

## Cowboy Chili Cookoff Contestant Rules

Saturday, June 27, 2026 – 10 AM for contestants until 4 PM

Participants in the Cowboy Chili Cookoff must adhere to specific rules regarding registration, cooking requirements, and judging criteria to ensure fair and enjoyable competition.

### Registration and Eligibility

- Participants must sign up for cook-offs through the Damascus Centennial Park website ([www.damascuscentennialpark.org](http://www.damascuscentennialpark.org)) .
- Participants must be 18 years or older.
- Each entrance will submit a \$40 entry fee with registration.

### Cooking Requirements

- **Chili Quantity:** Each contestant must prepare a minimum of one pint of competition chili, which will be submitted for official judging, and additional chili for People's Choice judging.
- **Cooking and Serving Equipment:** Slow cookers, hot pots, and similar electric cooking devices will be used by all participants. Propane grills may be used, but no charcoal or other flames permitted. Once cooking is completed, devices will remain plugged in or operating on a WARM setting (minimum 135° F) at all times with chili stirred regularly to ensure even temperature. Participants will provide their own preparation and serving implements. Portion cups and bowls, spoons, and napkins will be provided by Damascus Civic Club.
- **Ingredients:** Each participant will allow cookoff officials to inspect ingredients before cooking begins. Beans are required and should be visible in every spoonful. Non-vegetable fillers such as rice and pasta are not allowed, although masa, cornstarch, or other thickeners are permitted. Participants can use various meats, including beef, pork, chicken, or vegetarian options, and all perishable ingredients must be transported in and maintained in portable coolers with ice (maximum 41° F) until used. Any toppings, such as shredded cheese to be served with your chili must be kept in a cooler until serving time.
- **Cooking Location:** Chili must be prepared on-site. Spices may be premixed to maintain recipe secrecy. Vegetables, such as onions, celery, or other fresh items, may be cleaned and chopped in advance.
- **Food Safety:** It is recommended that participants familiarize themselves with food handling safety practices. Hand-washing stations, with instructions, will be set up for easy access in the food prep area. Double handwash is required after using the bathroom, blowing nose, sneezing, smoking, eating, or drinking. Hair nets and disposable gloves will be required during food preparation. Disposable gloves must be worn while serving. Participants must withdraw from competition or provide a substitute cook if they are or have been ill with diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, or fever with sore throat in the last 24 hours.

### Judging Criteria

- **Blind Tasting:** The judging process is a blind tasting, meaning contestants cannot stand by their chili once submitted. Judges will taste the chili without knowing which contestant prepared it.

- **Scorecards:** Judging will be based on scorecards, with criteria including flavor, texture, and presentation. The judges' decisions are final.
- **People's Choice Award:** In addition to judges' scores, there will be a People's Choice ballot box at each entrant's station for the general public to score the chili.

#### **Additional Rules**

- **Contestant Number:** Each contestant will be assigned a contestant number, which must be written on the bottom of their chili container for identification during judging.
- **Serving:** Contestants are responsible for maintaining the proper temperature of their chili for serving. Spoons and bowls for serving the public will be provided.

By following these rules, participants can ensure a smooth and competitive chili cook-off experience while showcasing their culinary skills.