

To Elizabethan Times

The History Of Gingerbread Goes Way Back

As the holiday season approaches, thoughts of delectable sweet foods dance merrily through our imaginations in anticipation. And what better represents the sweet side of Christmas than the decorative gingerbread men, who have become a long-standing part of Christmas tradition.

Somehow a ginger-flavored dessert always manages to find its way on to holiday tables everywhere, whether it is ginger cookies, cakes, snaps, or gingerbread, they are always a part of the holiday lore.

According to "The Dictionary of American Foods & Drink" (Ticknor & Fields) by John Mariani, ginger is the native plant of tropical and subtropical regions of Asia, especially Indonesia.

The ginger root was used frequently by the ancient Romans but nearly disappeared and was considered practically extinct in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. It was later brought back into vogue (as a rare and ex-

pensive spice) by famed explorer Marco Polo, who retrieved the pungent spice from the Orient.

The gingerbread man has a rather unique history of its own, as its origins have been traced back to Queen Elizabeth I of England, who was responsible for inventing "a cookie in the shape of a man" which became especially popular at Christmas time.

There is an equally interesting history surrounding the actual making of gingerbread.

Artists sculpted detailed molds depicting everyday scenes from the lifestyles of the rich, for who, the gingerbreads were made in the 16th century.

The 17th century added gingerbread etchings of the wealthy bourgeois, whom along with the rich, were the only patrons who could afford the costly gingerbread designs.

Finally, during the 18th century, gingerbread was made inexpensively enough to be offered at carnivals and fairs, extending the delights of ginger-



Making gingerbread...the old-fashioned way

bread even to the most common of folk.

Nowadays, gingerbread is considered deeply enmeshed in the history of traditional American cooking. And with Christmas fast approaching, gingerbread men not only make for a unique dessert idea, but also make the most lovely ornaments for your

Christmas tree.

No matter what type of ginger dessert you choose, it is sure to please both family and guest alike.

The recipe below for gingerbread cookies supplied from the "Recipes from the Raleigh Tavern Bake Shop," published by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, can easily be transformed to gingerbread men with the aid of a good mold.

GINGERBREAD COOKIES

(50-60 cookies)

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| 1 c. sugar | 1 c. unsulfured molasses |
| 2 tsp. ginger | ¼ tsp. vanilla extract (optional) |
| 1 tsp. nutmeg | ¼ tsp. lemon extract (optional) |
| 1 tsp. cinnamon | 4 c. stone-ground or unbleached flour, unsifted |
| ½ tsp. salt | |
| 1½ tsp. baking soda | |
| 1 c. margarine, melted | |
| ½ c. evaporated milk | |

Combine the sugar, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, salt, and baking soda. Mix well. Add the melted margarine, evaporated milk, and molasses. Add the extracts if desired. Mix well. Add the flour 1 cup at a time, stirring constantly. The dough should be stiff enough to handle without sticking to fingers. Knead the dough for a smoother

texture. Add up to ½ c. additional flour is necessary to prevent sticking. When the dough is smooth, roll it out ¼-inch thick on a floured surface and cut it into cookies. Bake on floured or greased cookie sheets in a preheated 375 degree F. oven for 10 to 12 minutes. The cookies are done if they spring back when touched.

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If you're like Mabel Reid, above, you'll be doing a lot of cooking this holiday season. If any of these special dishes calls for a white sauce, here's a mix to keep you in the sauce for a long time.

MEDIUM WHITE SAUCE MIX

- 1 8-oz. container soft Parkay margarine (reserve container)
- 1 c. flour
- 2 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- Milk

Combine margarine, flour and seasonings, mixing until well blended. Store in reserved soft Parkay margarine container in refrigerator. Provides enough mix for 11 cups white sauce. When ready to use,

place 2 measuring tablespoons of mixture in saucepan. Stir over medium heat until melted and bubbly. Gradually add 1 cup milk; cook, stirring constantly, until sauce boils and thickens. Approximately 1 cup. Variations: Add 1 cup (4 oz.) shredded J. L. Kraft Select Sharp natural cheddar cheese to sauce. Stir until melted. Add 2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley to sauce; Add 4-oz. can mushrooms, drained, to sauce; heat

thoroughly. Add ½ teaspoon curry powder to melted margarine mixture. Add ¼ teaspoon Kraft pure prepared or Dijon-style mustard to sauce. Microwave: Increase margarine mixture to 3 measuring tablespoons. Microwave in 2-cup measure on High 45 seconds to 1 minute or until melted and bubbly. Gradually add milk; microwave 2 to 4 minutes or until sauce boils and thickens, stirring well after each minute.

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