



Front Range Regional
4-H Creative Cooks Contest
Saturday, February 28, 2026
Adams County Regional Park, Dome Building
9755 Henderson Road, Brighton 80601



Contest Rules and Regulations

The Creative Cooks contest is a fun contest where you can learn more about and be creative with meal planning. You select a theme, prepare food and create a table setting around your chosen theme. In this contest you use your knowledge of nutrition, meal planning, and food preparation in a creative way

The Front Range Regional 4-H Creative Cooks Contest is open to any 4-H member, between the ages of 5 and 18, who enjoy cooking. Members must be enrolled in 4-H in one of the following counties: Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson, or Weld. Members can participate as an individual, team or club. Following is the rules and regulations for the contest as well as the categories offered.



In order to offset the cost of this contest, there is a \$6 entry fee per person. Entry fees can be paid at <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/front-range-regional-creative-cooks-contest> or by cash/check.

Please send in the registration form as soon as possible in order to help us with scheduling. Register online at <https://forms.gle/Egp3jLaprMFPxGQR9> *no later than Friday, February 13, 2026.*



Tentative Time Schedule for day of Contest:

- 8:30am Registration and Set Up time for ALL participants
- 9:00am Judging Begins (schedule determined by number of participants).
Judges will begin with Cloverbuds. Awards will be given to Cloverbuds as soon as they are done being judged. They are welcome to stay when they are done or may leave.
- Following Awards**
judging

**It is not required to be present when the awards are presented, awards can be picked up at the office following the contest. However, it is encouraged to be present to be recognized for your accomplishments. The timing of the awards will be based on then number of participants in the contest.

Designated winners will be eligible to represent their county at the State Creative Cooks Contest held ruing the State Fair in Pueblo. Each county will be giving their own awards for the contest.

Please note: Throughout the day there will be some “waiting” time as the judges talk with each contestant. During this time we will have some activities for members to do, but you may want to bring something *quiet* to keep you busy.



Creative Cooks Contest Guidelines:

- The purpose of this contest is to learn about meal planning, food safety and nutrition
- Any enrolled 4-H member from Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson, or Weld Counties can participate in the Creative Cooks Contest - Cloverbud, Junior or Senior. You do not have to be enrolled in a food unit to participate.
- 4-H members can enter as an individual or as a team, but they can not enter as team and an individual.
- Think of a theme -- be CREATIVE -- carry it through your entry.
- Plan to do as much food preparation as possible before you come to the contest. Do NOT plan on doing all of your cooking at the contest. There is limited space and equipment.
- Bring your own utensils, crock pots, coolers, etc. that you will need. You may also want to bring a power strip and/or extension cord.
- **Members are to do all set up and food preparation by themselves.** Adults, other family members or friends cannot help contestants set up their display. To do so may forfeit all awards. This includes helping prepare foods in the kitchen, verbal coaching, etc. Contest committee members will be available to assist contestants if needed. Adults may assist in carrying items into and out of the building and during clean up in order to expedite the conclusion of the contest.
- Contestants are required to thoroughly clean their space at the conclusion of the contest - this includes the kitchen area. Be sure to bring all necessary cleaning supplies.
- Junior and Intermediate members should not prepare deep fat fried foods due to safety concerns.
- During the judging portion of the contest, no one except the contestants will be allowed in the contest area.
- No commercially prepared food items are acceptable.
- Wild Game Meat - **if using deer or elk meat, a copy of the test results for Chronic Wasting Disease is required!**
- Exhibitors are asked to display one serving of their prepared food on the proper dish. Exhibitors are encouraged to garnish the one serving as it might be served. The judge should not be served from the display serving, but rather from another serving. Disposable dishes and utensils should be used (which are not part of your table service to give samples of the food to the judge).



Creative Cooks Procedures:

- Plan a well balanced meal. This meal may be simple or as extravagant as the 4-H'er wants to make it. Ideas include, but are not limited to, breakfast lunch, barbeque, camp out, sports game, holidays, etc.
- Set one place setting appropriate for the meal selected, including flatware, napkins, table covering, etc. Each contestant will be allowed a 48" square for a display area. All props must fit within the designated space. Contestants must supply their own tables, if needed, that fit in the allowed space. (Cloverbud tables will be provided, if needed. Please note they are the large rectangle tables).
- No food, real or artificial, may be used as a centerpiece or part of the centerpiece.
- A menu displayed on any stiff medium (foam board, tile, chalk board, framed, etc.) detailing the entire menu (no larger than 8-1/2"x11"). It is helpful if the menu can stand alone. Be creative and follow through with your theme as you design your menu.
- **Bring TWO copies of the recipe(s) with you to the contest.** Make sure it is correct and has specific measurements and directions. Include your name, club and age on each copy of the recipe. **One copy of the recipe will be turned in when you register and one should be kept on the table for the judge to refer to.**
- Remember, as you are transporting food to the contest to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold, so they are safe for the judges to taste and all to sample after the contest.
- **If** your hands touch food while serving to the judge, members should consider using disposable gloves. **Do Not** use disposable gloves throughout the set-up and judging process.

