



Special Foods Contest Handbook 2024

DIVISIONS:

- **Cupcake War** (Open to all age levels)
- **Special Foods BASIC** (Jr. Level or first 3 years of experience in contest at any age)
- **Special Foods ADVANCED** (over 3 years of experience in basic contest, so Intermediate or Senior levels only)
- **Table Setting/Menu/Nutrition Quiz** (Open to all age levels)

Age Levels (as of Jan. 1, 2024): *Clover Kid 5-7 yrs. (non-competitive), Junior 8-10 yrs., Intermediate 11-13 yrs., Senior 14-18 yrs.*

CUPCAKE WAR

Goals and Objectives

This baking/cake decorating competition focuses on product quality (visual and taste) and creative presentation.

The contestant prepares cupcakes and a display based around a theme of their choice (i.e. baby shower, birthday, teacher gift, etc.). Creative ingredients are encouraged in the recipe. Cake mixes may be used, but other ingredients can be added to the mix. A recipe **MUST** accompany the entry. Cupcakes are to be decorated and incorporated into a presentation/display that will not exceed the size of a square card table (approx. 34" x 34"). Cupcakes made with ingredients that can spoil (i.e. frosting) **MUST** be kept cool as the judge will conduct a taste test along with an interview with the contestant.

SPECIAL FOODS - BASIC

Goals and Objectives

4-H'ers will learn to provide meals and snacks that satisfy aesthetic, nutritional, and individual needs by choosing and preparing a recipe from any one of the five food groups.

Menu Planning Objectives

- Demonstrate interest in a meal by varying color, shape, texture and form of menu items.
- Demonstrate how contrasts in a menu's flavors, temperatures and textures contribute to its total quality.
- Demonstrate preparation methods and equipment use patterns.

Food Principles Objectives

- Know and discuss the food principles and preparation techniques applied in the recipe prepared.
- Evaluate the finished product based on eye appeal, flavor, texture, and taste.

Aesthetics Objectives

- Coordinate a table setting cover into an attractive, aesthetically pleasing manner based on the menu.

- Demonstrate the importance of arrangement and garnishing in overall appearance of the food being served.

Time Management Objectives

- Identify and implement time management strategies, appropriate equipment and appliances to prepare the recipe within 1 1/2 hours.

Food Safety & Sanitation Objectives

- Observe personal hygiene habits to ensure safe and sanitary food.
- Know and implement general kitchen practices that are routine in the interest of safety and sanitation.
- Know and implement recommendations for avoiding bacterial hazards when purchasing, storing, thawing, cooking, and serving food.

Nutritional Objectives

- Know MyPlate food groups and amount/number of servings needed for one's own age and activity level.
- Prepare foods that meet basic nutrient need.
- Know and discuss the functions of nutrients present in the food groups and specifically those found in the food prepared and the menu.
- Recognize and categorize foods in the recipe into the food groups.

Nutrition knowledge helps you select food that will help you grow up healthy and strong. A large part of the Special Foods Contest will focus on the contestant's understanding of nutrition. Youth will be asked several nutrition questions by the judge. All nutrition knowledge can be gleaned from the My Plate website at <http://myplate.gov>

OR from the 4-H Cooking manuals (101, 201, 301, 401). Here is what each age level should know:

Nutrition Knowledge for Juniors

For the contest you need to be able to list the five food groups from My Plate. You will need to know:

- How many servings or amount you need per day from each of the food groups for your age and physical activity level.
- Which food groups each of your ingredients belong in.

Nutrition Knowledge for Intermediates

For the contest you need to be able to list the five food groups from My Plate. You will need to know:

- How many servings or amount you need per day from each of the food groups for your age and physical activity level.
- Which food groups each of your ingredients belong in.
- Know at least **two** nutrients that are found in your menu and how they help your body. We get nutrients from the foods we eat daily. Each nutrient does a special job in the body to keep us healthy.

Nutrition Knowledge for Seniors

Note that you will also need to know the Junior and Intermediate nutrition knowledge.

