Jr Iron Chef VT

since 2008

A RECIPE FOR EMPOWERING YOUTH



JR IRON CHEF VT RULES & GUIDELINES for 2026

Updated October 2026

Jr Iron Chef VT is a career exploration program and competition that teaches communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills by empowering Vermont youth to create locally sourced meals that promote Vermont's Farm-to-School efforts.

I. RECIPE GUIDELINES

The goal of the competition is to promote recipes that use local, seasonal ingredients, fostering a sense of community and sustainability. These recipes should be replicable in a school kitchen. While making fancy dishes is fun and a great experience, our goal is to enable students to recreate their dishes at home, in school, and with their groups. This means using simpler, replicable recipes with easy-to-find ingredients; however, this should not dissuade you from dressing up the dish to bring it up to competition level.

Teams are encouraged to use original recipes. This competition is not just about winning, but also about learning. Students and coaches work together to research and create recipes, learn basic cooking skills, and discover the value of using local ingredients. Recipes should be easily followed and consist of affordable ingredients. If a known source inspires the recipe, you must credit that source.

Eligible recipes include savory entrées, soups, sandwiches, and salads. Breakfast dishes are also qualified for the competition. Dessert recipes and snacks are not allowed.

Only recipes that are one dish will be approved. This rule is in place to ensure fairness and consistency in judging. Recipes with a side dish will not be approved. For example, a burrito with salsa is considered one dish, but a veggie burger with a side salad is regarded as two dishes and will not be approved.

Teams will have ninety minutes to create their dish**.** Jr Iron Chef VT is not a race against the clock, unlike many cooking shows. Ninety minutes should provide ample time for thoughtful, careful preparation and presentation of the dish. Teams should not finish too early and should have their dishes arrive in the judges' room hot.

Teams must prepare the recipe exactly as submitted and approved by Jr Iron Chef VT. Judges will be on the floor during the competition to observe that all rules are followed and to provide any necessary feedback when tasting and judging the dishes in the judges room..

Teams must bring ALL ingredients for their recipes, including local foods. The dish must be made from start to finish during the assigned competition heat. All ingredients must arrive in their raw state, except canned beans. No pre-cooked grains are allowed.

NOTE: Every recipe must include one local ingredient, defined as a Vermont product. For a recipe to qualify for submission, the local ingredient box must be checked with the local ingredient listed.

Teams are not allowed to share samples of their recipes with the crowd. This rule is in place to ensure safety in the competition environment. Only youth participants and judges may eat the prepared dishes at the competition.

Recipe Quantity: On the day of the event, you will need a total of 40 ounces divided into the following portions. **Teams must exclusively use the compostable plates, bowls, and cups provided on-site; personal display vessels are not allowed. (**Event-provided vessels include 10" plates/8 oz. bowls for display and 4" plates/4 oz. cups for sampling.)

- Display plates/bowls: Two 8-oz. portions (judging room & main floor)
- Judges plates/bowls: Twelve 2-oz. portions (for the 12 judges)

II. TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams must comply with all rules and guidelines. Failure to do so may result in disqualification.
Nuts, meat, poultry, and fish are prohibited ingredients for food safety reasons. These items can pose a risk of allergic reactions or foodborne illnesses, which is why we have chosen to exclude them from the competition.

Teams consist of 3–5 students in 6th–8th grade or 9th–12th grade. It is ok for teams to have an alternative sixth member in the event of illness or cancellation, however only 3–5 may participate.
Due to some K–6 schools, middle schools may be pre-approved for some, but not all, 5th-grade team members.

Each school/organization is allowed to have up to 3 teams per age group (middle or high school). Each school or organization may register three teams per grade level (i.e., middle and high school). In the case of a 7th–12th-grade school, schools may send up to six teams: three middle schools and three high schools. To facilitate competition logistics, teams from the same school may be placed in the same heat.

We will do our best to accommodate your heat request, but we may need to change your heat depending on the number of registrations. We will confirm the heat assignment when registration closes. Note: ALL HIGH SCHOOL TEAMS WILL BE IN THE PM HEAT.

Each team must have an adult coach who is a school representative, an afterschool-related organization representative, or a parent/guardian of a team member, or a trusted local chef. Coaches must be present during the entire competition. Teams may also have an assistant coach to support the coach

during practices and competitions. This role primarily assists the leading coach in managing the team and provides additional support, including helping with preparation and ensuring safety measures are followed.

Teams MUST comply with all competition deadlines, including registration and payment. Punctuality and responsibility are key to a successful competition, and we expect all teams to adhere to these deadlines. Team members are required to wear sturdy closed-toed shoes; clean, neat attire, including aprons (optional chef jacket), and a hat or hairnet. The event will have extra aprons and hairnets available.

Students are required to wear gloves, which we will provide during cooking. It is helpful to practice your recipe once with gloves on.

If a student or coach is sick or experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms, they are not allowed to attend the event.

Only students may cook during the competition.

