



Cook Off Information Packet

Section II

Mailing Address:
41 East 400 North #210
Logan, UT 84321

How to Organize a Dutch Oven Cook Off

This information has been compiled to help you organize and run a Dutch oven cook off. Any help that the International Dutch Oven Society (IDOS) can be to you, please just ask. Please keep in mind that IDOS only runs one cook off a year, the International Championship Dutch Oven Cook Off, but we are always willing to help you with your cook off, all things permitting.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Align your cook off with the biggest, and best, local celebration such as: 4th of July, Wild West Days, Strawberry Festival, state or county fair, etc. You need an environment of activities to draw a crowd. Or think about holding it in front of Sports & Outdoor store that sells Dutch oven equipment, especially if they are willing to sponsor the cook off.
2. If the celebration lasts several days, pick the busiest day and the best hours of the day to stage your cook off. Try to have the judging at the busiest time of the celebration, but try not to conflict with the celebrations major events as you don't want to make people have to decide which event to attend.
3. Get as much publicity out on the cook off as early as you can. Use resources that feature community calendar events. There is likely no charge for this advertising but they need the information sometimes weeks or months in advance. Contact your local newspapers, radio stations and television stations to see if there is someone who works on and reports on outdoor events.

COOK OFF FORMATS:

1. The easiest format to begin with is a one-pot cook off. Let the contestants come in and cook their specialty so that they feel somewhat confident and comfortable in the competitive environment. It makes recruiting contestants easier and also gives the spectators a variety of recipes to look at.
2. A "complete meal" cook off consisting of a main dish, a dessert, and a yeast or sourdough bread is another possibility.
3. A junior division cook off consisting of one or two pots is another fun possibility.
4. A one-pot specified recipe such as sourdough bred, soups or stews, chocolate desserts, etc. is another option. Some celebrations may be centered around a particular food or tradition and this format will fit such restrictions (Peach Days, German Festival, Cherry Days, Spud Days, etc.) As well, you could require them to use a certain ingredient in all three of their dishes. For example, at Spud Days, they need to have potatoes in every dish.
5. You can also have a "complete meal" cook off as in number 2 above, but for those who have never competed before, call it a "Novice Division" and then the first place winner is no longer a "novice" after that year.
6. You may also mix some of the formats together if you like. Be creative.

Note: The more contestants and the dutch ovens that are involved with the cook off will require more details, facilities, and support staff. Starting simple will allow you to bring off a good event your first year and then it is easy to expand from there. But if you feel up to it, go for it. Do a 3-pot cook off.



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SPONSORS AND PRIZES:

1. Appropriate sponsors are the city or county that the event is being held at, local merchant who sells Dutch ovens, a soft drink/beer distributor, food stores, sporting goods stores and most anyone else you can enlist. You can ask for either cash, products, free tickets, free trips, etc. Give your sponsors full credit any way you can and ask them to be present to award their prizes. As you solicit prizes for your cook off, please remember not to solicit them in the name of IDOS but in the name of your cook off.
2. Most cook offs have a local business sponsor that donates the aprons that are given to the contestants, judges, and support staff. They silk-screen their name/logo on the apron along with the name of the cook off. Be careful not to use logos of other cook offs or organizations without prior permission.
3. Three winners are normal, but not set in stone. If you have enough prizes for more winners than that, then do it. Often a Judge's Merit Award or People's Choice Award are also given. The first one allows some judge's discretion in the selection and the last one allows the crowd some choice in one.

