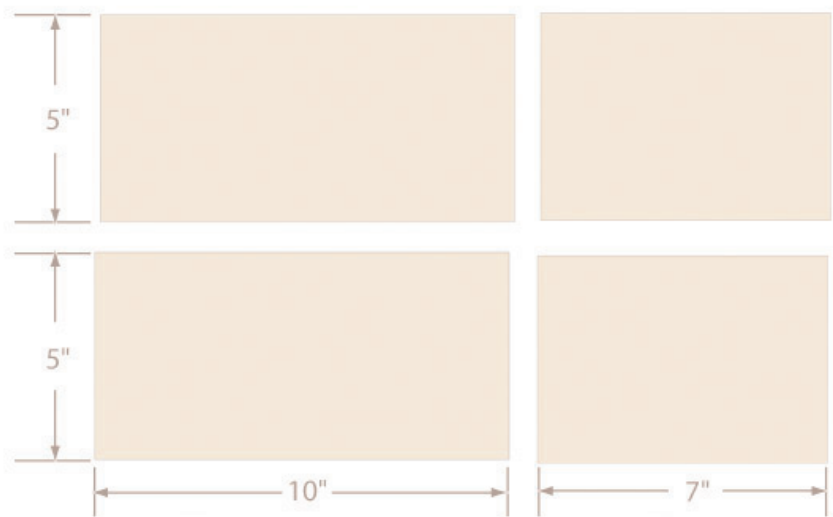


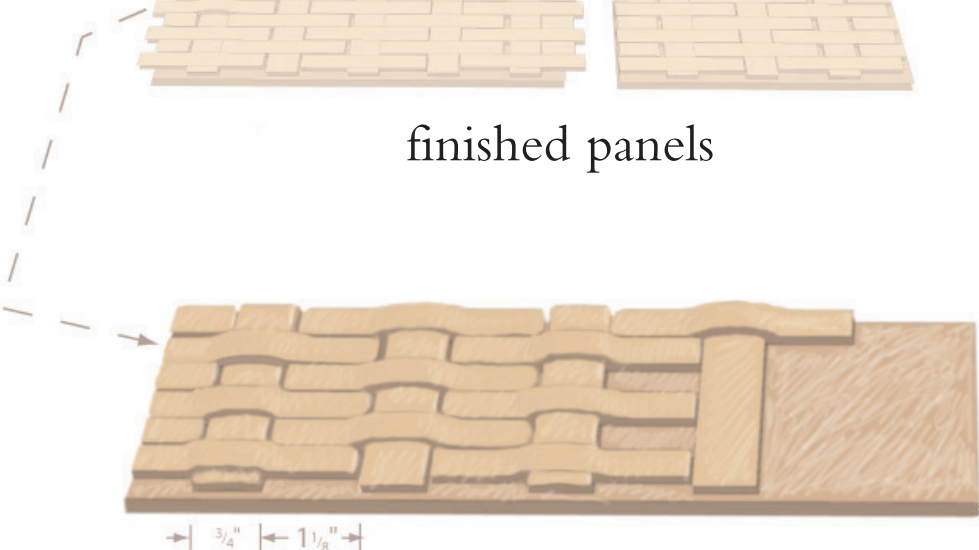
gingerbread basket templates: front, back, side panels



weave pieces: 3/4" strips



finished panels



weave assembly detail



**[SPECIAL BONUS:
DO IT YOURSELF]**

GINGERBREAD HARVEST BASKET

When Matthew and Jenny Mead entertain, they like their guests to have a sense of awe when they walk into a room. Awesome is this woven gingerbread harvest basket dressing up an antique sideboard. It's filled with autumn's bounty—squashes, berries, leaves, and sheaves of wheat. This project is edible, but you may save it from year to year if you prefer.

➤ BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. From lightweight cardboard, cut patterns for front and back panels, 10 by 5 inches each; two sides, 7 by 5 inches each (see the accompanying diagram); base, 10 by 7 inches.
2. Cut heavy-duty aluminum foil to fit several cookie sheets, mist lightly with cooking oil spray, and set aside.
3. Prepare two batches of gingerbread dough (see recipe below). Wrap each in clear plastic wrap and chill. You'll use half of the first batch to make your basket's front, back, sides, and base, and half to make decorative "weaving" strips. You'll use half of the second batch to make a handle for your basket, and half to create corner and top edge effects.