Coaches provide encouragement and only very LIMITED guidance and should not touch or taste the food during the event unless there is a safety issue. There will be a blue tape line on the floor at each team's cooking station. Once the competition begins, coaches may not cross this line or lean over the outside barriers. This rule is strictly enforced, and judges will disqualify a team if there is excessive coaching instruction.

Teams are allowed to bring gas/butane-fueled tabletop burners (camping stoves) with tanks no larger than 1 pound. Please check that your tanks are full before the competition.

Due to limited electric needs for 35 teams, the ONLY electric appliances allowed are food processors, blenders, and mixers.

Prohibited electric cooking appliances include: toaster ovens, air fryers, multi-cookers, pressure cookers, induction stoves, hot plates, crockpots, electric griddles, electric waffle irons, and microwaves.

Teams may not extend their workspace by adding a cart to the end of their stations. This rule is in place to ensure fair competition and to prevent any team from having an unfair advantage due to additional workspace.

Carts used to transport equipment must be stored under the tables provided. If they do not fit under the table, they must be stored in your vehicle during the competition.
Bring all of the water you will need for cooking and food prep. NO WATER is available for cooking on-site, and DISHWASHING IS PROHIBITED.

III. AWARDS

Winning teams MUST be present at the event to receive a prize package. The following honors will be given in the Morning and Afternoon Award Ceremonies for each age category (high school and middle school):

CROWD-PLEASER — This award goes to the team that best incorporates color, texture, and taste for a true crowd-pleaser.

MISE EN PLACE — “Everything in its place," this award goes to the team that demonstrates exemplary teamwork, order, and professionalism. These qualities are not just appreciated, but they are crucial for a successful competition.

LIVELY LOCAL — This award goes to the team that best highlights Vermont foods.

- **LIVELY LOCAL AWARD** — Recipes must include at least five local ingredients to be eligible for the Lively Local Award. Teams will Lively Local Form in the recipe submission by the Recipe and Lively Local Deadline –2/12/27, which indicates the origins of their local ingredients (e.g., carrots from Lewis Creek Farm, Starksboro, VT). If a team does not submit a Lively Local Form by this deadline, they will not be eligible for the Lively Local Award. To be eligible for the Lively Local Award, ingredients must be in quantities of ¼ cup or greater and be integral to the recipe. Garnishes and condiments will not qualify as Lively Local ingredients.

IV. JUDGING CRITERIA

This cooking competition is about school food, and school food is for everyone. We have intentionally selected judges with a wide range of culinary expertise. Judges will be briefed on methods for giving constructive feedback to teams. The following criteria will be used to evaluate teams:

EXECUTION — Clean and presentable team outfits, including hard-soled shoes, hats or hair nets, aprons or chef jackets, and safe food handling practices
TEAMWORK — Evenly distributed workload, team cohesiveness, and communication
TASTE — A subjective category based on the judge’s expertise
CREATIVITY — Ingenuity of the ingredients used, creative use of ingredients
LOCAL — Recipe is tasty and highlights at least one local, seasonal product (five+ local products for the Lively Local Award)
COMPLIANCE — Meets all Jr Iron Chef VT Guidelines and Rules

V. IMPORTANT DETAILS

We compost all food scraps, as well as serving plates, bowls, tasting cups, and utensils produced/used at the event. We expect everyone to compost and recycle throughout the event.

Jr Iron Chef VT will provide:

- Aprons for team members, if needed
- Disposable gloves and hairnets, if needed
- A 8’ x 6’ workstation with table covers
- Compostable utensils and dishes for plating the dishes to be judged
- Community ovens set at 350°F

Teams must bring:

- All recipe ingredients, including local food items
- Cleaning supplies needed, such as paper towels, non-toxic cleaning spray, or rags
- A large tote to carry out dirty dishes; dishwashing is prohibited on-site
- Heavy-duty 3-prong extension cord (12 gauge) if your recipe requires an electric hand tool such as a blender, food processor, or mixer

- Water for cooking: we recommend 2–3 gallons
- Stainless steel or aluminum baking dishes are permitted for shared ovens; glass **and ceramic baking dishes are prohibited**.

Examples of other supplies to bring:

- Camp stove, extra fuel tanks, and lighter
- Blender, food processor, pots, and pans
- Spatulas, whisks, veggie peelers, and tongs
- Cutting boards, knives, hot mitts or trivets, and mixing bowls
- Thermometers and timers
- Can opener and measuring cups/spoons
- Aluminum foil, food wrap, or containers for leftovers
- Uniforms, team signs for your 6’ x 4’ workstation, and copies of your recipe for the audience

Community oven policies:

- Teams may use only stainless-steel and aluminum baking dishes; no glass or ceramic. This is to ensure the safety of all participants and to prevent any potential accidents during the cooking process. Teams sign up for an oven rack during the recipe submission process. Multiple teams are assigned racks in each oven on a first-come, first-served basis. Please allow extra time for your dish to cook, as the door may be opened and closed several times.Jr Iron Chef VT volunteers oversee and operate the ovens.
- **Each team needs to assign an Oven Captain who keeps time on their dish, ensures the dish is cooked to perfection, and notifies the adult volunteer when to remove it from the oven. The Oven Captain returns the hot dish back to their prep station.**