CONTESTANTS:

1. Even if you are having only a one-pot cook off, consider contestant teams of two – it is more fun for them and involves more participants. A minimum age limit of 12 years old is suggested unless it is a cook off specifically for youth. To be considered an IDOS-sanctioned cook off, a team may consist of one or two members. An adult must accompany any contestant under the age of 18. Some cook offs allow up to three contestants working together.
2. Get as much publicity out on the cook off as early as you can. Then start corralling your friends. The first year is usually the hardest and you may have to twist a few arms as Dutch oven cooks often do not see themselves as competitors. Hopefully in a year or so you will be making an alternate list of people wanting to compete in case a team drops out of the competition at the last moment. Dutch oven cooks are used to cooking for everyone but not competing. Encourage them to try because most cooks learn so much during a cook off by talking with and observing what other cooks do.
3. To assist with getting competitors the following year, have a signup clipboard at the first year's cook off. Mail them information the following year encouraging them to compete and have some fun.
4. You can even have your contestants dress appropriately for the celebration – pioneer, western, medieval, civil war, or whatever. It is more fun and attracts attention.
5. Send instructions on dress, safe health and cooking practices, cook off schedule, rules to be followed and information on how food will be judged as soon as contestants register. Some cook offs require that typed recipes be submitted a couple of weeks beforehand so that a recipe booklet can be offered for sale at the cook off. If you are setting up a youth cook off you should get a parental release form from the legal guardian.
6. Most cook offs require an entrance fee. Do not try to make money on the fee for the first year or so. Ten or fifteen dollars won't discourage them. A youth cook off may want to eliminate an entrance fee to encourage participation.



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FINDING A SITE FOR THE COOK OFF:

1. The location of your cook off is going to be a big consideration. Try to find a spot in the middle of your celebration where the most people are going to walk by. Try to put the contestants in some shade as an afternoon over hot briquets in the direct sun can be a long and miserable one. If there is no shade available, try to provide some by using canopies, Easy-Ups, etc.
2. Your contestants should be required to use some type of cooking table to cook on, or at least something that keeps the pots up off the ground and the food away from the dirt. Some cook offs limit contestants to using briquets only or may allow the use of propane to start briquets. Some also allow any natural fuel, such as cow chips, etc. You will have to determine specific rules on what may or may not be used to cook with or on top of.
3. The cook off area should be roped off to preclude the spectators from directly interfering with the cooking preparations.
4. The cook off committee should provide certain support requirements and require the contestants to bring the rest. Support requirements are things like preparation tables, hot water, drinking water, parking passes, etc.
5. Equipment to have available at the site should include rope, black marker, clip boards, calculator, leather gloves, lid lifter, paper plates, knives, forks and spoons (for the judges), something to write with for the judges, aprons, tables, palate cleansers (cold water, grapes, carrots, celery, etc.), napkins, serving ladles/spoons/knives, prizes, etc. Make yourself a list and check it often.

COMMITTEE STAFFING:

In setting up your competition, figure out what will be best for you depending on how many people are involved. You will most likely need to ask for help and explain exactly what you need help with. Being involved with a cook off is an exciting way to learn more about competing. The committee described below can handle up to approximately 15 teams of contestants. Everyone should be aware of their duties.

1. Chairman – organizes remainder of committee, does most of the preliminary arrangements with celebration committee, press recognition, and lining up of judges. Should help review recipes for completeness, assists judges during cook off, and completes any wrap up activities.
2. Judges' assistant – helps register contestants, reviews recipes for completeness, sets up the judging area, provides clean tableware, palate cleansers, etc., assists the food judges during judging by helping to cut the dishes, serve the judges, etc. More than one person can do this job.
3. Scorekeeper – helps to register contestants, helps during judging, totals scorecards as soon as each contestant is judged and ranks winners. It is best to have at least two if not three people do this so that you can double and triple check your addition totals to make sure no addition mistake is made by having each scorekeeper total the judges sheets separately and then compare to make sure they have all tallied them the same.
4. Field Judges – two are recommended and possibly a third if you have over 15 teams. See section titled Field Judging Qualifications for further information about these judges.
5. Food Judges – three to five judges are recommended. See section title Food Judging Qualifications for further information about these judges.



