INFORMATION: COOKING

**Related Advancement**

* Camping, Cooking, and Wilderness Survival merit badges
* Cooking requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First-Class ranks

**Cooking Safety** – Cooking requires attention to several key safety concerns.

* Avoiding burns and fires should be a major focus. Be careful to keep any items that could catch fire (paper towel rolls, dish towels, pot holders) away from the heat source. Be sure to use dry pads or hot-pot tongs to handle heated pans. Hot liquids or grease might also cause burns, so be sure to avoid spills and splatters. Keep a fire extinguisher and first-aid supplies on hand in case they are needed.
* Cuts are always a risk when using knives, so be careful and follow safe practices.
* Proper food storage and handling are of prime importance. Be sure that all foods requiring refrigeration are kept in an ice chest or refrigerator and do the same with leftovers after a meal. Always cook meats and fish at the proper temperature to avoid making someone sick from food poisoning.
* Clean as you go and wash hands, with soap, prior to preparing foods and after handling raw meat or any foreign substance. Also, clean utensils as you go.
* Be aware of any food-related allergies or intolerances among those who will be eating the meal. See the Cooking merit badge pamphlet for more details.

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**Nutrition**

Planning well-balanced meals requires a bit of effort, but the result is well worth it. Guidelines provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/) will help you balance these five types of foods:

* Fruits (fresh, canned, frozen, or dried; fruit juice)
* Vegetables (fresh, canned, frozen, or dried; vegetable juice)
* Grains (bread, cereal, pasta)
* Proteins (meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts)
* Dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream) Not included are fats and oils, which should be used sparingly.

**Spice up your cooking** – Salt and pepper are popular seasonings, but you should also try chili powder, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, and cumin. Other options include bouillon, soy sauce, hot sauce, tamarind, mint, basil, cilantro, and ginger. Go easy with seasonings during the cooking; you can always add more flavor at the table.

**Cooking Methods**

* **Bake** – To cook by dry heat as in a conventional oven, in a Dutch oven, or in aluminum foil. Cookies, cakes, pies, and roasts are typically baked.
* **Broil** – To cook using a direct heat source such as over or under an open fire. Meats such as steaks, ribs, or chops are typically broiled. Constant attention is needed to avoid overcooking.
* **Boil** – To cook in water or other liquid hot enough to bubble (212º for water at sea level), such as boiling water for oatmeal. Boiling water is the first step in cooking items like rice, spaghetti, or noodles.
* **Pan-fry –**To cook using a hot skillet and a small spoonful of cooking oil. Meats and vegetables are typically pan-fried. You can panfry potatoes or fish you have caught over an open fire in the outdoors.
* **Stir-fry** – Usually done in a wok or a large skillet with a small amount of cooking oil. Vegetables like celery, carrots, peppers, onions, cabbage, pea pods, and tomatoes are often stir-fried with thinly sliced cuts of pork, chicken, or steak and served with rice. Shrimp is another good ingredient but check for shellfish allergies. Food can be seasoned to taste while stir-frying.
* **Deep-fry** – Cooking that requires a deep pan and immersion in very hot oil (more than 300º). Care must be taken to prevent splatter and burns. Common foods for deep-frying are French fries, chicken nuggets, hush puppies, doughnuts, and fish.
* **Roast** – A method of cooking a larger portion of meat, pork, chicken, or turkey in a Dutch oven over hot coals or in a regular oven (using a roasting bag makes cleanup a snap). The key to success lies in timing the cooking, carefully adjusting the temperature based on the weight of the item.
* **Simmer** – To cook over reduced heat in liquid just barely at the boiling point. Simmering makes the sauce richer and more flavorful the longer it stays on the heat source.
* **Steam** – To place food on a rack or special device over boiling or simmering water in a covered pan. A basket or strainer is held over the water, and the resulting steam cooks the items. Steaming is most commonly used to cook vegetables.
* **Stew** – To cook slowly over low heat or slow boiling. Beef is one of the most common meats for stewing. microwave. This is the most common indoor cooking method used by Scouts. A microwave oven heats food by radiation. Care must be taken to use microwavable dishes and NO metal objects, including aluminum foil.
* **Special Cooking Events** – In addition to cooking at every campout, here are some ways to make cooking more fun for your group.

**Family Day** – Have patrols invite their families to a full meal cooked by the Scouts.

* **Dutch Oven Instruction/Competition** – Spend a day learning to cook in Dutch ovens, then put your skills to the test.
* **Food Field Trip** – Take a tour of a food manufacturing plant, farm, bakery, or cannery. Learn how the facility prepares, processes, and packages food and what safety measures they take.
* **Fundraising Cooking Event** – Hold a fundraiser that involves serving a breakfast or supper that you have prepared. Typical options include pancakes or a spaghetti and meatball dinner.
* **Advancement and Cooking Merit Badge Day** – Recruit a merit badge counselor and other instructors to help Scouts complete advancement requirements related to cooking.

**Cooking Competitions** – Challenging your peers to a cooking competition is fun at any age. In recent years there have been countless TV shows dedicated to such contests. While the exact rules and procedures may vary, the competitions all provide an opportunity to showcase culinary skills.