

FOOD PREPARATION CONTEST TIPS: Recipe Selection Ideas

1. Decide whether you want to compete in the Foods of the Pacific Northwest contest (one-hour) or the Mini Meal contests (two-hour). You may choose to enter more than one contest.
2. You will be timed and must adhere to the time limit for the contest you have entered. The clock starts when you enter the kitchen and ends when you leave the kitchen with dishes washed, counters and sink clean, ready to serve. Look for a recipe where the maximum baking time for a one-hour contest is 35-40 minutes (that only leaves 20-25 minutes preparation time). Consider cooling time if needed. Yeast breads are an exception as proofing time is not included for the one-hour contest.
3. Look over past Jackson County Foods Contest Recipe books to see what other contestants have entered. Follow the rules. The mini-meals contest only allows you to prepare two dishes.
4. Choose a recipe you and your family enjoys. You will eat it a lot during practices at home!
5. Consider the skills involved and choose a recipe that demonstrates the skills you have mastered or new skills you plan to add this year. Making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich may be too simple but do not choose a recipe far above your skill level for your first contest.
6. Reduce the recipe if necessary to reduce the preparation and baking time to keep you within the time limit. Remember that you only need to serve the judge. Halving the recipe and choosing smaller pans may reduce your cooking time enough to enable you to make that dish you love. However, consider whether you have the skills to get the batter into small pans neatly. Baking and serving from the same pan may be easier for small inexperienced hands.
7. Consider the judge's preferences. Most judges are older women. Chocolate covered peanut butter cups drizzled in hot fudge may not be their first choice.
8. Consider color and nutrition. Bright orange carrot dill soup, scones dotted with red cranberries.
9. Think about the specialty awards for cooking with dairy, lamb, beef, or fish.
10. Consider using produce grown in Oregon. Pears from the Rogue Valley, or cranberries or hazelnuts.
11. Think about a theme. Perhaps; An Evening in Paris, Cowboy Christmas Breakfast, a Mother's Day Brunch. Consider coordinating your recipe, apron, poster and table setting to match your theme. If you enjoy sewing, sew your own apron or placemat and napkin and enter them later in the clothing and textiles contest at County Fair. Use your place setting to enter in the Table Setting Contest at County Fair in July.
12. The use of alcohol is not permitted in 4-H Contests. Think about substitutes if necessary!
13. As a rule, you are not allowed to use mixes or pre-measured or pre-chopped foods. The judge wants to evaluate your skills. As our groceries offer more and more pre-chopped foods you might get away with bending this rule if you have shown chopping skills in other areas but different judges may feel differently about this subject.
14. Think about your "presentation". Could you bake a quick bread in a bundt or fluted pan instead of a regular loaf pan? Do you have time to add a garnish to make your plate look prettier?

FOOD PREPARATION CONTEST TIPS: Paperwork

Judges Information Form (sample included)

These forms are included in your registration packet. You may choose to retype the form but handwritten forms are fine. The completed form is handed to the judge before you begin. The forms include a recipe with directions and an itemized cost of ingredients, a proposed menu, a simple task list and an entire days' worth of menus as well as the cost per person for the entire meal if you are a senior. Keep a file of ingredient costs to help you calculate your recipe costs from year to year. Costs are included as a means of teaching valuable concepts; competitors are not evaluated on their budgeting skills.

Packing List (sample included)

Prepare your recipe enough times to feel fairly comfortable with it. Make a list of the ingredients and equipment necessary to prepare your dish(s), clean up, and serve. It may be helpful to highlight ingredients that require refrigeration and thus must be packed at the last minute. Try using your packing list several times before the contest to determine what items are missing from your list so you may add them in before packing the final time for the contest.

Task List (sample included)

1. This may be as detailed as you want for your own personal use. Give a simplified copy to the judge.
2. Include any steps you commonly forget. Use a highlighter or a different colored font if that helps you remember the steps in your recipe.
3. Decide on an order that works for you. Perhaps you need to set the table before you start cooking since your food must be served straight from the oven.
4. Place your task list and/or recipe in a document protector to protect it while you work.