For the contest you will have to be able to list the five food groups from My Plate. You will need to know:

- How many servings or amount you need per day from each of the food groups for your age and physical activity level.
- Which food groups each of your ingredients belong in.
- Know the **six** nutrients and at least one function of each of the nutrients. You will need to know functions of specific vitamins and minerals present in your recipe.

Contestant Appearance

- Contestants should be poised and well groomed. Wear washable clothing and a smock top or apron. Hair should be away from the face using a scarf, ribbon, rubber bands, hairnet, cap, barrettes, etc. Clean hands are important!

General Guidelines:

Special Foods Contestants may choose to make a product from any one of the five food groups from My Plate. One serving of the dish must provide one serving of a food from the food group in which it was entered. For example: if a casserole is entered in the milk, cheese, and yogurt group, it could contain 1 cup of milk or 2 oz. processed cheese or a combination of foods (Example: 1/2 cup milk and 3/4 oz. natural cheese). The recipe is to be prepared and ready to serve within 90 minutes.

Recipes

- Bring two copies of the recipe you are preparing. One for you to use while cooking and one for the judge/audience. Leave one copy on your table.
- *Nutritious drinks are acceptable recipes in the Junior division only. Drinks should be served from a pitcher, not the blender. The pitcher does not stay at the place setting so it does not have to coordinate with the dinnerware.*

Menu/MyPlate

- Contestants must have a written one-meal menu with at least four of the five food groups used. (*Junior Division competitors also have the option of creating a snack menu with at least two different food groups.*) The special foods recipe must be one of the menu items.
- One copy of the menu is needed for the contest. Menus will be laid at the place setting. Include your name and menu occasion.
- Create your personalized My Plate printout by going to <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan>. You will need to enter your age, gender, and activity level. The website will create a personalized plan for healthy eating. **This will also need to be laid at the place setting with your menu.**
- See the nutrition section (above) to prepare for nutrition-related questions the judge will ask you as part of the competition.

Technique

- Contestants are to bring all supplies needed to prepare and serve the recipe they have selected. This includes the ingredients, cooking utensils, serving utensils, and everything needed for a place setting.
- Three ingredients must be measured during the contest. A maximum of two ingredients may be pre-cooked or pre-measured prior to the contest. All other preparation needs to be done at the contest.
- Contestants should: 1) use correct measuring, mixing, and preparation techniques; 2) know and exhibit food safety involved in food preparation techniques at all times (time, temperature, and personal sanitation).

Place Setting

- Contestants will display a place setting that coordinates with the recipe and menu chosen. All dishes and utensils needed to consume the foods in the menu should be included with the setting. A centerpiece is encouraged but not required for Juniors, but IS required for intermediates and seniors.

SPECIAL FOODS - ADVANCED

- All of the rules and guidelines for Special Foods Basic apply to this competition.
- The one major difference is that Special Foods Advanced competitors **MUST** use the year's "Challenge Ingredient" in their menu and prepare a dish including that "Challenge Ingredient". **The Challenge Ingredient for 2024 is *chicken*.**
- Youth must have participated in Special Foods Basic for **at least three years** to be able to compete in the advanced level.

TABLE SETTING/MENU/NUTRITION QUIZ

- *Youth will choose either this division OR Special Foods, not both.*
- This is an option for youth who do not want to cook in the competition.
- Youth will be expected to follow the rules in the Special Foods contests (above) related to their age level for creating a menu, generating **and printing a Personal My Plate Plan**, and creating a place setting. They will also answer nutrition questions with the judge. The only major difference is that this division does not include food preparation. (Food also does NOT need to be brought from home to place on the display table.)