Creative Cooks Helpful Hints:

- Be Creative - use fun names for your dishes - make a simple food look attractive. For example, say “Creamy Fruit Crisp” rather than simple “Coffee Cake with Cream”
- In planning a menu, consider My Plate - meats, fruits, vegetables, milk and cheese, bread, cereal, rice and pasta.
- Think of time, cost and your age when preparing the menu.
- Vary the textures of foods, colors, flavors, temperatures and shapes.
- Write your menu in an orderly manner. Arrange the food items in the order they are eaten. Place foods that “go together” (like salad and dressing) on the same line.
- Dress appropriately for the theme you have chosen. Your appearance means a lot. Be neat and well groomed. A dress up outfit is appropriate for a formal meal and a casual outfit for a picnic or after skiing. You may use costumes if appropriate. Long hair should be under control. Be sure to have clean hands. Keep hands off hair and out of mouth.
- Garnishes do not need to be included in the written menu, but they do brighten a meal. A garnish (tomato wedge, parsley, radish, etc.) can add interest to a plate, if properly used. Size, shape, color, texture, favor, etc. must be considered in the selection of the proper garnish. Experiment with different garnishes to select the most appropriate garnish for the meal you have planned.
- Keep food at proper temperature and be able to discuss with the judge how the food was kept at the proper temperature during transport, etc.
- Do as much food preparation at home as you can before coming to the contest. Kitchen space is limited and needs to be shared with all contestants. Do NOT plan on cooking your entire dish at the contest.
- Don't forget to brush up on nutrition, food safety, cost of the meal, cost of the dish prepared, what food was prepared and method of preparation for all foods on the menu.
- Menu - for the menu you display on your table, make sure it is legible and compliments your theme. Display the menu on your table, but don't let it dominate your table.
- You are asked to bring two recipes of the dish(es) prepared. You will turn one in at registration. The other one will be placed on your table for the judge to refer to and look at.
- Only make one dish (for individuals) or two dishes (for team). Unless you are competing as a club, don't make everything on the menu to bring with you to the contest. Contestants will only be judged on the number of dishes required for their division.
- Judging will be based on:
 - Exhibitor - well groomed, understands meal planning
 - Menu - balance of flavor, color, texture, shape and nutrition
 - Prepared dish - appearance, flavor and quality
 - Table Setting - attractive, suitable for meal
 - Knowledge of nutrition - nutrients from the prepared dish and menu, how fits into My Plate
 - Food Safety - how was transported to keep hot/cold
 - Creativity
- Most of all - HAVE FUN!!



Colorado Specialty Division: **GUIDELINES**
2026 Colorado Specialty Food Ingredient - Chile Peppers

- Members entered in this category or classes must use the 2026 designated food or ingredient in their Creative Cooks exhibit. The product must be a *major* ingredient in the recipe to qualify for this division. Ingredients such as oil used to brown meat, as a garnish, or in a small amount in the recipe do not qualify as a major ingredient.
- Members entered in this category must also have some general knowledge beyond nutrition and food safety about this year's contest ingredient or food. The list below is a sample of the type of information that they should discover about the food. The judge might ask one or two general questions appropriate to each age division.
 - Location in Colorado where ingredient is grown
 - Part of the country or world where it is grown other times of the year
 - Varieties of food, ingredient, crop
 - Unique production or harvest methods
 - Plant type or animal origin
 - Specific cuisines or cultures that use a lot of this ingredient
 - The "specialness" of the ingredient—may be flavor, nutritional or diet value, color, texture, trendiness, cost
 - Special handling or preparing techniques
 - Other uses for the product
 - Any other knowledge or interesting facts members may discover

Please Note - Members do not need to know all of the above. The above is guide for possible research searches.

