Winter Wonderland
Crafting instructions to create log cabin and gingerbread wildlife habitat

Activity Time/Materials:
Varies from several hours to days. Please review suggested supplies below and read all steps before beginning. This is a family-friendly (K-12) craft.

- Gingerbread dough for cookies (divided and chilled, 2-3 hrs)
- House frosting (often called royal icing), the glue for house assembly
- Additional royal icing (for cookies), can buy pre-made, keep airtight
- Gel food colors (optional)
- Graham crackers (1-2 boxes)
- Pretzels (knots, sticks, butter snaps, large rods)
- Various candy (gumdrops, rock candy, sour streamers/straws, fruit roll-ups, Swedish fish, candy corn, cinnamon red hots, candy canes, peppermint swirls, M&M’s, chocolate bars, marshmallows, licorice, etc.)
- Sanding sugars (red, green, brown, white, black, gold, orange, etc.)
- Sprinkles (red/black balls, brown/orange sprinkles, holly, nonpareils, confetti, etc.)
- Frosted shredded wheat cereal, golden grahams, or frosted pop-tarts (for roof shingles)
- Powdered/confectioners sugar or coconut (for snow)
- Piping/pastry bags and tips for icing
- Cardboard or tray
- Tablecloth, paper towels
- Cookie sheets (baking pans)
- Cookie cutters (forest animals, trees, stacking stars, etc.)
- Rolling pin and cutting board
- Flour and water
- Spatulas and spoons
- Foil or parchment paper
- Numerous bowls/plates (for sprinkles)
- Knives (for cutting and smearing)
- Toothpicks and pencil
- Cinnamon sticks (for logs)
- Black peppercorns (door knob, eyes)
- Mini nutter butters, oreos, chips ahoy (optional for stepping stones)
- Nuts and seeds (animal food sources)
- Optional: Certified Wildlife Habitat sign (printed), scissors, glue, paper

Photos by: Morgan Parks, NWF
3-Part Steps:

Adult supervision is encouraged. Gather supplies first. To simplify craft, make only the log cabin or the gingerbread critters and habitat elements. Purchasing royal icing or gingerbread mixes will also save time. Consider working on different parts over a couple days. If you don't have all the supplies/ingredients, no problem, use your imagination and whatever you have on hand that may substitute. Kids are super inventive and come up with new creative ways to do things you've never thought of before. Adapt, adapt, adapt!

Part 1: Gingerbread Critter and Tree Cookies

1. Make gingerbread dough from recipe of choice. Remove pre-made dough from fridge. On a kitchen counter top or smooth table, lightly sprinkle flour to keep gingerbread dough from sticking to surface (same for rolling pin). As an alternative, roll the dough between two pieces of parchment paper. Take a third to half of the dough and roll out flat until uniformly 1/8-1/4 inch thick. Re-roll scraps into next batch to roll. If dough gets too dry, add tiny amounts of water. Note: Using a gingerbread house dough rather than a gingerbread cookie dough will make stronger and stiffer cookies. The author of this craft used a gingerbread house and frosting recipe from Old-Fashioned Cookie Recipes by Bear Wallow Books.

2. Use cookie cutters to press critter and tree shapes into dough firmly. Wiggle them slightly to get a crisp cut and to separate. If sticking to counter or parchment paper, a spatula may help. Create multiples of each shape to have extras on hand in case of decorating mishaps. To create 3D trees, cut out an entire set of stars of various sizes from small to large.

3. Gently transfer cookie shapes to a cookie sheet covered in foil or parchment paper. Bake according to recipe temperature and time and then cool completely.

4. While cookies are cooling, make royal icing. If desired, create different colors using gel food colors. Note: Author used store bought cookie icing to save time. If avoiding eggs whites, look for a recipe with meringue powder as an alternative. Keep airtight to avoid the icing drying out.

5. When cookies have cooled, use royal icing to coat cookies but plan ahead first. For the animals, add icing in stages depending on the color of sanding sugar needed (don't coat entire cookie all at once). Think about the fur, feather, or scale color. Sprinkle one sugar color at a time and then wait for it to dry before adding more sections of icing. Have your sugar ready to go as icing dries very fast. To not waste sugar, use a bowl/plate for each color so that you can generously sprinkle sanding sugar and return leftovers back to container. Paper plates/bowls or paper towels are handy for this reason and easy to bend to funnel sugar. Add black balls (or peppercorns) for eyes or spots. Use a toothpick to add small pin pricks of icing on top of sprinkles to glue these.

6. To build 3D trees, use icing to glue unfrosted stars on top of each other from largest to smallest. Once dry enough, coat ends of tree tips with icing and sprinkle green sanding sugar on top (leaving a little white snow peaking through).
Part 2: Graham Cracker/Pretzel Log Cabin