Recipe Poster

This is a large poster of your recipe used for the visiting public so they can see what you are making. In Jackson County, the poster is also automatically entered in a contest for creativity and could win a separate award. If you are an intermediate or senior and are selected to compete in the foods preparation contest at State Fair, you will need to bring this poster to display in the kitchen area when you are cooking. Use 22 x 28-inch or 22 x 30-inch poster board. The best buy locally for poster board is Dollar Tree. Use two or more posters if needed for a meals contest. Hand-lettering your recipe is perfectly acceptable and a great skill to master. Most, however, type the recipe on 8 ½ x 11 typing paper in the largest font with the smallest margins that will fit on the paper. You can glue or tape this on the poster board. Some opt to take this sheet to Kinko's where they will help you enlarge it to 22 x 28 inches for a cost under \$2. Laminating is optional. If you think you will use this poster repeatedly, it may protect your poster from damage during transportation and display but it does significantly add to the expense.

Menu

Create a menu for an entire meal for which your dish (s) would be a part. In developing your menu, think about good nutrition, selecting a range of items from all the food groups. Consider color, texture, taste as well as your theme. Display your menu at your table setting. You may choose to place your menu in a small picture frame. Dollar Tree is a good place to locate an inexpensive frame and you may type your menu in a fancy font or your best printing and decorate it any way you wish. Be creative, picture frames may not be for you and you have an even better idea. Especially as an Intermediate or Senior, the judge may ask if you have prepared each item in your proposed menu. It is a good idea to have done so at least once! Pack this display menu in your table setting box and place it on your table for the judge's use during your interview.

Table Setting Diagram

Make a diagram of your place setting, centerpiece, menu, etc. and place it in your table setting box.

FOOD PREPARATION CONTEST TIPS: Tips for Success

Pre-Contest Checklist

Before the contest, have I:

- Carefully read over the requirements for this year's contest.
- Complete the Judge's Information Form on both sides.
- Plan a menu as required on the back of the Judge's Information Form
- Made a copy of my recipe to give to the judge before I begin cooking
- Make a large Recipe Poster easily read at the back of a room
- Decide how I will keep my hair pulled back if necessary
- Create a simple task list and have a copy to give to the judge
- Create a packing list, practiced working from it and packed my own box
- Practice my table setting and made sure it is correct.
- Include an apron and a camera to take a picture for my Record Book
- Study the nutrition facts about what I have prepared
- Carefully review the study materials for the Foods Judging Contest

Foods Preparation Contest Day

1. Arrive early after a good nights sleep. Observe the other contestants.
2. Check in with the clerk. She and the judge are there to help you. Ask questions if you need help turning on or off the oven, working the microwave, etc.
3. Be well groomed, dress nicely, have your hair pulled back, and wear an apron.
4. Do not ask your mom for help. It is best not to speak with your parents during the contest.
5. Do not go back into the kitchen to wash your serving or baking dishes. Either take them home to wash or wash them in the back kitchen where the judging contest is held.
6. If something goes really wrong, admit it and ask for help. If you have brought enough supplies you may be allowed to start over.
7. Never place your supplies boxes on the counter. Move them out of your work area before you begin.

Top Foods Contest Tips

1. Wash your hands before you begin cooking. Wash them again if you handle eggs or raw meat.
2. Fill your sink with hot, soapy water as you are washing your hands and setting up your space.
3. Wash and dry the counter before cooking on it. Prepare a spray bottle with water and one tablespoon bleach as a disinfectant. Create a dishwashing tote.
4. Measure over waxed paper.
5. Practice your table setting and make sure it is done correctly. Make a diagram if necessary.
6. Double check your packing lists. Pack your own supplies – mom can help but she should not do it for you. Include a small trash bag taped to your tray and practice using it.
7. Leave your kitchen spotless. Dry out your sink. Check that all appliances are turned off.
8. Ask questions during the contest if you need help.
9. Consider equipment safety: Never insert beaters into a mixer while it is plugged in. Unplug the mixer before you remove the beaters. Learn to use knives properly if needed.
10. Wash your hands after cracking an egg. Crack your eggs by holding the egg in one hand and tapping it with a knife over a separate small bowl. Wash the outside of fruits or vegetables before peeling.
11. Wash your hands, counters, cutting board after working with raw meat. Think about where you place knives or other equipment that came in contact with raw meat.
12. Stay within the time limit!
13. Try to practice at least once in someone else's kitchen. Pack your boxes and pretend you are competing in the contest. This is a great way to bless a friend with a meal and your family is probably quite glad to share at this point. Practice serving so you feel comfortable.