HELPFUL TIPS

The Table Presentation

Garnishes

- Before we taste food, our eyes often "feast" upon what is set before us. This helps to excite our appetite. Good cooks always invest a little extra attention to make their dishes look special with a garnish.
- A garnish is any edible decoration added to a dish. It can be placed on or around the dish. It can also be added to the individual serving. Garnishes can be as simple as a dash of paprika or as elaborate as a food sculpture that garnishes the table.
- Variety and contrast in color, form, and texture are important to remember when deciding on a garnish for your dish. Garnishes should be appropriate to the food with which they are served and should harmonize in flavor.
- Parsley is a typical garnish. But try to use your imagination and come up with something unique. An ingredient from your dish can be used in an interesting way as a garnish.
- For the contest, the place setting with one serving of the food you prepared on it should be garnished.
- The serving dish must have eye appeal and be well presented. A garnish may add to the eye appeal and, therefore, you may choose to garnish the serving dish but a separate garnish is not required.

Table Setting

- A "cover" means everything used at each individual's place setting. The "cover" includes the dinnerware, glasses/cups, flatware, tablecloth or placemat, and napkin used at each individual place setting. The recipe and menu you have chosen influence the type of items you will use in your cover.
- A child's birthday party would probably have bright colors while an adult dinner party would probably use neutral and subdued colors.
- The purpose of setting the table cover is to make the act of eating as easy as possible. Common sense and courtesy dictate that place settings include whatever is necessary for eating a meal, and that they be placed conveniently. It discourages the display of non-essential utensils and dishes. For instance, if you are not serving coffee, you would not set a cup and saucer at the place setting.

Beverage-ware

- Some type of beverage is usually served with the meal or snack. Therefore, at least one piece of beverage-ware (glasses/cups) should be included in your table setting.
- If you list more than one beverage on your menu (for example, milk and fruit juice) then two appropriate glasses should be provided at the setting. If only one beverage is listed on the menu, (water is assumed to be served if nothing is listed on the menu for a beverage) then one piece of beverage-ware should be included in the table setting.
- A water glass may or may not be included at the place setting in addition to other beverages listed on the menu. It is up to the host/hostess whether an additional glass for water is placed at the setting.
- Water does not need to be written on the menu. It may be written on the menu if a glass is provided.
- If you do not list coffee on your menu, you do not need to put a cup and saucer at your place setting.

Serving Dishes and Utensils

- Table presentation of the food prepared is important for a successful and pleasing meal. Matching or coordinating serving dishes and utensils should be used for a unified look at the table.
- Foods that are prepared in blenders, fry pans, grills, etc. should be transferred to an appropriate serving dish, plate, or pitcher.
- Casserole-type foods, salads, etc. may be prepared and served in the same dish, if the dish is also a serving dish. The preparation/serving dish should be appropriate for the menu item and blend well with the other dishes used at the place setting.

Centerpieces

Centerpieces are another way to show your creativity. Juniors do not have to bring a centerpiece for this contest. Intermediates and Seniors must have a centerpiece with their table settings.

Basic Principles of Centerpieces

- Simplicity is the key to beauty. Do not overdo it.
- Try unique items. Candles and flowers are good options but also consider unusual items, such as pinecones, fresh fruits/vegetables, or small decorative objects.
- Be sure that items are not offensive where people are eating, such as very strong aromas. Watch for bugs or other foreign matter when using natural objects.
- Centerpieces can consist of more than one item, but all items should coordinate and not be too spread out.
- Remember that a centerpiece is viewed from all sides. The centerpiece should be equally visible to all people seated at the table.
- Create a mood with the centerpiece and table appointments. Consider establishing a theme around the type of meal and foods that are being served. For example, if you are serving fish, you might choose a nautical theme or beach theme.
- Consider the height of the arrangement. Keep the view and conversation zones open. All guests should be in clear view of each other to promote conversation.
- Candles. Candles should be lit when they are used as a centerpiece; however, for this contest, DO NOT LIGHT the candles. Use an appropriate height of candles so that when lit, they will not interfere with the view of the guests.
- A mat of some kind is usually placed underneath the centerpiece to “ground” it. This mat or fabric should coordinate with the place setting. It could be the same kind of placemat or napkin as the one used for the place setting.

Design Elements for Centerpiece Creation

- Keep the centerpiece in proportion to the size of the table. Do not choose a centerpiece that is too large or too small for the table. If it is too large, it will overpower the space. If it is too small, the centerpiece will seem lost and insignificant.
- Color is one of the most important considerations. The centerpiece can help to draw the entire table setting together. Coordinate the colors in the centerpiece with the colors in the place setting.
- Select containers carefully. The container should be in proportion to its contents or the

effectiveness of the arrangement may be lost.

