



## 2026 Mississippi Seafood Cook-off Rules

### Hot / Cold Seafood Competition:

The seafood competition is an event in which competitors cook and present food to be judged on taste as well as execution of skills and presentation. For the individual competition, food will be needed for four portions – three tasting portions and one display. In an "open" competition, three judges will taste the entry for judging. It is expected that chef competitors will dress in full professional chef's whites.

### PROCEDURE:

Competitors will supply their tools, i.e., knives, cutters, pans and products/recipe ingredients to prepare the recipe. Small appliances will be allowed to be brought in by competitors. Each competitor must complete the assignment within the 50-minute allotted time, allowing time within the 50 minutes for plating.

### THE KITCHEN:

All competitors will be provided with his or her own workstation, which should consist of an adequate worktable. Water will be provided at chefs' workstations. A safe and efficient working environment must be maintained.

### SEAFOOD PROFESSIONAL:

Each competitor will have 50 minutes (this includes plating) to prepare four servings of a menu item. Of the four portions to be prepared:

- \* Three for judges' tasting
- \* One for photos/critique/press/display

The entry should highlight Mississippi Gulf seafood and demonstrate regional and national cooking techniques. Also, basic culinary preparation skills and sanitation skills must be used.

Applicants must complete the following by Friday, April 17, 2026:

- Submit application
- Provide typed, standardized recipe that will be used for the Mississippi Seafood Cook-off
- Submit chef's photograph and biography
- Submit chef's restaurant logo

Applicants will be notified by April 21, 2026, if they have been selected as a finalist to compete in the Mississippi Seafood Cook-off.

\*\* All dish photos become property of the Mississippi Seafood Cook-Off competition and recipes will be used for the sole purpose of promoting domestic seafood to the consumer. Photos and recipes will be used on [www.MSSeafood.com](http://www.MSSeafood.com), in press releases, on social media and for other promotional purposes.

## Competition Guidelines:

General Rules and Guidelines (Applicable to all competitors.):

- \* Competitors must provide recipes with full ingredient list and cooking instructions. These will be given to the tasting judges.
- \* No advance preparation or cooking is allowed. Vegetables can be peeled and cut. Salads may be cleaned and washed, but not cut or shaped in any form; beans may be pre-soaked. Exceptions are chopped herbs, shallots, garlic and mire poix.
- \* Competitors are allowed to bring in only the whole and raw materials stated in their recipes.
- \* No finished sauces are allowed; however, basic stocks (beef, veal, chicken, vegetable, or fish) may be brought in as necessary for the assignment.
- \* Competitors will bring his or her own tools, including small ware and dishes (plates, platters, bowls, etc.) to display the finished dish.

## Tasting Judges Evaluation:

Judging will be open to the event, not anonymous. The chef teams will serve the judges and give a short verbal description of the dish. The judges will be allowed to ask the lead chef questions during the service time only. Following that time of judging, plated dishes will be displayed for viewing and photography and identified by the information as submitted on the Entry Forms.

## Competition Scoring:

As the judges critique a display/entry, points are awarded in several areas and averaged to yield a single score for the entry/display. Based on a possible 25 points.

Scoring - (Maximum of 25 points total)

- 5 points maximum – Presentation, general impression and serving methods
- 5 points maximum – Creativity
- 5 points maximum – Composition and harmony of ingredients
- 5 points maximum – Correct preparation and craftsmanship
- 5 points maximum – Flavor, Taste and Texture

## Tasting Judges Evaluate:

**Presentation, general impression and serving methods.** Fresh and colorful, easy to eat, correct temperature, hot/cold serving plate, stylistic but practical. Dish was completed and served within time allotment.

**Creativity.** The dish shows a degree of difficulty and creative flair, rather than something copied and overused. If using an old or classical idea, new, creative ideas have been used to transform the dish. Degree of difficulty, artistic achievement, work involved and originality are evaluated.

