

Lebkuchen

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

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ACTIVITIES

As you well know, spending time with children is always rewarding. It can help you to see the world around you in a whole new way and to value things that you may take for granted or consider perfectly ordinary. On the other hand, when you are entirely responsible for their care, even small children can be intimidating. Just what do you do with them all day? This newsletter is here to help – whether you're a parent, grandparent, babysitter, caregiver, neighbor, or anyone acting as a substitute teacher and spending the day with a preschool-aged child.

The following sections will give some suggested activities for this week's theme as well as methodology and ideas for preparation.

Opening Verse

The Waldorf method places a strong emphasis on establishing rhythms throughout the day which give a comfortable sense of order and security to a child's life. One of these is to start your day (or your time together) with a short meditation called an opening verse. Choose a place which is clean and orderly; children are deeply sensitive to their environments and are unable to feel calm in the midst of chaos. Lighting a candle while you say the verse is customary, as this helps to establish a reflective atmosphere. Even if you choose not to do light a candle, the opening verse will be a transition for the child into your care. After you declare yourselves to be "ready now for work and learning", you can blow out the candle and begin your day!

Opening Verse:
In the morning at the sunrise
When the light of day doth break,
Children's souls, by angels guided,
Sleep from rested body shake,
Ready now for work and learning,
Happy, steady, and awake.

Lebkuchen

Lebkuchen are traditional German Christmas cookies similar to gingerbread. The history of Lebkuchen begins with its forerunner, the honey cake. The ancient Egyptians, the Greeks and Romans considered honey to be a gift of the gods, with magical and healing powers. So honey cakes were not just something to eat, but were often worn as a talisman in battle or as protection against evil spirits. Honey cakes were also buried with Egyptian kings.

The Teutonic peoples in Europe prized honey cake especially around the winter solstice as protection against evil spirits who were abroad during the twelve nights of Christmas.

Then in the 13th century the honey cake became the Lebkuchen, probably in a monastery. The use of wafers for Lebkuchen may indicate monasteries as their origin. To make the many candles they needed in the monasteries, the brothers cultivated fruit trees and kept bees for the wax. By spreading the dough, made with honey, on wafers, they produced a nourishing and healthy food. It served well on journeys and was brought to the infirm and the sick. The monks particularly liked the dry gingerbread cake, seasoned with black pepper. The nuns, however, preferred the "panis mellitus", a sweeter kind of bread.

Gingerbread soon became a favorite outside the monasteries. Lebkuchen bakers were recorded as early as 1296 in Ulm, but today the most famous Lebkuchen come from Nuremberg, from where they are exported all over the world. To this day Lebkuchen are exported from Nuremberg to the U.S. especially for the Christmas Season.

Stories

Choose from among the recommended stories for this week

Snipp Snapp Snurr and the Gingerbread

by Maj Lindman

Maisy Makes Gingerbread

by Lucy Cousins

The Gingerbread Boy

by Paul Galdone

The Gingerbread Rabbit

by Randall Jarrell

The Gingerbread Doll

by Susan Tews

Hansel and Gretel

the Brothers Grimm

Lebkuchen vs. Gingerbread – Recipes

Lebkuchen range in taste from spicy to sweet and come in a variety of shapes with round being the most common. The ingredients usually include honey, spices and nuts, almonds or candied fruit. Salt of Hartshorn and Potash are often used for raising the dough. The Lebkuchen dough is often placed on a thin wafer base called Oblate. This was an idea of the monks who used communion wafers to prevent the dough from sticking. Lebkuchen are usually soft, but a very hard and generally inedible type of Lebkuchen is used to produce Lebkuchen hearts, usually inscribed with icing, which are available year round at many German fairs and the witch houses made popular by Hansel and Gretel. The closest German equivalent to the gingerbread man is the *Honigkuchenpferd* (honey cake horse).

At what point does a recipe transition over from Lebkuchen to Gingerbread? I am not clear on this. In doing some research on the Internet, I found that people tend to get into very heated debates over this topic, so I will avoid trying to give any generalizations of the difference between the two. Suffice it to say that many recipes are available on the internet for both Lebkuchen and Gingerbread. It may be interesting to try a variety and draw your own conclusions.

To purchase Lebkuchen: <http://www.germanfoods.org/consumer/lebkuchen.cfm>

Gingerbread on Display

Gingerbread houses can be found everywhere this season. Look in your newspaper for contests, gingerbread house displays, and workshops. I have seen gingerbread house making workshops at our grocery store and public library, a gingerbread house contest and display at a historic home near us and even a gingerbread lighthouse competition at the local maritime history museum!

Visit one of these displays to introduce this week's theme. Then read [Hansel and Gretel](#) with your child.

Baking & Building

Read [Maisy Makes Gingerbread](#).

