

## **COOKING THAT PERFECT POT OF RED**

*By Alan Dujenski*

### **COOKING THAT PERFECT BOWL:**

Start time depends upon your recipe, cut of meat, weather conditions, and altitude. My recipe normally takes 2 hours from start to finish so I try to give myself a cushion and start at 2 1/2 hours before turn-in. At a high altitude and on a cold day I would start maybe 3 hours before. The key is not to get it done too soon or get behind. If you get done early you can always turn off your pot but if at 20 minutes to go and the sauce is not starting to thicken, you have problems. You have to turn up the heat to get it boiling a little faster and this can cause your sauce to turn bitter. NINE-BUBBLE-BOIL is the max you ever want. That's where you only have about nine bubbles breaking on the surface at a time. The alternative is to use some Arrowroot. This is a thickener that has no flavor. But sometimes, as the chili sets in the cut you can get some slight amount of separation making your chili "look" watery. To add Arrowroot, mix about a teaspoon with about a tablespoon of hot water first, then add to the chili or you will get "Arrowroot-globs" that are sometimes hard to get all dissolved before turn-in. A "trick" some cooks use to make their sauce get a velvety look is to add a teaspoon of butter or butter flavored Crisco about 10 minutes before turn-in. My recipe gives me the gloss without "tricks" and so I don't use or advocate this practice. You make your own call on that. The same goes for the practice of adding "Sazon Goya". It is a Mexican flavoring that is high in MSG. I used it last year but have shied away because MSG can play tricks on you and turn your chili bitter after it has set for 20 - 30 minutes (at the finals table usually). Again this is going to be your choice.

### **PREPARING THE TURN-IN CUP:**

Your judging cup is usually passed out about two hours before the turn-in. A practice I follow (which is more ritualistic) is to season my cup with a clove of garlic. I strip the clove and smash it. Gently rub the inside of the lid of the cup (careful not to scratch it), place the clove in the bottom of the cup, replace the lid and set it aside in a safe place where it won't get damaged. Be sure you have removed the ticket from the inside of the cup. I left it in and in a hurry to get my cup to the judges (at Tacoma), I left it in, remembering half way up. This supposedly gets rid of any styrofoam taste (which I have yet to detect). I have won both ways. It doesn't hurt, so you make your own decision. At 5 minutes before turn-in, get your chili hot but don't burn it. At 2 minutes to turn-in I will start to fill my cup using a strainer-type spoon so I get mostly meat in the bottom 2/3 of the cup. I then ladle in the last 1/3 then using a spoon, gently mixing the two layers. The chili should be about 1/2" from the top. Wipe around the edge carefully removing stain on the upper exposed portion of the cup and replace the lid making sure it is on snug. Check the outside and wipe away with a damp rag or towel any signs of chili.

If you are going to a major cookoff where there may be 75 cooks or more and judging may take two hours or longer some cooks have filled their cups half full and added extra salt and "heat" to this lower half and then filled the

cup with their regular chili. The idea is as the chili cools that extra salt and heat gives it a bit more flavor when cold. It can backfire on you also if a judge decides to mix the chili in the preliminary stage.

**TIPS FOR NEW COOKS:**

Use either the YAHOO recipe (published at the end of this package) or mine . Follow it exactly. Use the following specific spices:

Pendery's CALIFORNIA FANCY for the main chili powder.

Pendery's FT WORTH LIGHT for the other chili powder

For bouillon, use Knorr brand.

For broth, us Swanson brand.

You will generally find that the Knorr cube and the Swanson broth have sufficient salt for most chili's. It is good to put the broth in the ice chest so when you open the cans you can skim the fat off the top easier; you don't want a greasy chili.

If chili gets too salty, they say sticking in a potato cut in half for a few minutes will remove some of the salt.

Taking a jalapeno pepper and putting a few cuts lengthwise in the pepper and floating it in the chili for about 15 minutes gives it a nice kick (remove before turn-in).

About 1/4 tsp of brown sugar will remove bitterness in many cases from chili (add 15 - 20 minutes before turn-in).

Grease can be removed from chili by floating a slice of white bread on the surface for a few seconds.

Remember, never experiment at the cookoff. I don't take extra spices just to remove the temptation. Use your chosen recipe AND FOLLOW IT! Go in with the confidence it will win.

**GOOD LUCK!**