

BBQ & Smoked Chicken Wings Competition Judging Criteria

General Rules for Participants

All chicken wing entries must be homemade, cooked entirely by the competitor, and prepared from raw wings. No pre-cooked, frozen, or commercially pre-seasoned wings are allowed. Wings may be grilled, smoked, or a combination of both, but frying is not permitted in this competition. Competitors may choose to present whole wings or separate flats and drumettes, but all should be consistent in size and evenly cooked. Each entry should provide enough samples for all judges, with wings presented neatly and ready for immediate tasting. The goal is to showcase barbecue technique, flavor mastery, and creativity while staying true to the spirit of smoked or grilled chicken wings.

Appearance (20 Points)

Judges will first evaluate the wings on their visual appeal. A well-prepared wing should have a uniform, appetizing color, with a mahogany or golden-brown finish that reflects careful cooking. Wings should appear moist and juicy, not dry, shriveled, or greasy. If a glaze or sauce is applied, it should be evenly coated, glossy, and visually appealing, without clumping, excessive pooling, or burnt edges. Wings that are presented neatly, with a clean and professional appearance, will score higher. The goal is for the wings to look as good as they taste, creating anticipation for the first bite.

Texture & Tenderness (25 Points)

Texture is a critical part of judging chicken wings. Judges will be looking for wings that are tender and juicy on the inside while maintaining a pleasing bite. The skin should not be rubbery or overly chewy but should have some crispness or

a pleasant texture that enhances the eating experience. Wings that are too dry, undercooked, or tough will score lower, as will wings that are mushy or falling apart. A perfectly cooked wing should be moist and flavorful, with skin and meat working together to create an enjoyable bite.

Flavor (35 Points)

Flavor is the centerpiece of the competition, and judges will carefully evaluate the balance of seasoning, smoke, and sauce. The wings should have a well-developed flavor profile, with seasoning that enhances the chicken without being too salty, bland, or overpowering. Smoke should be present but balanced—never bitter, harsh, or acrid. If sauce or glaze is used, it should complement the seasoning and smoke, adding depth without dominating the natural flavor of the chicken. Dry-rub wings should carry a flavorful bark or crust that pairs well with the juicy interior. A winning wing will be layered with flavor from the first bite to the last, leaving a satisfying and memorable impression.

Taste Balance (10 Points)

Beyond the overall flavor, judges will assess the harmony of the wings' taste profile. The wings should not lean too heavily toward sweet, spicy, smoky, or salty, but instead present a balanced and cohesive flavor experience. Whether seasoned with a dry rub or sauced with a glaze, the flavors should feel intentional and complementary. The aftertaste should be pleasant, inviting the judge to reach for another bite rather than leaving a heavy or cloying finish.

Creativity & Originality (10 Points)

While chicken wings are a barbecue classic, creativity can set an entry apart. Judges will look for unique approaches to flavor—such as innovative rubs, sauces,

wood choices, or international influences—that make the wings memorable. Creativity might include a clever flavor pairing, a regional twist, or a personal spin on a traditional style. However, originality should always enhance the wings rather than distract from them, staying rooted in barbecue fundamentals while showcasing individuality.

Overall Impression (10 Points)

This category captures the total experience of eating the wings. Judges will consider whether the wings were enjoyable from start to finish and whether they left a lasting positive impression. The best entries will combine appearance, tenderness, flavor, and balance into a cohesive whole that stands out among the competition. A truly outstanding wing should not only satisfy but also excite, making judges eager for another bite and setting itself apart as an exceptional entry.

Bonus Criteria (Up to 5 Extra Points)

Judges may award additional points for entries that rise above expectations. A wing that achieves flawless presentation, exceptional balance of smoke and seasoning, or an unforgettable flavor profile may earn these bonus points. Competitors who showcase extraordinary technique, mastery of flavor, or a bold but successful creative touch may be rewarded in this category.