

Lebanon Recreational Department Sponsored

New England Regional Chili Cook-off

SO YOU WANT TO COOK COMPETITION CHILI?

Cooking competition chili can be a rewarding experience. Seasoned competition chili cooks enjoy the camaraderie of their fellow cooks and especially enjoy the opportunity to exercise their "bragging rights" when they have won or placed in a chili cook-off contest.

WHAT IS COMPETITION CHILI? Chili cook offs are held in virtually every state and in many countries around the world. Usually held as fund-raising events for charity, they serve also as an outlet, a hobby, for countless competition chili cooks. Everyone loves Mom's chili and everyone seems to have the recipe to end all recipes. So the reason for chili cook-off competition is to settle the score and, in the process, raise money for a good cause. Chili is cooked on site and from scratch. A panel of judges, using a blind selection process, determines the winners.

WHAT EQUIPMENT WILL YOU NEED TO GET STARTED?

Most chili cook offs take place outdoors. Cooks must provide their own equipment for cooking. Seasoned competition chili cooks will come to the cook-off with canopies, tables, decorated booths and more. In addition to your meat and cooking ingredients, you will need to bring, as a minimum, the following extra gear:

- Table - Dipping or serving spoon
- Chili pot with lid*, 5-8 quart variety - Knife
- (Glass lids not recommended for outdoor cooking) - Measuring spoons and cups
- Portable outdoor-style camp stove - Heat diffuser (inexpensive metal device to spread flames)
- Can opener
- Matches - Propane fuel cylinder
- Pot holders - Tablecloth, paper towels
- Ladle, large and small - Ice chest and ice
- Long-handled spoon - Cutting board
- 1 to 3 gallons water - Dishpan, dish soap, scrubbers, etc.

Since samples of your chili are usually given out to the public, most cook offs fall under the jurisdiction of local health departments. Ray Andrews is our local Registered Sanitarian for the Town of Lebanon, he will make sure that everyone will be using all of our local health codes. You may need some additional equipment such as rubber gloves or hand-washing provisions in order to serve samples to the public.

WHAT PREPARATION CAN I DO AT HOME BEFORE THE COOKOFF?

Chili cooks often cut the chili meat at home a night or two before the cook-off. This saves time at the cook-off and provides the opportunity to take care of this time-consuming effort in the manageable confines of the family kitchen. Most chili cooks cube the meat into 3/8 inch cubes and freeze it in sealed plastic bags. Here's a tip to cut and cube meat; Trim the outside of the meat you choose and freeze on a cookie sheet. Take out of freezer, partially thaw, and slice into 3/8 inch slices. Refreeze these on a cookie sheet, and then take out a group at a time and cube. Don't have time to do the whole batch? Put the extra slices in a freezer bag until ready. This way the meat won't wiggle around when you're cutting it, resulting in better standardized cubes. On the other hand, many cooks will cut their meat at the cook-off and that is perfectly all right.

Some cooks measure their spices at home and bring them to the cook-off in separate containers. It is best to exactly pre-measure all spices and do it the same for each cook-off, so you can replicate the results. Many cooks grind their spices in an electric coffee grinder to a fine powder. This process makes for smoother looking gravy and imparts better flavor to the finished product. If you experiment with something new, write it down so you know what you did! This practice helps keep one from being distracted by spectators or the effects of a windy or inclement day. This is your option.

WHAT HAPPENS AT A CHILI COOKOFF?

Typically a chili cook-off will start with the organization of where the cooks will set up their cooking gear. Thereafter, the Chief Judge or some other cook-off official will call for a "cook's meeting" during which the rules of the day will be explained and the cooks will be given an opportunity to ask questions.

The Chief Judge will announce when the preparation of ingredients may begin and the precise time cooks will be allowed to light their stoves to begin the cooking process. The lighting of the stoves typically provides a minimum of three (3) hours cooking time before turn-in of the chili samples to the judges. The Chief Judge will see to it that the official sampling cups will be presented to the individual cooks.

At the designated turn-in time, all cooks will take their chili samples to the judging tent or similar area. The Chief Judge will oversee the marking of the sample cups for the blind judging and the process of determining the winning bowl of chili will begin. It could take from one to two hours for the judging panel to complete the judging process. Announcement of the winners will be set at a time consistent with any other programmed activities

Most Important HAVE FUN!!!!!!!!!!!!