➤ GINGERBREAD DOUGH

- 5½ cups all-purpose flour,
plus extra for surfaces
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- 2 teaspoon ginger
- 3 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 1 cup vegetable shortening
(such as Crisco)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1¼ cup molasses
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- Cooking oil spray

In a large (5-quart) mixer with paddle attachment, thoroughly blend flour, baking soda, salt, and spices. In a large saucepan over medium heat, melt shortening. Add sugar, molasses, and eggs. Mix well; then remove from heat and let cool slightly. Pour cooled liquid into the flour mixture and blend on low speed until dry ingredients have been completely absorbed. Pour dough onto a lightly floured surface. Knead in additional flour if necessary for smoothness. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill until ready to roll out. *Yield: 1 batch dough*

➤ FRONT, BACK, SIDES, BASE

1. Remove one batch of dough from the refrigerator and divide in half. You'll work with one half now to create your basket's front, back, sides, and base; keep the other half wrapped and put it back in the refrigerator.
2. Roll your dough out on the prepared heavy-duty aluminum foil placed directly on a worktable or counter (not on the cookie sheets). Using your cardboard patterns, cut the dough to the specified dimensions.
3. Slide the aluminum foil onto the cookie sheets. (This technique eliminates the dough's stretching out of shape if you were to try moving panels directly to cookie sheets.) Set the sheets aside while you prepare the "weave" strips.

➤ WEAVING: 'WARP' & 'WOOF'

1. Remove the second half-batch of dough from the refrigerator; you'll turn it into strips of

gingerbread to create the illusion of weaving on the side, front, and back panels. Start by rolling out one chunk to 8 by 12 inches. Cut the 8-inch side into two pieces: 3 by 12 inches and 5 by 12 inches. Now cut crosswise strips, each ¾ inch wide. (See the accompanying diagram.) You should have a total of 16 strips of each size. Chill in the refrigerator.

2. Roll out two more rectangles, each 6 by 9 inches. Cut each in half lengthwise to create four rectangles, each 3 by 9 inches. Now cut these into ¾-inch strips. (See the accompanying diagram.) You should have a total of 48 strips, ¾ by 3 inches each. Chill in the refrigerator.
3. Wrap the remaining gingerbread in clear plastic wrap and chill.

➤ WEAVING: APPLYING THE STRIPS

1. Take the cookie sheets with the front, back, and side panels and place on your work surface. Bring out the precut strips of gingerbread from the refrigerator.
2. Lay one 5-inch strip vertically, approximately 1 inch in from the left side of the front basket panel (see the accompanying diagram).
3. Select three 3-inch strips. Lay the first one horizontally over the vertical strip, even with the left side of the front panel.
4. Place the remaining two horizontal strips even with the left side of the panel, leaving a ¾-inch space between strips.

5. Repeat to finish placing strips on all four panels. For front and back, you'll use five vertical 5-inch strips and 15 horizontal 3-inch strips each. For the side panels you'll use three vertical strips and nine horizontal strips.
6. After you've "woven" all panels, go back and fill in the ends with pieces cut to fit. Trim any excess and keep the leftover pieces.
7. Heat oven to 325°. Bake panels 20–25 minutes, until firm and evenly browned.
8. Bake the basket base as above, separately.

➤ HANDLE

1. Remove the first half of the second batch of gingerbread dough from the refrigerator.
2. You'll create the handle by twisting ropes of gingerbread together and baking in an arc shape. Begin with several chunks of dough, each about the size of a golf ball. With your hands, roll each ball out into a rope shape, approximately 6 inches long and about ½ inch in diameter. Make eight ropes in all.
3. Place two ropes next to each other on a foil-covered baking sheet. (You'll want to work directly on the cookie sheet when twisting the handle together, so you can bake the handle without trying to move it.) Gently, begin twisting the two pieces so they wrap around each other, resembling the twists on a rope. Try not to stretch the dough too much. If the dough becomes too soft and pliable, chill in the refrigerator 10 minutes.
4. As you work, attach pieces to make a twisted rope that's 16 inches long total. When you attach a new piece, try to place the seam on the underside of a twist.
5. Draw a 10-inch line on your aluminum foil (the length of your basket). Now place one end of your rope at the beginning of the line, and the other end of the rope at the end of the line. Gently move the rope into a semi-circle above the drawn line. You should have a natural arc shape for your handle.
5. Bake as above until firm and evenly browned.