**Composition and Harmony of Ingredients.** Ingredients are compatible. The seafood should be the showcase. Ingredient colors harmonize. Ingredient amounts are correctly portioned to give a perfect harmonization. Taste and colors should enhance each other, display practical craftsmanship and should be practical, digestible.

**Correct Preparation and Craftsmanship.** Classical names should correspond to original recipes and methods of preparation. Preparations must display mastery of basic skills.

Flavor, Taste and Texture. The stated flavor in the menu and recipe are profound. Doneness and temperatures are correct. The textures correspond to what was implied in the recipe. The flavor of the sauce or vinaigrette reflects what the recipe stated and is of the correct consistency. The dish portrays a high level of skill and exactness. The number of different skills employed throughout the menu distinguishes the caliber of the chef.

*In the event of a tie, judges will discuss and decide the winning order.*

## General Guidelines for Competitors and Judges:

### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR COMPETITORS AND JUDGES

The following list should provide a good beginning checklist of what is considered the most general guidelines for both competitors who are developing displays and for judges who will evaluate them.

- \* The criteria for judging all dishes is the recipe, with a brief description of ingredients and methods of preparations.
- \* More than one domestic Mississippi Gulf seafood product may be used in the entry.
- \* Participants must supply their own seafood and ingredients for the competition.
- \* Ingredients and garnishes should harmonize with the main part of the dish and conform to contemporary standards of nutritional values.
- \* Unnecessary ingredients should be avoided and practical, acceptable cooking methods should be applied.
- \* Dressing the rims of plates will result in an unacceptable appearance.
- \* Product juices should not make a dish look unappetizing.
- \* Vegetables must be cut or turned uniformly.
- \* Plate arrangement and decoration should be practical yet appealing and should comply with daily standards.
- \* Avoid all non-edible items.
- \* Food prepared hot should not be placed on buffet platters or mirrors.
- \* Plated portions must be proportional to the dish itself and the number of persons specified.
- \* Sauce boats should be only half full.
- \* In general, portion weight should be in keeping with the norms of accepted practice and nutritional balance.
- \* If fruit is used to garnish, it should be cut into small pieces or sliced thinly.
- \* Less experienced participants are advised not to set their aims too high and to abide by fundamental cleanliness as much as possible in their work.
- \* All exhibits should be identified by their proper names both on exhibition tables and on entry forms.
- \* No identification of personal or business affiliation is allowed with the exhibits until the judging is completed.
- \* Finally, the punctual presentation of each exhibit at the appointed time is a matter of urgent necessity.

### COMPETITORS SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON:

- \* Highlighting domestic Mississippi Gulf seafood product(s) that best represent the state
- \* Originality -- new ideas
- \* Garnishes
- \* Practical portion size (cost considerations)
- \* Proper color, presentation and flavor combination
- \* Presenting a natural, appetizing look
- \* Properly cooked seafood

#### COMPETITORS SHOULD AVOID:

- \* Use of inedible materials
- \* Decorating with parsley, watercress
- \* Cluttering the platters
- \* Entering a previously judged piece
- \* Identifying your display prior to judging
- \* Serving of food on the rim of the platter
- \* Repetition in preparatory methods
- \* Excessive use of food coloring
- \* Use of plastic ornaments, flowers, etc.
- \* Use of tarnished silver
- \* Unsuitable serving dishes
- \* Presenting hot food on mirrors
- \* Over dressing or decorating the presentation table

#### COLD FOOD MAY BE DISPLAYED ON:

- \* Silver trays and platters
- \* Stainless steel
- \* Mirrors
- \* Formica
- \* Polished wood
- \* China plates
- \* Any other approved food surface

#### HOT FOOD MAY BE DISPLAYED ON:

- \* Lined copper dishes
- \* Stainless steel platters
- \* Earthenware dishes (oven proof)
- \* Dinner plates (china, porcelain, or ceramic)
- \* Imitation pewter
- \* Silver platters
- \* Glass containers
- \* Any non-porous surface

Although table decorations are not a part of the actual judging, a well presented and attractive table will add to the high-quality image which the exhibitor attempts to project.