Christmas Angels

Yes, these are actually beautiful Gingerbread cookies, about 10" tall. They were inspired by the antique Neapolitan ornaments that adorned the Metropolitan Museum of Art tree in New York City every Christmas—well at least they were back in 1985 which is the date of the Good Housekeeping issue I cut these out of. Directions follow. You can use any gingerbread recipe but I’m including the one they used year-after-year in most of their issues.

Nettie’s Gingersnap Dough
1-1/2 cups heavy cream
2-1/2 cups brown sugar
1-1/4 cup molasses
1 Tbsp powdered ginger
1 Tbsp grated lemon rind
2 Tbsp baking soda
9 cups flour

READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS FIRST. These are a bit complicated with all the color mixing and you can certainly make these over several days.

To prepare dough: whip cream. Add sugar, molasses, ginger, lemon rind, and baking soda. Stir 10 minutes. Add flour and “work” with hands until smooth. Cover; refrigerate overnight. One batch of this dough is enough for 5 angels.

To roll dough: roll out on greased and floured 17" x 14" cookie sheets; placing 3/16 inch of 1/8 inch dowels on either side will help you roll dough to uniform thickness. Before cutting shapes, chill rolled dough on cookie sheets in refrigerator or freezer. Rechill as necessary to keep it “leather hard,” easier to cut.

To make patterns: enlarge diagrams to full size and cut patterns from oak tag or heavy cardboard.

To cut and bake: flour the patterns. Using a knife, cut out cookie shapes, leaving and least ½ inch between them. Remove scraps (they can be rerolled, though the cookies won’t be as smooth). Brush dough with water before baking. Preheat oven to 300° F. and bake for approximately 20 minutes. Trim cookie shapes, if necessary, while cookies are still warm. Leave on cookie sheets to cool. Let them age a few days before proceeding. In addition to those given in diagrams (patterns) you need 2 brace bars, 3/4 inch by 2 inches, for each par of wings—once bakes, file to wedge shape and use to support angle of wings.

Icing
Before icing, lay pieces on patterns to check for shape and fit. Mark where sections will overlap indicated on pattern pieces with broken line. When icing, extend color slightly across lines. Apply background color first with thinned icing in paper cones, covering all section of one color at a time. Do not let wet areas touch; allow two hours drying time for colors that touch. Let all dry thoroughly, then proceed with heavy (regular weight) icing in pastry bag for piped designs. Follow photos and patterns, for colors and color area. Directions below for individual angels include how to mix colors (color listed first is main color, which is adjusted with less amounts of next colors) and approximate amounts of icing needed.

Note: food-color pastes are extremely intense in color—use only the amount on the head of a toothpick to start, add color very gradually until icing approximates colors in photos.

Porcelain-finish faces and hands: After skin-color icing is dry you may wish to paint faces and hands for a "porcelain" look. In small dish, place small dots (just the amount of color on the end of a toothpick) of rose pink, red, orange, sky blue, brown, and violet.
  • Lightly pencil eyes, nose, and mouth on face. With small paintbrush mix brown and blue; outline eyes; use lighter shade for eyebrows.

Jana Keeler, costumepastimes.com, 2008 – copied from Good Housekeeping article from 1985
• Mix rose pink, violet, and brown to a very pale shade; dip brush in color, blot on tissue, and lightly paint side of nose.
• Mix rose pink and/or red; dip brush in color and blot on tissue; paint on mouth.
• For cheek blush; tin rose pink to very pale, blot brush on tissue before applying, building color gradually with brush fairly dry, tiny strokes.
• To shadow eyes, nose, and side of face, mix violet and brown with a little rose pink.

Icing Colors and Amounts
You can mix about 3 tablespoons of a color; remove one tablespoon as needed for Royal Icing thinned icing; cover remaining color to use in pastry bag.

Angel #1: you’ll need the following thinned icings: applied with paper cones and small round decorating tip, #1.

