

For most of us, the holiday season is going to be very different this year. Knowing that, Body Mind Spirit decided to add a little contest to hopefully offer the opportunity to bolster and stimulate our customers' creativity and spirits. Dust off those baking sheets and rolling pins and dig out your favorite gingerbread recipe, we're extending a gingerbread house challenge. Send us pictures of your confectionary creation by Dec. 12th and we will post them and social media will then decide the winners. First place receives a \$25.00 Body Mind Spirit gift card and two runner-ups will receive a complimentary 2 oz. of our Tranquil Times lavender body scrub.

So how did gingerbread cookies and houses become associated with the holiday season? There is quite a bit of lore and legend surrounding gingerbread's history. There are beliefs that gingerbread was brought to Europe by explorers on the trade route called the Silk Road which led to China. Other theories include that gingerbread came back with the 11th century crusaders from the Middle East. France has a legend that an Armenian monk taught the culinary art of gingerbread to priests and other Christians in 992. While there were probably many ways that gingerbread was introduced to Europe, what made it so accepted was the preservative properties of the ginger root itself. These preservative properties gave the gingerbread a longer shelf life. Soon all kinds of shapes of this bread became a popular special treat for sale particularly on Sundays outside of churches or on holidays. They were considered as love tokens and were also often distributed to guests at weddings.

The rise of the prevalence of the gingerbread house also has many theories. One is attributed to the brothers Grimm and their retelling of the Hansel and Gretel story which they published in the 19th century. The fairy tale itself is much older and German bakers in the 16th were already constructing their confectionary houses but the publishing of a story about a house made of gingerbread may have brought more attention to this use of this treat.

So we know that because ginger root acts as a preservative for both breads and also meat it became an important culinary herb. However, ginger root was and is very popular because of its many medicinal properties as well. For at least 2000 years and quite probably longer, ginger root has been used medicinally in China and India. Gingerol, an active compound found in ginger has both anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Which means it can be useful for osteoarthritis and injuries. Another benefit of ginger is that it is believed to be helpful in regulating blood sugar levels. And studies are now being conducted into its efficacy in the prevention of cancer. What ginger is best known for though is how effective it is at treating nausea and indigestion. Remember having an upset stomach as a child and Mom giving you a glass of gingerale? Worried about seasickness? Ginger root can help with that too.

So what are the best ways to work with this wonderful herb? Add fresh, peeled and hopefully organic ginger root to your stir-fry or other recipes. Or you can easily make some ginger tea by adding 2 inches of fresh peeled and thinly sliced root to 4 cups of water and boiling for 10 minutes. Steep longer for a stronger taste or add honey after removing from heat if you like it sweet. You can also make a bigger batch and store in a covered container in the refrigerator to either drink cold or reheat later. Even with little or no known side effects, moderation is always a good call in how much one uses and especially if you are pregnant and are using ginger root for morning sickness, check in with your doctor for appropriate guidelines.

**Fun Fact -** The largest gingerbread house in the USA was built in 2013 in Bryan, Texas to raise funds for a trauma center. They used 2,925 lbs. of brown sugar, 1,800 lbs. of butter, 7,200 eggs and 7,200 lbs. of general purpose flour to construct the 2,520 sq. ft. house!