

The scoop on how ice cream became an important part of America

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Two girls enjoy an ice cream treat on a hot summer day. Photo by: JGI/Jamie Grill/Getty Images

America's Founding Fathers probably didn't know they helped create a nation of ice cream lovers.

Many 18th-century foods, such as eel pie, have disappeared. That's not the case with ice cream.

Even when they do not agree on politics, Americans are united in their love of ice cream. The average American eats 48 pints each year. Americans spend around \$10 billion on ice cream every year.

Only The Wealthy Ate Ice Cream

We can thank George Washington for America's early interest in the treat. The first president was known for his sweet tooth. Washington was hooked when he got his first taste of ice cream in the late 18th century. It's believed Washington may have been introduced to ice cream by Norborne Berkeley. Berkeley was the royal governor of Virginia between 1768 and 1770.

Washington bought expensive ice cream-making equipment. The first family served the dessert at parties in New York City and Philadelphia.

During the country's early years, though, ice cream was for the rich. Most Americans had never heard of it. Still, food trends had a way of catching on, even long before Instagram. Thomas Jefferson first tasted ice cream in France. He wrote down the first ice cream recipe in the United States. The ingredients were simple: six egg yolks, a half-pound of sugar, two bottles of good cream and one vanilla bean. However, cooks had to go through an 18-step process. It also required a bit of muscle.

The ice cream maker hadn't yet been invented. Jefferson recommended making one in a covered pail with a handle and churning it by hand in the ice for 10 minutes. Then it would be put in a mold to set.

In 1802, Jefferson had ice houses built at Monticello, his home in Virginia. Ice houses kept foods cold before refrigerators were invented. Jefferson liked to have ingredients on hand to make ice cream.

Eating Ice Cream Was Risky

Modern-day chefs are not the first to churn surprising flavors into ice cream. First Lady Dolley Madison had a taste for some interesting combinations. One of her favorites was ice cream made with oysters. She made a less daring choice for her husband's second inaugural ball. They served plain ice cream with strawberries.

Eating milky desserts could be dangerous in those days. Today, companies purify dairy products. They are heated to high temperatures for a few seconds to kill bacteria. Historians still argue about how President Zachary Taylor died in 1850. Some say it was after eating ice milk and frozen cherries.

A few inventions made ice cream safer and more convenient in the early 20th century. Better refrigeration meant less spoilage. The truck replaced the horse-drawn wagon for distribution.

The waffle cone hit the scene at the 1904 World's Fair. There's still a debate about who should get credit for it.

An All-American Treat

Ice cream even became part of the welcome for newcomers to the United States. Immigrants arriving at Ellis Island were often given a scoop during their first meal in the states. However, some were alarmed by this act of goodwill. In 1902, several arrivals from Italy were alarmed by the strange temperature of this food. They asked for it to be heated up.

In 1969, President Richard Nixon visited Hawaii. He fell in love with macadamia nut ice cream. Nixon asked to have a three-gallon pack sent by air to the White House. He had another pack sent from Hawaii months later.

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan took official action. He declared July as National Ice Cream Month.

Three decades later, Vice President Joe Biden shared that love. He called himself the "ice cream guy." He also had a flavor named after him at Cornell University. When he visited towns across the country, he often visited local ice cream shops for a taste.

It seems President Donald Trump loves cherry vanilla. He orders two scoops of ice cream for his pies, while his guests get just one. He also has an ice cream shop named after himself in Trump Tower.

These days, it seems like Americans do not agree on much. Cooling down with a cone has never been a better idea. At least most of us can agree on that.

Quiz

- 1 Based on information in the article, which of these statements is TRUE?
 - (A) Ice cream has always been available to people no matter how much money they make.
 - (B) When ice cream first became popular, it was much easier to make than it is now.
 - (C) Many different presidents have shown a love for ice cream.
 - (D) Ice cream first started to become popular when it was given to immigrants at Ellis Island.

- 2 Read the section "Eating Ice Cream Was Risky."

Which paragraph supports the idea that making and delivering ice cream has become easier over the years?

- 3 Which detail from the article BEST reflects a MAIN goal of a president to help make ice cream even more popular?
 - (A) Nixon asked to have a three-gallon pack sent by air to the White House.
 - (B) In 1984, President Ronald Reagan took official action. He declared July as National Ice Cream Month.
 - (C) It seems President Donald Trump loves cherry vanilla.
 - (D) He orders two scoops of ice cream for his pies, while his guests get just one.

- 4 Which two of the following are MAIN ideas of the article?
 1. *Some presidents enjoyed ice cream while others did not.*
 2. *Ice cream has been a popular treat since the 18th century.*
 3. *Wealthy Americans have historically eaten the most ice cream.*
 4. *Many presidents have shared their love for ice cream, making it even more popular in the U.S.*
 - (A) 1 and 3
 - (B) 1 and 4
 - (C) 2 and 3
 - (D) 2 and 4