- Thinned Icings
  - Skin tone, A: yellow, orange, a tough of rose pink, 1 tablespoon.
  - Skin shadow, B: yellow, orange, rose pink, avocado, 1 tablespoon
  - Oversmock, F: avocado, yellow, orange, 1 tablespoon
  - Smock shadow, G: avocado, yellow, orange, 1 tablespoon
  - Dress, H: red, yellow, orange, 1-1/2 tablespoon
  - Dress shadow, I: red, orange, brown, 1-1/2 tablespoon
  - Hair, P: brown, red, orange, 1 teaspoon
  - Banner, J: yellow orange, 1 tablespoon
  - Banner shadow, L: yellow, orange, 1 tablespoon
  - Wings, C: sky blue-green, 1 teaspoon
  - Wings, G: leftover smock-shadow icing, 1 tablespoon
  - Wings, H: leftover dress color.

- Regular (non-thinned) icing colors, #1 tip, 2 tablespoons each
  - Hair, dark detail on dress (G)
  - Light detail on dress and feather detail on wings (H)
  - Detail on smock, wings (G)
  - Light and dark detail on banner (yellow, orange in different amounts)
  - Skin (rose, pink, yellow, orange)

Angel #2:

- Thinned Icings
  - Skin tone, A: red, yellow, rose pink, 1 tablespoon
  - Skin shadow, B: rose pink, orange, sky blue, 1 tablespoon
  - Dress and wings, C: 2 tablespoons light blue, 2 tablespoon medium, D; 1 tablespoon dark, E: all mixed with varying amounts of sky blue, orange
  - Overdress, F: green, orange, red, 1 tablespoon
  - Overdress shadow, G: green, red, orange, 1-1/2 tablespoon
  - Censer, K: yellow, orange, 1 tablespoon
  - Banner and banner shadow, J and L: yellow, orange, violet, in varying amounts, 1-1/2 tablespoons each
  - Banner, darkest shadow, censer shadow and hair, P: brown, orange, 1 tablespoon

- Regular (non-thinned) icing colors, #1 tip, 2 tablespoons each
  - Hair, censure, darkest banner shadow: brown, orange, red
  - Banner an banner shadow: yellow, orange, violet
  - Skin, A—same colors above
  - Overdress, F—same colors above
  - Underdress and wings, C, D, E—same colors above.

Jana Keeler, costumepastimes.com, 2008 – copied from Good Housekeeping article from 1985
Angel #3:
- Thinned Icings
  - Skin, A: red, yellow, rose pink, 1 tablespoon
  - Skin shadow, B: rose pink, violet, orange, 1 teaspoon
  - Dress, M: rose pink, yellow, 1-1/2 tablespoons
  - Dress shadow, N: rose pink, red, avocado, 1-1/2 tablespoons
  - Dress, darkest shade, and wings, O: rose pink, red, brown, violet, 1-1/2 tablespoons
  - Underdress, underdress shadow, wing, S, R: brown, yellow, in varying amounts, 1 tablespoon each
  - Banner, wing, T: sky blue, orange, 1 tablespoon
  - Banner shadow, wing, U: sky blue, orange, black, 1 tablespoon
  - Left wing, darkest shadow, Q: brown, red, violet, 1 tablespoon
  - Hair, P: brown, red, 1 tablespoon
- Regular (non-thinned) icing colors, #1 tip, 2 tablespoons each; each background color plus:
  - Wing, hair highlight: orange, rose pink, brown
  - Wing: yellow, brown
  - Belt: yellow, orange.

Assembly: Assemble pattern pieces in position, to see where cookie pieces overlap. Then, using #5 tip, pipe icing on the area of underneath piece that will be covered by top cookie, staying away from edge so icing won’t show. After attaching flat pieces, let dry; then turn over and pipe additional icing at hidden edges for reinforcement, keeping away from wing area.

To position wings: Ice wedges and set in position; let dry. Then ice edge of wing and attach; hold till set; support while drying.

After assembling Angel #2: cut tiny gold-colored chain to fit between censer and finger; attach with dotes of background color icing. Drape two chains of slightly different lengths between hands and attach with icing.

To decorate with the angels: arrange on mantel, table or buffet tucked into “clouds” of cotton or polyester fiberfill.
Jana Keeler, costumepastimes.com, 2008 – copied from Good Housekeeping article from 1985
ANGEL PATTERN #3

CHRISTMAS ANGELS

left skirt
left shoulder

banner, arm and foot

under right banner

left wing

right wing

one square = one inch

Jana Keeler, costumepastimes.com, 2008 – copied from Good Housekeeping article from 1985