



Closer Inspection

The **plum pudding** is a plaster cast of the real dessert. It is hollow to decrease the amount of weight placed on the tableware. The replica weighs no more than a pound, Simo says.



The recipe for this **hedgehog cake** calls for slivered almonds to create the hedgehog's quills, but the foam replica uses painted wood. "We don't know if the Washingtons enjoyed it, but ... it's a fun one to do." Simo says.



Custom-made food pieces must be made of materials approved by a conservator so "we're not introducing any materials that may ... react in a negative way with our collection," Simo says.

Though there are no records showing the Washingtons had a **crabapple pyramid centerpiece** at a holiday dinner, pyramids of any sort were popular among elite, middle and even some lower classes, Simo says.

Most dinners at Mount Vernon were **two courses**, Simo says. The first was hot foods such as ham and rabbit, and vegetables such as asparagus; the second was dessert, with sweet and savory items.



The **silver-plated wine coaster**, on loan from the Smithsonian Institution, was bought for Washington by the Marquis de Lafayette in the 1780s.



"The one dessert we do know the Washingtons would have enjoyed is the Twelfth Night cake," or Martha Washington's **"great cake,"** Simo says. Twelfth Night (Jan. 6) is the Washingtons' wedding anniversary; they married in 1759.

A Washington feast

At Mount Vernon, a holiday dessert table set for 10

BY KRIS CORONADO
Take a look at the holiday dessert table setting at Mount Vernon, and you'll see why George Washington might have had dental problems. The table prepared for 10 in the large dining room of the first president's home (3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Hwy., Alexandria, 703-780-2000, www.mountvernon.org) is resplendent with cakes, puddings and other tantalizing sweets. "The colors, the textures, the tastes of the table really must have shown to guests just who the Washingtons were," says the estate's associate curator, Laura Simo. Through Jan. 6, visitors can get a glimpse of what the dessert course of a Washington holiday feast may have looked like. (In

February, the museum opens the exhibit "Hoe cakes & Hospitality: Cooking With Martha Washington.")
As for a taste? Better to leave that to one's imagination: All the period delicacies on display are inedible and generally made of foam and acrylic paint.
Guests with gumption can get a free copy of Martha Washington's "great cake" recipe, but be prepared for a palate experience of a different sort. "They're more complex in their flavors than what we have today," Simo says. "A lot of recipes call for nutmeg, a lot of times adding currants, chopped figs, dates, dried fruits. ... A spicy-sweet versus a sugary-sweet."

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