FOOD PREPARATION CONTEST TIPS: Packing & Organizing Supplies

Packing Your Supplies

Plastic storage boxes or laundry baskets make good supply boxes. Use lids or cover them with bath towels to keep the contents clean. Pack a cooler with items that need to be kept cold. Pack your dish soap, wash clothes, dishtowels and a disinfectant spray in a tote. Include the judge's information sheet and recipe as well as your apron in this tote. Use jellyroll pans (cookie sheets with sides) to put all your supplies in and remove the trays in one motion when you are unloading. **Practice cooking several times using only your packing box to make sure your packing list is complete.** If you transfer your ingredients from their original containers, label the contents carefully. Consider using wide-mouthed containers to make measuring easier. Make sure you label your containers very carefully. (A mix-up between salt and sugar is disastrous).

Consider using several jelly roll pans (cookie sheets with sides) to hold your supplies. One tray to hold all your ingredients, one tray to hold your measuring cups, measuring spoons, bowls, and other utensils. You may choose to use a third tray if you are cooking near the stove. Basically, think about setting up as though you were setting up "stations". Pack your boxes so you can lift entire trays and place them on the counter if possible to save time instead of removing ingredients one-by-one.

Tape a paper bag to one of the trays to use as a trash bag. Use good judgment; you may need a larger trash bag if you are preparing a lot of fruits and vegetables.

Tear off enough wax paper in varying sizes to measure ingredients over. Line your trays with wax paper if you tend to spill so clean up is easier. Place wax paper next to your mixer or the stove to put dirty mixing spoons on.

Pack a separate box for your table setting, centerpiece, and serving supplies. **Include a diagram showing where you should place everything if you think you might forget.** Leave this box out in the table setting area until it is time to set your table.

Pack your boxes yourself! An adult could help by reading your list, but do your own work so you will have the personal satisfaction of knowing you did it yourself.

Organizing Your Kitchen

1. To save time and help you remember, put your apron on before you enter the kitchen.
2. Ask the clerk to show you how to operate the oven, stove, or microwave before you begin.
3. Set your cleaning tote by the sink. This tote will hold your dish soap, dishcloths, dishtowels, disinfectant spray, and possibly your apron and recipe/cost analysis/task list for the judge.
4. Run a sink full of hot soapy water, wash your hands, and clean your counters before you begin unpacking.
5. Never put your boxes on the counters. Once you have unloaded your supplies, move your box outside your kitchen space, but out of everyone's way.
6. Set up the two trays several feet apart with a space for you to work in the middle.
7. Try to clean up as you cook. Keep your work space as neat as possible.

FOOD PREPARATION CONTEST TIPS: The Oral Interview

Introduction

This interview gives the judge a chance to get to know you a little and to provide you with constructive suggestions for future contests. It is also a wonderful skill to master for college and job interviews later in life. The interview gives you the opportunity to shine. Be prepared - then be positive and smile.

The interview normally lasts less than ten minutes. You will sit beside the judge and she will be seated in front of your table setting and taste your dish(s). The judge may have asked brief questions during your preparation time, but this is your best opportunity to demonstrate what you know.

Commonly Asked Questions

- * Why did you choose this recipe?
- * Do you like to eat it?
- * How many times did you practice for this contest?
- * How did you select your theme?
- * Where does flour come from?
- * Which food groups does your recipe or menu represent?
- * Which ingredients come from the Pacific Northwest?
- * When or where would you serve this dish?
- * What nutrients does it provide?
- * What vitamins is this recipe (or this menu) especially high in?
- * How do those vitamins or nutrients help build strong bodies?
- * Did you modify this recipe in any way?
- * Do you have any questions you would like to ask me (the judge)?
- * In a yeast bread contest: What type of wheat did you use? How long does it take to “proof”?

Interview Tips

1. Remove your apron before you sit down at the table.
2. Be prepared to serve a small piece of your product if asked. Sometimes the judge serves herself but more often she may ask you to serve her. Practice serving until you feel comfortable doing so. Keep in mind that the judge is “eating” all day long and keep her portions small.
3. Practice answering the questions listed above. Have a parent or sibling think of other questions they might ask. Research nutritional information that will help you answer the judge’s questions. The better prepared you become; the more comfortable the interview will be for you. If the judge does not ask any nutritional questions, try to gracefully weave your knowledge into your conversation.

Caution for Parents

Parents are normally allowed to sit at the table to listen to the judge’s comments. It is very tempting to answer questions for your young person, particularly if you know she knows the answer and you want her to succeed. Resist this temptation! Your child needs to handle this experience on her own and the judge will not look kindly on your interference. If the suspense gets overwhelming – take a picture for her record book. This caution holds true for the entire contest. If your child starts mouthing words across the room, you may need to walk away and let her handle her challenge on her own. The clerk and the judge are both available to help a contestant if asked.