



## The Washingtons and Gingerbread

It is likely that gingerbread was a favorite of the Washington and Custis families, because the women of these families passed down numerous recipes for the holiday treat. Martha Washington's *Booke of Cookery* was a family heirloom passed down through her first husband's family, the Custises. The book dates to as early as the 16th century, and contains multiple recipes for gingerbread. In 1799, Martha Washington gave the *Booke of Cookery* to her granddaughter, Eleanor "Nelly" Custis Lewis. Nelly, in turn, included no fewer than four recipes for gingerbread in her own collection of recipes, including some that she attributed to other women she knew.

The Washington family had a particularly special story associated with gingerbread. According to family legend, shortly before the battle of Yorktown the Marquis de Lafayette stopped in Fredericksburg, Virginia, to pay his respects to General Washington's mother, Mary Ball Washington. During their visit, Mary served her famous gingerbread, which was in the form of a soft cake or loaf, rather than a cookie. According to the story, from then on the family referred to Mary Washington's recipe as "Lafayette Gingerbread."



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## Lafayette Gingerbread Recipe



This recipe appears in *Dining with the Washingtons* (2011). It makes one 9-inch pan of gingerbread.

### Ingredients

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ½ cup unsalted butter, softened                   | ½ teaspoon ground cloves                                 |
| ½ cup, plus 2 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar | ¼ teaspoon ground allspice                               |
| 1 cup molasses                                    | 2 large eggs, plus 2 large egg whites,<br>lightly beaten |
| Scant 2 ¾ cups sifted all-purpose flour           | ¼ cup fresh orange juice                                 |
| 1 tablespoon ground ginger                        | 1 tablespoon freshly grated orange zest                  |
| 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon                        |  |

### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9-inch square cake pan.
2. Combine the butter and brown sugar in a large bowl, and beat until light and fluffy. Add the molasses, and continue to beat until well combined.
3. Sift the flour with the ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and allspice.
4. Alternately add the eggs and flour to the butter mixture, beating very well after each addition.
5. Add the orange juice and zest, and continue beating for several minutes until the batter is smooth and light.
6. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 35 to 45 minutes, or until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean. Set the cake on a rack to cool completely in the pan before slicing.

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