- Use a variety of textures, colors, lines, shapes, and sizes in the centerpiece to make it interesting.

The Chef

There are several techniques you will want to consider for the Special Foods Contest. The following are some suggestions for you.

Appearance

- Avoid long, flowing sleeves that may come in contact with your food or be a fire hazard.
- Wear an apron or some type of protection for your clothing. Full-length aprons provide better protection than short aprons that leave the chest unprotected.
- Wear comfortable close-toed shoes. Avoid open-toe sandals, as they do not protect your feet. There are many things that can happen when you are cooking that could injure your feet, so protect them/
- Wear something on your head to pull back your hair such as a scarf, hair net, or cap. This is for cleanliness purposes and keeps your hair from falling in the food. Be clean and well groomed.
- Wash your hands before beginning. Have a wet cloth at your workstation to periodically wipe your hands as you work. Be sure to wash your hands often while preparing your food, especially after coughing, sneezing, or handling raw meats.

Attitude

- Relax and enjoy yourself. Smile and be friendly to the judges. The judges are understanding people and any suggestions they give are to help you learn and improve your skills.
- Do your own work and be careful not to bother those around you. Many mistakes can be made in a recipe, so it is best to give all your attention to what you are doing.

Work Area: Organization, Neatness, and Safety

- After you have set up your work area and are waiting to start, cover your equipment with clean towels. This keeps your area looking neat. Keep your area neat by cleaning up after yourself. To make cleanup easier, you can cover your work area with wax paper.
- Keep your work area orderly. Using trays or cookie sheets will help this. When you start, have all of your necessary items on one tray to one side. When you use the item and are done with it, transfer it to a tray on the other side. This keeps you working neatly and also prevents mistakes. When you are done, your beginning tray should be empty. If it is not, you will know that you forgot something.
- Stay within your area. Do not overlap into the area that belongs to someone else. Practice at home in a limited work space. When you are finished, make sure that your work area is completely clean.
- To make it handy for yourself, tape a brown paper bag to the edge of the counter where you are working. This is handy for all garbage and when you are done, you need to make only one trip to the garbage can.
- If you need to walk some distance to use the stove or sink, be sure to walk carefully. Use dry potholders to prevent burns. If you are draining something, be sure to carry something underneath the item to catch all drips. Liquid on the floor is a hazard! Watch the traffic flow. This prevents traffic jams and accidents.
- If you have things on the stove, turn the handles inward to avoid spills and burns.
- Use correct measuring techniques. The judges will want to see if you can use the proper measuring techniques. Learn the difference between liquid and dry measuring.
- Be sure to use a cutting board if you are doing any cutting or chopping. Make sure to wash the cutting board thoroughly in between if you will be cutting raw meat and then cutting another ingredient. This is to prevent cross-contamination.
- Hard plastic boards are recommended over wooden boards.
- Learn how to use utensils and appliances properly. If you have any questions on how to operate the appliances (the stove, for instance), please ask for help.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Bring along extra ingredients. If you spill or drop something, you will have enough of what you need if you bring extras.
- Determine ahead of time how much of the food you prepare would be considered one serving. You may use the My Plate for serving size guidelines. You will be asked to place one serving on your place setting dish for the judges. For example, if your dish serves four, then you place one fourth of it on the place setting dish.
- Work in logical order. First prepare your dish so it has plenty of time to get done in the hour and a half. You can set your place setting while you are preparing. The only time you would set up your place setting first is if your food is prepared quickly and needs to be served quickly. If you have time in which you have nothing to do, stand quietly in your work area, or sit in a chair quietly.
- The only food you need to prepare at the contest is your main dish, which is your selected entry. You DO NOT need to bring along the other foods on your menu, unless it is something that is needed for your dish. An example would be if you were preparing pancakes, then you would need to bring syrup or the topping that would be used.