1. **Cover work space with table cloth.**
2. **Spoon pre-made homemade house frosting (kept airtight - drape moist towel over bowl to keep from drying out during use) into piping bags with round or petal tip attached or use decorating frosting tool (pictured). This will be your glue.**
3. **Use 15 full-sized graham crackers to construct log cabin interior structure and chimney. Note: Graham crackers are not as strong as they used to be, they may break easily. Having two boxes of graham crackers is advised.**
4. **For the base of the cabin, “glue” two graham crackers flat and side by side on a large cardboard surface or tray using house frosting in piping bag. Glue a graham cracker vertical against all 4 sides of the base using generous amounts of frosting to stick. This should create a square shape. Use canned foods, cups, or sprinkle containers to help support walls while drying. Wait until graham crackers feel sturdy before adding a second set of walls on top of the first. Add pretzel rods and extra glue to inside corners of cabin for extra stability and any weak spots/cracks. Remember that graham crackers may break easily and you may need to replace walls. Note: This will be an interior structure that will be completely covered up and not seen so it does not need to be pretty.**
5. **While waiting for walls to dry for a bit, begin stacking the large pretzel rods on each side of the cabin like Lincoln Logs (lay a log down in the front and back and then stack a log on each side). In every corner, add frosting under each log to stick them together. Continue stacking logs up a few layers. On top of a cutting board, use a serrated steak knife to cut shorter logs and then glue to fit in-between gaps. Stop adding logs when you reach the top.**
6. **Using the serrated knife, gently cut a graham cracker into a triangle from one side of the short serrated line in a diagonal direction toward each corner. This may require several tries and different knife edges to get a triangle that doesn’t break. If edges break off a little, again no one will see this so you can fill it in with frosting. Repeat so you have two triangles and then glue vertically to front and back of cabin on top of walls. Find something tall to prop it against to help support while drying. Using two other graham crackers, add the sides of the roof - there will still be a gap in the middle. To fill this, break one graham cracker in half along the long serrated line and glue each piece to the tip of the roof.**
7. **While roof is drying, create a door using 1/4 of a graham cracker cut to size of choice (can also use a mini chocolate bar for this). Glue little pretzel sticks to the front. Add a peppercorn for a rustic doorknob. Squeeze some snow around the base of the cabin using the frosting, then place a few pretzel logs on the ground in front to create a deck. Glue the door to the cabin.**
Part 2: Graham Cracker/Pretzel Log Cabin

8. Add butter snap pretzels as windows on front and sides of the cabin. Use orange sour streamers or fruit roll-ups behind the window to add a little light or simply use markers to color yellow/orange on a piece of paper.

9. To create a rocking chair for the deck, glue two knot pretzels (as arms) onto two butter snaps (the seat/back).

10. When roof of cabin is dry, add more logs in front of the graham cracker triangle by cutting pretzel rods to fit into a pyramid shape with rod ends cut at a diagonal angle so they fit snugly. Add two rods on each side to top it off. Repeat on backside. Add one extra full-sized rod as an overhang in front of the house so that there are two logs side by side.

11. Stack and glue frosted shredded wheat cereal as shingles on top of graham cracker roof. Start at bottom and move up as you overlap (6 rows should work). Cut the cereal if you run out of room or your roof is angled. You may want to add small pretzel sticks at the base of the roofline for the first row of shredded wheat to rest against.

12. To create a chimney, separate two graham crackers on long serrated edge to create four tall pieces. Use a knife to cut a base and glue together with the 4 sides to create a tall and skinny square shape. Once sturdy enough, glue another layer (not quite full-sized) on top so that your chimney is higher than the roofline but not too tall. When dry, glue chimney to back of house against the logs. Generously add frosting to outside of chimney and stick rock candy on the entire surface to look like rocks.

13. Add frosting on top of roofline, shingles, logs, door, and windows, to look like draped snow. If you make a mistake, just scrap it off before it sets. You can wipe down logs with a moist cloth or wipe. Use toothpicks to clean up areas or dab snow into cracks.

14. Break cinnamon sticks into logs and stack by the door as a firewood pile. Create a fire using more logs and add candy corn for flames (optional: eat/cut off white tips so only orange and yellow remain). Make a sled using two small candy cane cookies (or mini candy canes) with a small piece of graham cracker and pretzel sticks glued on top. To make a snowman, use marshmallows, pretzels or toothpicks (arms), balls/confetti sprinkles (eyes, buttons), curved rainbow sprinkles (mouth), and nose (candy corn, orange lucky charm). A glue gun helps with adhering tiny pieces. Sour streamers or fruit roll-ups can be cut into a scarf. An oreo and mini peanut butter cup makes a fine hat.
Part 3: Wildlife Habitat

1. Pick a spot for your stream (or pond) and line with blue sour streamers or fruit roll-ups to create water. Add frosting (as snow) a little at a time along the bank of the stream and glue on rock candy as you go. Add a few rocks within the stream. Blue sour straws can be used as ripples. Cinnamon sticks can be added as logs. Glue red and green Swedish fish in the stream as spawning salmon.

2. Cover and fill the rest of the habitat space with thick snow (frosting). Once dry, add a fence line using pretzel rods stacked on top of each other or make a picket fence using pretzel sticks.

3. Lightly dust cabin and habitat (trees, stream) in snow using powdered sugar.

4. Glue critters and trees around the habitat. Large green gumdrops can symbolize shrubs with red balls as berries. Nuts and seeds can be scattered around as food sources. Mini cookies can be used as stepping stones.

5. Create a nesting box using graham crackers and butter snap pretzels (cut triangles for front and back of roof) and line the top with a pretzel stick. Use a pencil to gently twist a circle for the hole and cut a pretzel stick for the perch. Embellish with holly sprinkle candy.

6. Lastly, print a mini Garden for Wildlife Certified Wildlife Habitat sign as a symbolic way of showing your commitment to wildlife and in recognition that your Winter Wonderland has all the essential habitat elements wildlife need to thrive: food, water, cover, and places to raise young. Note: The sign will be stronger if glued (with real glue) to cardstock paper first. Then attach it to a cinnamon stick or pretzel. Add a tiny amount of icing around the sign, it’s all about the details.

7. Now that you have a cozy haven for wildlife, display your festive habitat with pride and be on the lookout for a visiting reindeer up on the rooftop!
By Madison P. — 5th grade

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