4-H Cooking Contest Hints
Betty Dietz, 4-H Judge

BEFORE CONTEST

1. Thoroughly study the contest information sent to you from the county Extension office. Be aware of contest requirements and rules.

2. Select your recipe, keeping in mind skills you wish to demonstrate. It is difficult for a judge to evaluate you if you do not show what you can do.

3. Practice preparing your recipe the way you’ll do it for the contest. Practice several times so you are familiar with procedures in putting it together, and so you can finish the contest in the allotted time, including clean-up. Make a list of the ingredients and utensils you need. Do this as you begin practicing, not the night before the contest.

4. If your recipe calls for chopped or grated ingredients (or others that require a lot of preparation time), have approximately 3/4 of the ingredient prepared prior to the contest. Prepare the remaining 1/4 during the contest, so the judge can see your preparation skills.

5. Standard utensils to bring:
   measuring spoons, measuring cups for dry and liquid ingredients, straight-edged utensil for leveling dry ingredients, flour sifter, large mixing spoon, bowls, rubber spatula for cleaning out bowls, small paper bag and tape, hot pads, two trays, sponge for washing counters and dishes, dish towel for drying dishes, detergent for washing dishes, serving plate and any eating utensils you’ll need for serving your recipe to the judge.

6. Have all of your forms filled out and recipes copied (one for you and one for the judge) before you arrive.

DURING CONTEST

1. Wear clean clothing and remove outer clothing such as jackets before starting to work.

2. **DO NOT** put boxes containing your supplies either on the table or on the counter --- leave them on the floor.

3. **Smile!**

4. Be sure hair is tied back or stays out of face while preparing food. You should not have to touch or push hair back during the contest.

5. Put on apron.

6. Give recipe and score sheet to judge. Have you copy of recipe on a recipe card, protected with plastic wrap, rather than using a cookbook.

7. **WASH HANDS!!!!**
8. Set out and organize equipment and ingredients on trays on the counter. If you are preparing several dish as in the mini-meal contest, you may need more than two trays as suggested in list of utensils to bring.

9. Work at front counters whenever possible so judge and spectators can more easily watch your progress.

10. If you are going to use the oven, check to see in what position the oven rack is and change if necessary. If you are using an oven thermometer, put it in the oven --- when the preheat light goes out, check your thermometer and make adjustments in the temperature setting if necessary.

11. Tape paper bag to side of counter and/or table are clean.

12. Check to be sure counters and/or table are clean.

13. Partially fill one side of sink with hot, sudsy water, so you can clean up as you go.

14. If you are a messy cook lay a sheet of wax paper down and work on it. (Save clean-up time).

15. Grease baking pans before beginning to mix batter. Use wax paper for spreading the grease in the pan.

16. NEVER lick fingers while preparing food for a contest.

17. FOOD PREPARATION TIPS:
   a. Use a cutting board when chopping or dicing any food
   b. Have several hot pads any time you are cooking on top of range or in oven. (Use them to handle pans as well as to set hot dishes on).
   c. Always put a lid on blender before operating.
   d. Pull out oven rack when placing or removing pans --- place pan in center of oven rack.
   e. When pouring batter in pans, keep batter as low to pan as possible to reduce air.
   f. Do not measure ingredients directly over mixing bowl in case of an overfill of utensil. (You may get too much of the ingredient in the mixing bowl). Also, remember to crack eggs in a separate bowl, then add to other ingredients.
   g. Measure shortening, margarine, or butter by packing in cup with a rubber scraper, not a metal spatula.
   h. Use glass measuring cups for liquids. Put the cup on a flat surface after you have measured and bend down until the cup in at eye level to make sure liquid is right at the mark.
   i. After sifting flour, spoon it gently into a measuring cup. This retains the lightness of flour created by sifting.
   j. Unplug electric mixer before removing beaters.

18. Wash, rinse and drain all utensils used in the contest within time allotment. Wipe table and counter top clean. (Check surface with hand to be sure it’s not still sticky). Clean flour areas with paper towel before washing with dishcloth.

19. Rinse out sink and leave area in spotless order, ready for next participant.

20. Most important suggestion of all -- RELAX AND HAVE FUN!!! If you have done your homework, participating in a food contest will be a rewarding learning experience!

21. Remember the judge is your friend, and she likes you!