2026 Contest Ingredient is Chile Peppers

Chile peppers are the spicy fruit of plants in the Capsicum genus, native to the Americas and cultivated globally for their use in cooking, medicine, and as a spice. Their heat comes from a compound called capsaicin, which is concentrated in the white membrane where the seeds are located, not the seeds themselves. These peppers are rich in vitamins and minerals and linked to several health benefits.



Colorado is known for its *Pueblo chile*, a specific variety of green chile with a spicy flavor. The Pueblo Chile is a specialty pepper grown only in Pueblo, Colorado where the unique growing conditions in Southeastern Colorado render some of the best chile available. Hot, dry, sunny summer days, combined with our rich soils and pure Colorado water yield some of the hottest and most flavorful chilies. Pueblo chile is a meatier and thicker pepper.

NOTE → Although dried, crushed, ground chile spices may be a major flavor ingredient they should not be considered a major ingredient for the contest item. Mild or sweet bell peppers do not fit this specialty category.

Examples of contest food items and resources for 2026 Contest Ingredient - Chile Peppers:

Chile Relleno	Chile Grilled Cheese
Green Chile Corn Bread	Stuffed Chile Peppers
Candied Chiles	And so much more!!

Resources:

- Pueblo Chile - <https://pueblochile.org>
- Chili Pepper Fun Facts – Twisted Taco - <https://www.twistedtaco.com/fun-chili-pepper-facts>
- How Chili Peppers Work - <https://home.howstuffworks.com/chili-peppers.htm>

All Creative Cooks divisions (Individual, Team and Colorado Specialty) will be divided in the following age categories : (Age as of 12/31/25)

- ★ Cloverbuds (7 and under)
- ★ Juniors (8 to 10)
- ★ Intermediates (11 to 13)
- ★ Seniors (14 to 18)

NOTE - The age division of a team of two members in different age groups is determined by the age of the older member. For example, if a junior and a senior make up a team, it is considered a senior team. The exception to this is if a Cloverbud member teams up with an older member, then they will be considered a Cloverbud Team.

Creative Cooks Contest Divisions:

★ Individual Division (Cloverbud, Junior, Intermediate, Senior)

- Provide a place setting for one person
- Prepare one dish on your menu

★ Team Division (Cloverbud, Junior, Intermediate, Senior)

- Provide a place setting for one person
- As a team, prepare ONE dishes on your menu

★ Colorado Specialty Division (Cloverbud, Junior, Intermediate, Senior).

There will be an individual and team category in Colorado Specialty.

Individual Colorado Specialty Division

- Use the designated ingredient - Chile Peppers
- Provide a place setting for one person
- Prepare one dish on your menu

Team Colorado Specialty Division

- Use the designated ingredient - Chile Peppers
- Provide a place setting for one person
- As a team, prepare ONE dishes on your menu - *The dish preprepared has to use the Colorado Specialty ingredient.*

★ Club Division (Mixed ages or Cloverbuds) Clubs are not eligible for State Fair.

- Provide a place setting for one/ or all guests (as you prefer)
- Prepare all of the foods on your menu

Awards will be given, where warranted, in each age category and division. Special awards may also be given. Champions will represent their County at the Colorado State Fair. County contest requirements do not necessarily match State Fair Contest Requirements (example - number of dishes made by team entries). Champions wishing to exhibit at State Fair will have to comply with State Fair requirements.

Questions? Contact one of the following:

Julia Hurdelbrink at jhurdelbrink@adamscountyco.gov or 303-637-8108

Shaylen Florez at sflorez@arapahoegov.com or 303-730-1920

2026 Creative Cooks Contest

Things to Be Aware of for Contest



- Please do as much meal preparation at home before coming to the fairgrounds for the contest. Members will be allowed 10 to 15 minutes prior to their judging time to get their food prepared in the kitchen. If more time is needed, please let Julia or Shaylen know the morning of the contest.
- You will be asked to turn in a copy of your recipe. You can turn it in with your registration or bring an extra copy to turn in when you arrive at the contest.
- Each county will be giving their own awards. Winners will be eligible to represent their county at the Colorado State Fair Creative Cooks Contest in August in Pueblo.
- There will be down time during the contest. Please bring something quiet with you to occupy your time.
- All entries will be done online. Please register for the contest by Friday, February 13, 2026 at <https://forms.gle/Egp3jLaprMFPxGQR9> 
- Entry fees (\$6 per person) can be paid online or a check can be sent to the Adams County Extension office (Attention - Julia Hurdelbrink, 9755 Henderson Road, Brighton, 80601) by Friday, February 13, 2026. Entry fees can be paid at: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/front-range-regional-creative-cooks-contest> 

