Cooking gourmet meals over a campfire is part of our heritage—and easy. Here are four award-winning recipes prepared by junior chefs.

One Pot Wonders

Cadette Girl Scout Troop 1580

Story and Photos
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The crowd anxiously gathered around the table, eager to view the dishes that had filled the campground with delectable aromas all morning. The table was crowded with Dutch ovens of Shawnee Trail Gumbo with cornmeal topping, lasagna, jambalaya, stuffed Cornish hens with vegetables, breakfast soufflé and chicken pot pie. Anxious presenters reviewed their recipe cards, anticipating questions the judges would ask.

An hour later the scene repeated itself, only this time contestants lifted lids to reveal bubbly, golden-brown sweet treats: raccoon-stealin' apple strudel (so good that the masked bandits seek it out), Chattahoochee cheesecake, Russian cherry delight, baked apple explosion and chocolate Snickers cake.

After doling out portions for the judges, each team returned to their rustic kitchen, the heat of the contest subsiding and nothing left to do but sample their dishes and await the decisions.

Tension mounted as the judges prepared to announce the winners of the junior (ages 9-13) and senior (ages 14-18) youth divisions of the 2009 Midwest Dutch Oven Gathering and Cookoff.

Capturing first-place in the Junior Division main dish and dessert categories, Cadette Girl Scout Troop 1580, Johnsburg, (above) practiced their recipes at a weekly meeting and spontaneously served a group of church elders in the building. Receiving an enthusiastic thumbs-up from their "test-kitchen" patrons, the girls entered the cook-off with confidence.

Cornish Game Hens

1st place Junior Division Main Dish

Cornish Game Hens

Serves 4

2 Cornish game hens
salt
paprika
butter
hot water
1 package sage stuffing mix
1 pound of carrots
4 ears of corn
butcher's string

Heat water for the stuffing on a propane stove or over a fire.

Rinse hens, remove giblets and pat dry. Sprinkle the cavity of each hen with salt.

Make stuffing according to the directions on the box. Lightly stuff each hen with about 1 cup of dressing then tie the legs together with butcher's string. Sprinkle paprika on hens.

Place hens in the Dutch oven and bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 1 hour.

Peel and slice carrots diagonally to make thick chips. Husk and clean corn, breaking each ear in half.

Open the Dutch oven and arrange the carrots around the hens. Place corn on top of the carrots.

Bake 30-45 minutes or until hens are done (165 degrees Fahrenheit with a meat thermometer or until juices run clear when thigh is poked with a sharp knife).

1st place Junior Division Dessert

Russian Cherry Delight

Serves 12

1 15-oz. can crushed pineapple
1 21-oz. can cherry pie filling
1 21-oz. can strawberry pie filling
2 21-oz. cans apple pie filling
1 8-oz. bag chopped pecans
1 18-oz. box yellow butter cake mix
1 stick of butter
1 cup mini marshmallows
ground cinnamon

Preheat a lightly greased 12-inch Dutch oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Drain the crushed pineapple and spread evenly across the bottom of the oven. Cover lightly with cinnamon.

Follow the same procedure with the cherry pie filling, then the strawberry pie filling. Add the apple pie fillings and apply a very heavy coat of cinnamon.

Sprinkle the dry cake mix over the top and spread evenly.

Sprinkle pecan pieces evenly over the dry cake mix.

Cut butter into thin squares and lay them evenly on top of the cake mix.

Sprinkle mini marshmallows on top of the butter pats.

Bake one hour at 350 degrees Fahrenheit, with nine charcoal briquettes under the oven and 15 on the lid.

Check after 20 minutes and, if necessary, adjust the number of briquettes so the marshmallows do not burn.

Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

1st place Senior Division Main Dish

Senior Division, Ambassador (grades 11-12) Girl Scout Troop 20804, Chicago

Jambalaya

Serves 15

½ lb. spicy Andouille sausage
½ lb. kielbasa
1 lb. ham
1 lb. chicken meat
2 lg. red onions
4 stalks celery

Russian Cherry Delight

Jambalaya

2 bell peppers
4 cloves garlic
2 bunches scallions
1 bunch parsley
¼ cup olive oil
4 cups rice
64 oz. chicken broth
salt
pepper
bayou seasoning

Start 32 charcoal briquettes.

Split sausages in half lengthwise then slice into bite-sized pieces. Cut ham into ½ inch cubes. Cut chicken into ¾ inch chunks. Set meats aside.

Coarsely chop red onions, celery and peppers, set aside. Mince garlic. Chop scallions, including green tops, into ½ inch lengths and set aside with garlic, apart from the other vegetables. Finely chop parsley, stems and all, and set aside.

Put Dutch oven over coals. Once it is very hot, cover the bottom with a light covering of olive oil. Add sausage and ham, browning well. Add chicken and lightly brown. Remove all meat and set aside in a bowl, leaving oil in Dutch oven.

Pour remainder of oil into oven. Add chopped onions, celery and peppers, stirring until the onion begins to become translucent. Add garlic and scallions and stir until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Return meats to the oven, along with any juices. Mix well with vegetables. Add rice and stir for 2 minutes. Add chicken broth and bayou seasoning and bring to a boil, stirring often.

Once liquid begins to boil, put a round of aluminum foil, shiny side up, over the oven. Place the lid on the oven and move 21 briquettes to the lid. Cook covered for 30 minutes, or until rice is tender.

1st place Senior Division Desserts

Senior Division, Senior (grades 9-10), Girl Scout Troop 20030, Chicago

Chattahoochee Cheesecake

Serves 10-12

2 tins of 18-ounce crescent rolls
16 ounces cream cheese
2 cups sugar, divided
1 tsp. vanilla
1 stick butter
1 tsp. cinnamon

Prepare 25 charcoal briquettes. Line the bottom of a greased Dutch oven with aluminum foil. Place the rolls from one container on the foil, pinching to form a single round.

In a medium bowl, mix together the cream cheese, 1 cup sugar and vanilla. Spread over the dough.

Place the second container of rolls over the cream cheese mixture, pinching together as you go.

Mix 1 cup sugar with cinnamon. Pour melted butter on top of the crust, sprinkle with cinnamon-sugar.

Place eight briquettes under a Dutch oven, and 17 coals on the lid. Bake for 30 minutes. Let cool completely. Cut cheesecake into slices and chill if possible.

Chattahoochee Cheesecake

For further information on the Midwest Dutch Oven Gathering and Cookoff, visit midwestdutchovengathering.com.

Cooking with briquettes

Here's a rule of thumb for determining the number briquettes you'll need to cook at 350° F. Double the diameter of the oven for the total briquettes (12-inch oven needs 24 briquettes). Place a third of the briquettes on the bottom and two-thirds on top. Each additional briquette increases the temperature 15°-20°.