



## How to...

### DID YOU KNOW?

People have been using spices in their cooking for more than 6,000 years.



# Host a cooking competition

Invite friends or family to an at-home event inspired by TV cooking shows.

If you've ever wanted to show off your skills in the kitchen—and let your friends and family members do the same—then you might enjoy hosting an at-home cooking competition. Inspired by TV cooking shows like *Chopped* and *Top Chef*, these parties have become a popular alternative to activities like a game night or movie night. It's easy and fun to host one, but it does take some advanced planning. Here's how to cook up your own version.

### Invite the chefs

You can invite friends to join your cooking competition or just do it with members of your own family. This can also be a fun activity to do with another family. You could invite two other families, and each family can make one dish. Or keep it to just friends, and each child can create their own recipe. (Make sure an adult will be around to help with things like using the oven or sharp knives.)

### Set the ground rules

Next, you'll need to decide how your competition is going to work. One option is to prepare a basket of the same ingredients for every contestant. This could be things you already have in your kitchen, or you can ask your parents if they can buy some of them in bulk so you can split them up between the contestants. Include

about five ingredients in the basket, which your friends have to use in their final recipe, but then also give them free range to use anything else they find in the kitchen. Another option is to ask your friends to come prepared with all the ingredients for something they want to make, and then put "secret ingredients" in a big bag. Each contestant has to—without looking—choose an ingredient out of the bag and figure out a way to incorporate it into their recipe.

### Make presentation count

Did you know the way food appears on a plate can affect how people think it tastes? It's true! Presenting your recipe in an attractive way can make people enjoy it more. Encourage contestants to spend a little time at the end arranging their food on a plate.

### Judge the entries

Recruit parents or friends who aren't cooking in the competition to be judges. They should close their eyes while the dishes are placed in front of them so they don't know who made what. Have each judge taste the dishes. They should then describe what they like the most and the least about each one. Instead of declaring one winner, award a different prize to each dish. For example, one recipe could be named the most creative while another is awarded the healthiest.



Hand out dough for pizza-making.

## 4 extra-special touches to add

Make your competition even more fun with these festive, do-it-yourself decorations.

### Welcome sign

Use poster board or a chalkboard to write a welcome message for guests. If you have a name for your competition, include it on the sign. Maybe it's a play on your name or borrowed from a cooking show's name.



### Cupcake garland

Gather cupcake liners in



various patterns and colors and poke a hole in the bottom of each one. String them together then hang it across your kitchen as a decoration.

### Personalized aprons

Ask each contestant to bring an apron from home. Using cardstock or construction paper, cut out cooking-related shapes (such as a cupcake or a frying pan) and decorate them with each person's name. Safely pin the tags to each person's apron.



### Centerpieces

After the cooking competition ends, you might want to sit down at the dining room table to eat what you made. To make the table look fun, fill a large vase with dried pasta or beans and then insert cooking utensils, such as large spoons or whisks, as "flowers."



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