Try your hand at making a gingerbread house of your own. Many kits are available for this, or you can use the book [Gingerbread For All Seasons](#) as a reference. The best part about a gingerbread house is decorating it; depending on the age of your child you may want to make the house yourself and let the child get involved with the decorating part.

Of course, you'll also want to try gingerbread boys and girls. Maybe even bunnies! Read [The Gingerbread Boy](#) or [The Gingerbread Rabbit](#). Gingerbread boy cookie cutters are easy to find at a baking or crafts store and Wilton makes several sizes.

Cookie Swap

Last year I planned a gingerbread-themed cookie swap and used the smallest gingerbread boy cookie cutter I could find (from the Wilton set of mini Christmas cookie cutters) to decorate the invitations. They were simply printed from my computer onto vanilla cardstock and then I traced the cookie cutter onto dark brown cardstock (Chocolate Chip – Stampin' Up!) glazed with a blend of Plaid Decorator Glaze and Pearl-Ex to make it sparkle. I cut out the gingerbread boy shapes, glued them to the invitations and added seed beads for buttons. They were pretty darn cute, if I do say so myself – although no one attended my cookie swap because their holiday calendars were already booked. So if a cookie swap is something you would like to do, plan it now!

Gooseberry Patch has the best cookie swap publication, with sample invitations, recipes, and tips. Martha Stewart, though, put her cookie swap party planner online: http://a444.g.akamai.net/7/444/703/20051018180038/www.marthastewart.com/images/pdf/1105_cookieswap.pdf

If you have dietary restrictions such as food allergies, celiac disease, etc. a cookie swap may not be appropriate for your family.

Mini Houses & Ornaments



One Room Schoolhouse:

Another way to enjoy gingerbread houses and gingerbread men is to make ornaments. Martha Stewart Living magazine, December 2003 has a beautiful article about a cinnamon scented non-edible dough that can be cut out, baked, and used to make permanent decorations. There is a mini-gingerbread house kit (we got ours at Borders) but you can easily make your own template for the pieces. Keep the little houses simple – just cut two long rectangle pieces to be two sides of your house, two shorter rectangles to be the front and back, and two additional long rectangles to form a peaked roof. I tried this two years ago and they really did smell good but were somewhat fragile so make sure you don't roll your dough out too thin. Then the mini houses (or mini gingerbread men) can be decorated with seed beads. This project is somewhat finicky, so would probably be best for older children.

recipes and directions for cinnamon ornaments can also be found online:

http://www.ehow.com/how_5538_make-cinnamon-ornaments.html

Applique

This newsletter topic will be dated almost instantly by the inclusion of this idea, but currently Gymboree has a line of girl's clothing called Sugar and Spice which is decorated with gingerbread house appliques and little gingerbread girls. This is a cute project which can easily be done at home to dress up an existing sweater or pair of jeans.

http://www.gymboree.com/shop/dept_mixandmatch.jsp?collectionSelected=0&pageClicked=0&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=3083579&bmUID=1133378584554

100% wool felt is available through Magic Cabin:

http://www.magiccabin.com/magiccabin/product.do?section_id=0&bc=1004&pgc=185&cmvalue=MCD|0|Normal%20Search%20Result|P1

Google has 226,000 matches for "gingerbread house template" so you shouldn't have any trouble finding patterns!

Community Giving

Many of these ideas work well for community giving. You could organize a cookie swap and then take the resulting cookies, nicely packaged, to a hospital or nursing home. A wreath trimmed with cinnamon ornament gingerbread men can be donated your local Festival of Trees to benefit Hospice.

Read [The Gingerbread Doll](#) with your child. Even something as simple as a doll is a financial struggle for some poor families. Participate in a toy drive by donating or making toys to give.

Closing Verse

Use this verse to end your time together on a high note, striving to go forth and made the rest of the day a good one. Like the opening verse, lighting a candle is customary and provides a sense of closure. When the candle is blown out, you will go forward feeling positive about the next thing to come your way.

The golden sun so great and bright
Warms the world with all its might.
It makes the dark earth green and fair,
Attends each thing with ceaseless care.
It shines on blossom, stone, and tree,
On bird and beast, on you and me.
So may each deed throughout the day,
May everything we do and say
Be bright and strong and true,
Oh, golden sun, like you!

OTHER IDEAS

Cooking

In general, we do not recommend specific cooking activities because many children and families have restricted diets such as vegan or vegetarian, gluten-free, kosher, etc. However, cooking is always a wonderful activity for a child to participate in. Bearing in mind any food allergies, and common-sense kitchen safety, consider preparing a simple recipe with the child. Children love to wash vegetables, measure and mix ingredients, and set the table for a meal. Preparing and eating a snack is always popular!

