



of Central Alabama



Cajun Cook-Off Team Frequently Asked Questions

So, you're thinking about entering a team into Girls Inc.'s Cajun Cook-off but are not really sure what all it entails? We surveyed a group of our veteran teams to give you some insights as well as helpful tips and tricks!

Q1: On average, how many years have teams participated?

A: Most teams are return competitors, with the average being on their 2nd or 3rd competition. A few teams have been with us from the start. Thank you to the returning teams for your continued support!

Q2: What is the ideal size for a cook team?

A: Typically cook teams of 4-6 teams cooking and plating food during the event has been the most efficient. Some teams recruit more (8-12) to help with set-up and break-down of the tent area.

Q3: What dishes are typically prepared?

A: The food categories are split into 3 divisions: Gumbo, Open Cajun, and Dessert. Outside of Gumbo, Jambalaya is the most prepared dish, followed by red beans & rice and shrimp & grits. In the dessert category, bread pudding is most often made followed by beignets.

Q4: How much food should be prepared?

A: Girls Inc. has typically advised its teams to prepare 750-1000 2oz servings. We find this to be an accurate estimate.

Q5: Can food be prepared ahead of time?

A: The Health Dept. requires that all food must be **cooked** on site. This includes broth, as improper cooling of the broth (which is a protein-rich solution) could result in growth of harmful bacteria and a by-product of heat-stable toxins (which would not be broken down upon reheat). Also, for the spirit of competition, pre-prepared or pre-cooked food is not eligible for competition. For example, a pre-cooked or dehydrated jambalaya (though tasty) could disqualify a team from competing. We are fine with teams using pre-chopped or packaged "single ingredients," and pre-peeled shrimp is also permitted. You may also use canned beans instead of soaking red beans the morning of the event (when you probably won't have enough time). Premade combinations of ingredients are **not** allowed.

Q6: Are there typically left overs, and what do we do with them?

A: Most teams find that the guidelines provided for food quantity leave little to no leftover food by the end of the competition. However, if there are leftovers, Girls Inc. will collect them and take them to a local homeless shelter.

Q7: How much does it cost to enter a team, and is food cost included in the registration?

A: A minimum sponsorship of \$500 qualifies you to enter a team. NO, your team is expected to purchase the ingredients for your dish. Historically, teams spend between \$300-\$500 on ingredients. Restaurant Depot is an excellent resource for bulk ingredients.

Q8: How much do teams spend on cooking equipment?

A: If teams have had to purchase equipment they have typically spent under \$300.

Q9: One judging category is Team Spirit for having the best tent decorations. How much do teams typically spend on decorations?

A: Most teams spend less than \$100 on decorations.

Q10: Can we bring our own alcohol?

A: **NO**, the contract with Railroad Park STRICTLY PROHIBITS OUTSIDE ALCOHOL. Breaking this rule jeopardizes our ability to use this as our venue for this great event. Girls Inc. provides a number of free drink tickets for beer, Bloody Marys, or Mimosas. Additional drinks may be purchased from the bar.

Q11: This is my first time cooking. What are some essentials that I should know?

A: Some of our veteran teams offer the following advice:

- Remember, nothing can be made in advance.
- Go basic on your recipe. Be careful to consider the timing of the dish, and make sure you have enough volunteers not just for cooking but for set-up and take down.
- On the day of the event, get there early so you aren't rushed and can have a good time.
- Make sure you have the right equipment: pots, pans, utensils, pot holders.
- If using propane, have a backup tank and make sure all your tanks are secured (tied to a fixed object or in a box, milk crate, or some other creative device).
- If you use propane, you must wait until the Fire Marshal inspects your cooking area before you can light any fire. Electricity is also an option and does not require an inspection.
- Bring a handtruck or cart to get things from the car to the tent. Make good use of tubs and coolers.
- Remember, if you are frying something, it takes a while for the oil to heat up AND cool down. Have an appropriate container to dispose of waste oil.

Q11: What do we get if our team wins?

A: You'll receive a coveted Cajun Cook-off trophy for winning first place or the runner-up in any food category. If you win Best Overall Cajun Dish, you'll win \$1,500!!

Still have questions? Call Girls Inc.'s Development Director,
Karen Griner, at kgriner@girlsinccentral-al.org or (205) 599-5683!

