

Freestyle Chili Cook-Off Competitor Guide & Rules

The event is Saturday, September 26th. Cooks will arrive by 10 am to unload and set up their cooking space. 10:30 am is a mandatory safety meeting and then cooking begins. Samples for judging must be submitted by 1:30 pm sharp. If chili is ready beforehand, then public sampling may begin (just make sure you hold back your judging samples).

Cooks must be 17 years of age or older by September 26th, 2026. They must be able to safely handle and use knives and the heat source used to cook with. This is an adult cook-off. Cooks may present up to two entries for the event, but must register as such beforehand and pay the \$10 fee for each entry.

Cooks will provide all necessary food, utensils, fuel, tools, and materials needed to cook with. This may include a cooler & ice for storing perishable items, a hot plate, camp stove and fuel, propane burner and fuel, or similar items. Electrical outlets will be available for use on site. **Entries must provide ~5 litres of chili for judging and sampling.** Each entry must provide 3 small samples for the blind judging. Each public sample will be about 4 oz or one standard ladle scoop/ 30-40 samples. Organizers will provide bowls, spoons, and napkins for sampling. Judging will be based on the following categories: Visual/Colour, Aroma, Taste/Flavour, Spice/ Aftertaste, and Texture/ Consistency. Cash prize amounts will be posted later once amounts are finalized.

- 1st Place receives cash prize, special wood-carved trophy, winner's certificate, and bragging rights
- 2nd Place receives cash prize, smaller trophy, and winner's certificate
- 3rd Place receives cash prize and winner's certificate

All food must be prepared according to VCH health standards. Handwashing, proper handling of raw meats, single use sampling utensils, prep gloves, and a full list of ingredients must be followed or you will be disqualified. All cooks are required to provide a full list of ingredients (not amounts) to be posted at your station and available for public viewing. This means you can list bacon, but don't need to list every ingredient on the label, like preservatives or salt. We will provide plastic sheaths for display. The chili must be kept at least 140 degrees F or 60 degrees C throughout the event for safe consumption.

This cook-off will be "Freestyle", meaning that all styles and kinds of chili can be entered, but they will all compete against each other in one judging. This includes standard styles, chili verde, vegetarian, white bean, chicken, or meat substitutes. All chili must be made from scratch at the event. No store bought or restaurant take out. You can provide sides and toppings for public samples, but judging samples must be submitted plain.

There is always some confusion over food sources and what can be prepared at home. To clarify:

- All food must be purchased from an approved source (i.e. grocery store). This is to confirm proper sources and ensure ingredients can be traced in the event of a foodborne illness.
- No food preparation is allowed in the home. Because food is being served to the public, we must ensure that all food is prepared safely. We do not and cannot inspect private homes. It is not permitted to have washed, cut, or prepped ingredients in advance.
- Produce — such as onions, peppers, tomatoes, garlic, cilantro, etc. — may be brought fresh and washed and prepared on-site only. Food preparation sinks will be provided at the event.
- Chili ingredients (including meats, vegetables, and chilies) may not be cooked, roasted, peeled, chopped, or prepared at home. Any roasting, peeling, chopping, or cooking must be done on-site at the event.
- Pre-packaged, commercially prepared ingredients are allowed - like canned tomatoes, bacon, or pre-cubed meat packages from a butcher.
- On-site preparation is a requirement of both the organizers and VCH and is also a Chili Cook-Off rule. Complete production of the chili on-site is part of the competition.
- Chili Cook-Off staff and VCH staff may inspect any food brought to the event, including ice chests, at any time during the event.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize all knives and cooking utensils before beginning chili preparation. Sinks will be available and maintained by Chili Cook-Off organizers.
- Bare-hand contact with any ready-to-eat food is prohibited. Use non-latex gloves when handling ingredients during chili preparation.
- A clean, disposable spoon must be used each time you sample or taste chili during the preparation process.
- Hair nets or hats must be worn during food preparation. Long hair must be tied back so it doesn't fall forward into food.
- Keep personal food and drinks off prep tables to avoid potential cross-contamination. Designate a spot below or away from prep tables for personal items.
- No pets are allowed in the chili preparation area.

If you believe that you may have brought any food or completed any preparation that could cause your chili to be embargoed or disqualify you from the event, please contact a staff member immediately.

We can often resolve issues prior to the start of the event, allowing you time to correct any problems and still enjoy your participation in the competition.

Basic chili cooking supplies may include, but are not limited to:

1. 10x10 tent if you have one (we have limited tents and shade) (please let us know if you can bring your own)

2. 1 six-foot table if you have one (please let us know if you can bring your own)
3. Tablecloth, paper towels, and sanitizing wipes
4. Pots with lids, frying pan
5. Knives, peelers, cutting boards
6. Large bowl and colander for straining meat
7. Gallon jug of fresh potable water
8. Propane camp stove (the older Colemans with small propane canisters work well) or hot plate burner. A larger free-standing propane burner may also be used, but the propane tank must be secured.
9. Propane - bring a spare can too
10. Can opener, lighter for gas stove, hot pads
11. Utensils - carry a spoon, ladle, and slotted spoon for each pot to stir and serve
12. Plastic tasting spoons - bring 5 to 10 tasting spoons for taste testing

All leftover chili must be taken away after the event. Please don't waste or leave the leftovers at the event. We will have to dump it. Please clean up your station afterwards and wipe down your table.

Questions? Email events@lvss.ca