



To Dine For

Tips For Hosting A Formal Williamsburg Dinner

For centuries, Williamsburg, Virginia, has been known for its formal entertaining style and matchless hospitality. So what better way to show your most gracious side than entertaining your guests with a formal Williamsburg-themed meal.

Start with a classic centerpiece. Hostesses in the 18th century vied to create elaborate, breath-taking “dessert pyramids,” which could move them higher on the social ladder. While times have changed, it’s still exciting to wow your guests with an unexpected table formation. Using tiered glass cake stands like those of colonial times, arrange an assortment of fresh fruit and bite-size desserts, like petite fours, for a centerpiece that’s both beautiful and edible. If there’s no room on the table, let it be the highlight of your sideboard.



Create a menu that coordinates with the colors or themes in your china. This adds a little extra work and planning, but the result is simply stunning. Imagine a butternut squash soup in a bowl decorated with deep yellow flowers. This little touch makes the meal that much more visually appealing while staying in sync with the colonial mindset.



Don’t forget the fingerbowls. These little dishes for cleaning one’s hands between courses were a standard of any fine dining experience in the 18th century. This charming and practical tradition is often lost in today’s formal entertaining. What a nice touch of the colonial era to let guests freshen their fingers before dipping into dessert.



Bring out the whole set—we rarely deem an occasion as worthy of bringing out and using all the forks and spoons in our flatware sets, much less the myriad of unique serving pieces for wonderful little delicacies like corn relish and watermelon pickle! But why let them sit and gather dust? Formal dinner tables of the 18th century aimed for abundance, appearance, and opulence, and this is your opportunity to do likewise—if you have it, flaunt it!



The formal table—come with a number of “rules” with the butter tray being unacceptable is a nice touch to resurrect the molded single serving of butter. This is an easy way to show that you “went the extra mile,” and butter molds come in different shapes and sizes (how about a pineapple shape!) so that you can even coordinate with your theme.



Don’t forget the shrubs—no, I don’t mean to trim up your landscaping. Shrubs were a popular drink in 18th-century Williamsburg, made from a fruit juice mixed with alcohol. However, over time shrubs have come to be thought of as non-alcoholic juice treats much like a sorbet. The shape of shrub glasses is ideal for showing off the beautiful color of your concoction, while providing a vessel for serving your dessert.

