Tab1-Slot1 pairs, aligning the “bottoms,” and allowing a small gap along the “top” of the menorah where the candles will go (enough room to insert a toothpick). Carefully but firmly hold together above the pan of syrup while you use a spoon to drizzle syrup “caulk” in the two Tab1-Slot1 edges. Set down carefully and allow to cool and set while you repeat for each menorah.

15. One at a time, hold the short wedges C and D over the syrup and drizzle syrup along the sides of the backs of the cookies. Quickly attach to a menorah, matching Tab2-Slot2 pairs and Tab3-Slot3 pairs. For the Tab3-Slot3 pairs, you'll need to hold the wedge in place for a few seconds while it starts to set. Allow all to cool and set. (This doesn't take very long, so you could start decorating immediately, but you probably need a break by now.)

Icing:

Note: Keep all utensils completely grease-free for proper icing consistency.

16. Beat powder, sugar, and water until icing forms peaks, about 7-10 minutes with stand mixer at low speed, or 10-12 minutes with hand-held mixer at high speed. Separate into several small cups or bowls, add food coloring to each as desired, then mix each well so that color is even throughout.

17. Put each color in its own dispenser. Take pains to minimize exposure to air as icing hardens fairly quickly when exposed to air. (If using mini squeeze bottles, store upside-down after filling and keep lids on when not in use. If using decorating bags, use silicone tip covers and store all in an air-tight container when not in use.)

Decorating:

18. Use colored icing to draw and decorate the menorahs as desired. Also use the icing as glue to affix candies to the front, back, and sides of your menorah— but remember that the icing begins to dry quickly, so if you're doing detailed work, you may want to use only a small amount of icing at a time.

19. Assemble the candles on toothpicks.

19a. If using hollow licorice, then start by trimming off the ends of the licorice. Then cut licorice into eight 2-inch lengths and one 2.5-inch length. Insert the toothpicks into the ends as far as they'll go (which may not be very far, but that's okay as you can break off the end of the toothpick if needed). The length of exposed toothpick will be used to anchor the candle into the menorah cookie.

19b. If using marshmallows, skewer five marshmallows on one toothpick and four marshmallows on each of the remaining eight toothpicks. Make sure that the pointy end of the toothpick does NOT poke out the top of the last marshmallow. The length of exposed toothpick at the other (bottom) end will be used to anchor the candle into the menorah cookie.

20. When steps 18 and 19 are complete, attach the candles to the menorah by placing a large drop of icing in the middle of the top edge of the menorah and then four evenly spaced drops along either side. Insert the ends of the toothpicks through the icing and between the cookie layers. Allow "candles" to set for

a few minutes, then place a large drop of icing on the top of each "candle" and place a yellow candy (banana Runt or lemon drop) on top.

21. Ta-da! Take pictures and post them on your blog or Facebook or Shutterfly to share with your friends. Admire your handiwork for a while. Then eat it!

** If using these instructions for a kinara, you may want to substitute a more traditional cookie dough, but make sure you reduce the fat in the recipe if the cookie recipe gives cookies that are sometimes on the soft or chewy side. The other big differences are in steps 6, 19, and 20. In step 6, use assorted cookie cutters appropriate for Kwanzaa. In step 19, you will need only 7 candles. Use licorice twists; green apple licorice twists can be ordered online, and red and black are obviously readily available in the US. In step 20, you will need only 7 evenly spaced drops of icing on the top edge of the kinara.*

***Gingerbread recipe adapted from Epicurious.com Nov2011. Icing recipe from Wilton.com Nov2011. Cautionary statement regarding working with hot sugar copied from candy.about.com Nov2011.*