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JUDGES

1. The best Dutch Oven judges will have all or most of the following qualifications:
 - a. Possess a wide knowledge of foods.
 - b. Have personal experience in many methods of food preparation.
 - c. Have personal ability to control the cooking process using fires or charcoal and Dutch ovens.
 - d. Possess the ability to recognize and reward excellence.
 - e. Have long term food memory by examining the recipes ahead of time and making notation of any distinct flavors or combinations of flavors to look for. This will also help so the first pot is equally evaluated with the last pot.
 - f. Have an appreciation of the efforts and expertise used to produce the results.
 - g. Have the ability to set aside food preferences and prejudices by judging every dish presented on its merits, not on personal dislike for certain types of foods.
2. Three to five food judges are recommended and two field judges are recommended for up to about 15 contestant teams. Notice there is an odd number of judges. With two field judges there should always be an odd number of food judges.
3. Get your judges from:
 - a. Good Dutch Oven cooks who may not be participating.
 - b. Well-known chefs or restaurant owners who have had formal food education or training.
 - c. Food editors from local or regional papers (some editors will not want to judge if they are covering the cook off).
 - d. VIPs (mayor, senator, TV personality, radio personality, etc.) who can bring recognition to your event. Try to keep these to a minimum unless they also have knowledge of Dutch Oven cooking.
4. Be sure that a majority of your judges are known to be good cooks, otherwise you will lose your credibility with your contestants. Most people will be happy to judge if you will ask them well ahead of time so they can clear the schedules accordingly.
5. One of the most important things about your judges is that you need to get them their packet of information at least a week before the cook off so that they can go through the information **before** they come to the cook off.
6. Have a “lead” judge review with all of the judges things that should be looked for consistently. Discuss the point spread and suggest that burned on the bottom, or undone food be docked so many points, etc. so that judging will be fairly consistent. This “lead” judge should be knowledgeable about Dutch Oven cooking.
7. Provide your judges with a shady spot, comfortable chairs, heat-proof devices to put the hot ovens on, meat thermometers for your field judges, palate cleansers, clean paperware and utensils, clipboards with judging forms and pencils, along with recipes of the food being prepared. The contestants should bring the ovens to the judging table or in front of the judges and in some contests they even have each team briefly tell the judges a little about the recipe. Contestants should leave their dish and depart from the judging area after this is done.
8. Keep family, friends, and spectators out of the judging area while the judges are working.
9. The judges will need clean knives and serving ladles/spoons, and separate scorecards for each team of contestants.



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AFTER JUDGING

1. As long as your contest has followed all Local and State Health Department guidelines, you may serve the competition food to the spectators. This is fun for people who have been watching the food preparation or who are curious about Dutch oven flavor. You should consider having the contestants dish out some food for themselves before submitting their food for spectators. Some cook offs sell tickets for a small amount of money and then the spectators go to the specific Dutch oven dish they want and hand in a ticket for a sample. Contestants put in a lot of time and money to preparing their food and getting some money back can be a positive aspect if they do not receive any prizes. Other cook offs have used these samples as a fund raiser for the park that the cook off is held in or for the city, etc. You can sell a plate for a certain amount of money and all the proceeds go to the park or the city, etc. Whatever you decide to do, remember to follow your local Health Department's guidelines.
2. Try to get as many contestants, family, and spectators to be present for the announcement of the winners. Start with your last place winner first. Arrange for press coverage of the winners and give the press a copy of the winning recipes.

WRAP UP ACTIVITIES

1. Write a thank you note to your sponsors and include any media coverage.
2. Write a thank you note to any other persons who helped make the cook off a success.
3. Make a file of all your cook off forms and papers. Immediately after the cook off meet as a committee and make notes for improvements for the next year and include it in the file.
4. Notify IDOS of the winners along with their recipes so that we can share your event in our newsletter. Please include some photographs if they are available. If you have run your cook off as an IDOS-Sanctioned cook off, then it is a requirement to fill out the Championship Qualification Information Form at the end of this packet and return it to IDOS. This will insure that your 1st place winner will be eligible to be invited to cook in the International Dutch Oven Championship Cook Off.