

A Colonial Floor Plan

The average colonial home was quite small in comparison to our standards today. The very first homes would have been small huts made out of materials that could be found in the local area where the colonists landed. None of these homes exist today, but there remains a few of the second dwellings the colonists built as they became more settled. These homes were somewhat different in the south than they were in the north. In the south where it remains warm year round, a typical colonial home measured 20 feet by 40 feet with fireplaces at each end. In the north where cold seasons made it necessary to warm up the home, houses were quite smaller measuring on the average of 16 feet by 21 feet with a loft about half the size of the house above for storage and sleeping quarters for some or all of the children.

The average size family during this time was six giving the average person 67 square feet of living space filled also with furniture and necessities. The fireplace would measure typically 8 to 10 feet wide and 4 feet high, and it was placed generally in the center of the home rather than along a wall. Every home pretty much had a chest since none of the homes had closets. These chests could do double duty as a seat or table. If a table did exist, it was more of a board table that could be taken apart and stored when not in use. There were few chairs, although stools were common. If there was a chair, it was reserved for the man of the house. Many of the members, especially the children, stood while they ate.

Beds were generally flock beds. These were basically bags stuffed with rags, cornhusks, or anything else that could be found to make a soft mattress. Feathers were sometimes used by the wealthier colonists. Parents of the home might have a bedstead which was a wooden frame with cords laced back and forth to hold a mattress. Sometimes these frames were attached to the wall with leather hinges so that they could be closed up when not in use. Trundle beds were also used because they could be stored under larger beds during the day.

Most of the tools for cooking were located close to the fireplace. There were generally a spinning wheel nearby and axes, guns, powder horns, mallets, saws, fishing tackle, butter churns, barrels, wooden bowls, and other necessary tools crowding the area. Over time, families began building sheds to store some of these items, but the early colonial homes were quite crowded.



For this activity, you will need to copy the following page twice. Once on white paper and the second one on a color sheet of your choice. You will need to measure out a home of 16 feet by 21 feet on the white sheet. Place your fireplace in the middle of your room as previously discussed. You are a family of six which means you will need at least six chests, twelve barrels, and a sleeping place for everyone. Do not forget something to eat on and a seat for each adult. Whenever possible, use an item for more than one purpose. Cut out circles and rectangles to represent furnishings from your colored graph paper. Cut these items out to scale, letting one square equal one foot. You may turn the colored graph paper over once you have cut it out to hide the graph lines. You may wish to write on these colored sheets what furnishings they represent. Also remember to include a wide enough area around the fireplace to include all the tools a home would use. An estimate of 3-4 feet should work for this activity.

Decide of the following which furnishings you will need:

- _____ chests (2'x4')
- _____ chairs (18" x 18")
- _____ stools (1' round)
- _____ mattresses (3'x6')
- _____ bedsteads (4'x7')
- _____ butter churn (18" round)
- _____ trestle (board) table (3'x6')
- _____ barrels (18" round)
- _____ spinning wheel (2'x3')

