

Construct an Edible Holiday Train

A twist on the traditional holiday gingerbread house, this holiday train is made with graham crackers and decorated with candy, icing, and other edible trimmings. Your youngster will learn small-scale engineering and design skills and develop her fine motor skills as she carefully puts each piece in its place to construct her miniature masterpiece. In no time at all her Graham Cracker Express will be chugging down the track, loaded with holiday cheer! All aboard!



What You Need:

- Cardboard or cutting board
- Aluminum foil
- Box of graham crackers
- 2 round, flat wafer cookies
- Assorted candies and edible items for decoration
- Quart-sized freezer bag
- Scissors

For the royal icing:

This is the glue (edible, of course) that holds everything together. It will harden quickly, so make it just before you begin construction and be sure to complete the project within a few hours. If the icing gets difficult to work with, kneading the bag or warming it slightly may help to soften it.

- 1 pound confectioners' sugar
- 3 large egg whites (if you intend to eat the train after you create it, substituting $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pasteurized egg whites is recommended)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cream of tartar

What to Do:

1. Prepare your train platform by covering a piece of cardboard or large cutting board with aluminum foil.
2. Have your child carefully mix all royal icing ingredients together until smooth and scoop into the freezer bag. Twist the top corner (as you would a pastry bag) to push the icing towards the bottom, then snip a small hole in the opposite bottom corner of the bag.
3. Break four graham cracker sheets in half to form eight square pieces. You will use these pieces to create the engine of your train.
4. Ask your child where she wants the engine to go. Dot one graham cracker square with several small blobs of icing and place on the platform, pressing down gently. This will form the base of your engine.
5. Pipe icing around the edge of the engine base. To form two sides of the engine, help your child place two graham cracker squares on the base perpendicular to the platform and on adjoining sides so that they meet at one corner of the base. Pipe icing along the seam between the two cracker sides to secure.
6. Repeat the previous step to form the remaining two sides of the engine, making sure all seams are sealed with icing.
7. Gently pipe icing along the top edges of the engine. Making sure the train is stable, have your child carefully place the last cracker square on top to form the engine's roof. The engine should now look like a square box.

8. To give your engine a pointed pilot (also called a "cowcatcher") at the front, secure two cracker squares together with icing in the shape of a V and attach them to the front of the engine. The pilot deflects objects away from the tracks and helps prevent the train from derailing.
9. Now that the engine is formed, it's time to create cars for your train. Break a few more graham cracker sheets in half so you have more squares to work with. To create an open-top car, secure another square flat to the platform with icing directly behind the engine.
10. Repeat steps 5 and 6 to create walls for the train car. Do not repeat step 7 for this car; since this is an open-top car, it should not have a roof.
11. To create a longer open-top car behind the short car, secure a full-sized cracker sheet to the platform with icing and repeat steps 5-6 above. Instead of using four squares for the sides of the car, however, use two full-sized sheets for the long sides of the car and two squares for the short sides.
12. Have your child continue constructing cars for her train until she is happy with its length. She can create as many cars as she likes as long as they all fit on the platform.
13. When your child is finished constructing her train, allow the icing to set for a few minutes before decorating.
14. Have your child attach cookies or round candies along the sides of the engine and cars to form wheels, then decorate the train and platform as she desires, using icing to hold everything in place.

Choo choo! Your Graham Cracker Express is ready to go! Use it as a centerpiece for your holiday table, or gobble it up for a delicious afternoon treat.

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