Play

Don't forget the many benefits of unguided imaginative play. You need to stay nearby for safety's sake, if the child is in an unfamiliar environment or you aren't certain what should or should not be childproofed. All children need daily time to play. In the preschool years, play is the WORK of the young child. Prepare an appropriate play space and then stay out of it as much as you can; give the child the simplest and highest quality toys you can find such as large pieces of cloth, blocks, dolls, and materials from nature (such as pinecones, feathers, or shells). Avoid plastic toys. Consider a basin of water and some measuring cups or add some dish detergent and give the child a whisk. The more open-ended a material, the more of the child will be brought forth in playing with it. The more structured a material, the less will be required of the child – and the less he will grow and develop when playing with it. As a simple test, try playing with the toys yourself. If you find you tire of a thing quickly, so will a child!

Helping

Helping around the home is an essential part of any Waldorf curriculum. It is not necessary to put a child in front of the television while you do the dishes or sort the laundry into lights and darks; let the child help you. Even if you have an automatic dishwasher, a child can help by rinsing the dishes before they are loaded. Children love to do work that they know is truly helpful and all young children thrive in situations where they are allowed to imitate an adult. Washing the dog, washing the car, sweeping or dusting, repotting houseplants, feeding the cats, setting and clearing the table... all of these are wonderful activities to do with a preschool-aged child.

PLANNER

Activities: highlight the activities you would like to do

Opening Verse

Lebkuchen

Stories

- Snipp Snapp Snurr and the Gingerbread by Maj Lindman
- Maisy Makes Gingerbread by Lucy Cousins
- The Gingerbread Boy by Paul Galdone
- The Gingerbread Rabbit by Randall Jarrell
- The Gingerbread Doll by Susan Tews
- Hansel and Gretel the brothers Grimm

Lebkuchen vs. Gingerbread – Recipes

Gingerbread on Display

Baking & Building

- Gingerbread for All Seasons by Teresa Layman

Cookie Swap

Mini Houses & Ornaments

Applique

Community Giving

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

PLANNER

Book List:

list the books you will be reading
feel free to substitute other books you may have on hand
which relate to this theme

Materials:

list all materials required for your chosen activities

APPENDIX: LEBKUCHEN

What makes Nuremberg so famous for its Lebkuchen? The city had two major historical advantages which contributed to the development of their Lebkuchen bakeries. Firstly, toward the end of the Middle Ages, Nuremberg was an important international trade center due to its location on the intersection of the ancient salt and trade routes which carried sacks of spices from the East via Venice and Genoa; so there was no shortage of the required raw materials needed for the ever more popular gingerbread, e.g. candied fruits, hazelnuts and spices. The second essential ingredient for Lebkuchen came from nearby. The huge imperial woods around Nuremberg, then known as the "Holy Roman Emperor's Apiary," supplied honey in abundance. The "Lebküchner" began to organize their own guild of candlemakers and gingerbread bakers. The Zeidlers – the Guild of Honey Collectors, Apiarists and Wax Suppliers – were well respected and highly privileged at the time. The Zeidlers were permitted to wear their own costume and crossbow and to provide an imperial bodyguard. They made beautiful decorated candles and many varieties of gingerbread known as "Honigkuchen", "Pfefferkuchen", "Lebkuchen", "Pfefferzelten", "Lebzelten," and "Pfeffernüsse." Thus Nuremberg became famous as their gingerbread found fanciers all over Europe.

The 30 Years' War (1618-1648) caused the Nuremberg Lebkuchen bakers a serious decline. They got no more spices and trade with the surrounding countryside also collapsed during the two lengthy sieges of the city. The old markets had to be laboriously built up again over almost two centuries.

Since 1808, Nuremberg gingerbread of the best quality is called *Elisenlebkuchen*. It is uncertain whether the name *Elise* refers to the daughter of a gingerbread baker or the wife of a margrave. There are many regional variations. In Austria and Bavaria they are called "Zelten," a Germanic word that means "flat cake." Achener specialities are Mandel-Lebkuchen (smaller than those from Nuremberg), and then there are Nuss-Saftprinten, Mandel-Printen, Honig-Saftprinten, Saftprinten, Dominosteine, Nuss-Spitzkuchen, Dessert-Spitzkuchen, called Spitzkuchen because they have three corners (Spitzen).

Sometimes Lebkuchen are packaged in richly decorated nostalgic tins and boxes which have become collectors' items. Lebkuchen range in taste from spicy to sweet and come in a variety of shapes with round being the most common. The ingredients usually include honey, spices and nuts, almonds or candied fruit. Salt of Hartshorn and Potash are often used for raising the dough. The Lebkuchen dough is often placed on a thin wafer base called Oblate. This was an idea of the monks who used communion wafers to prevent the dough from sticking.

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