➤ CORNER ADORNMENTS

1. Remove the remaining half-batch of dough from the refrigerator. Begin with four chunks, each slightly smaller than a golf ball. Divide each ball in half. Roll with your hands (as above) into two ropes, each about 8 inches long. Twist together (as above).
2. Measure the twisted rope and cut to 5 inches long. Place on your cookie sheet.
3. Repeat with the other three dough balls. You should have four twisted ropes, each 5 inches long, when finished.
4. Bake as above until firm and evenly browned.

➤ DECORATIVE TOP EDGE

1. Begin with two chunks of dough slightly larger than golf balls. Divide each ball

in half and roll out with your hands into two 10-inch ropes. Twist together, for a total of two twisted ropes.

2. Repeat using two chunks of dough slightly smaller than golf balls, to create two twisted ropes, each 6¾ inches long.
3. Bake as above until firm and evenly browned.
4. Gather all your remaining gingerbread dough and bake as cookies, tree ornaments, or cake to enjoy with a cup of cocoa!

➤ ROYAL ICING

After you've baked all the gingerbread pieces and cooled them, it's time to assemble your basket. Begin by making a batch of royal icing; you'll use it as "glue" to hold all the parts of your basket together.

- 1 pound confectioners' sugar
- 3 tablespoons meringue powder
- 5–6 tablespoons warm water

Pour sugar and meringue powder into the bowl of a standing mixer with paddle attachment. Mix on low speed. Add 5 tablespoons water. Scrape down bowl and turn speed to medium. Add an extra tablespoon of water if needed. Beat 6 to 7 minutes, until light and fluffy. Cover icing with a damp towel to prevent it from drying out. Mix with brown food coloring to match baked gingerbread pieces.

➤ ASSEMBLY

1. Place a large piece of waxed paper or parchment paper on your work surface. Place the basket's base panel in the middle of the paper. Put the brown icing in a disposable plastic decorating bag and cut the end off to make a ½-inch-wide opening.
2. Squeeze a line of icing along the short (5") side of the gingerbread base. Pick up a side panel and lean it up into the line of icing. Holding this panel with one hand to balance it, pick up the icing bag with your other hand, and squeeze a line along the base's back (10") edge. Then squeeze another line of icing up the outside of the side panel that you just attached.
3. Pick up the back panel and attach to the base and the side panel. Once these panels are iced together, they should be able to stand on their own.

4. Pick up the icing bag again and squeeze a line on the opposite short side of the base and up the inside edge of the long back panel already standing. Place the second side panel into the icing carefully as you steady the other two upright panels with your other hand.
5. Once the third panel is in place, take a good look at your basket and make sure it's square at the corners, before you put your last panel on. Adjust if necessary. You may want to run a second line of icing up the inside corners of the basket.
6. To place the last panel, squeeze a line of icing along the front edge of the base and up the edges of the two exposed sides. Lean the front of the basket into the icing. Adjust carefully if necessary.
7. Let the basket dry overnight (before adding handle and accent pieces). Cover the leftover icing with a damp paper towel and clear wrap to keep overnight.
8. The next day, whip the icing again before you use it. After whipping, place in a disposable decorating bag and cut the end so that you have a ¼-inch opening.
9. Attach the four 5-inch gingerbread ropes to the corners of the basket with royal icing. These will conceal the joined edges.
10. Now for the two 10-inch twisted ropes: Attach one across the top of the front panel and one across the back panel.
11. Next, make sure your two 6¾-inch pieces will fit the side panels correctly. If you need to, trim the pieces with a serrated knife in a sawing motion. (This works well in general to even up your baked pieces.) Once you've trimmed them, attach with royal icing.
12. Now pick up your handle carefully and hold it up to the basket to make sure it fits. Handle ends must fit inside the completed basket; trim if necessary. Attach the handle inside the basket with royal icing, no more than 1 inch from the top. Use props to secure the handle as it dries. (We used a 4-ounce bottle of vanilla extract on each side, which worked perfectly.) Once the royal icing has dried, remove the props and enjoy your creation!

— Sue Chandler

GINGERBREAD CLASSES

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