



Pie & Cheesecake Judging Criteria 2026

Pie Judging Criteria (Total Score: 100 Points)

Appearance (20 Points)

The first thing judges will notice is the pie's visual appeal. A well-baked pie should have a golden, even crust with a consistent color across the top. The top crust should be evenly browned, with no burned spots or areas that are too pale. If the pie has a lattice top, the crust should be woven neatly with no gaps or overly thick spots. For pies with a decorative top or lattice, the design should look intentional and well-executed. The filling should not be spilling over the edges or look too runny, and any garnishes (whipped cream, fruits, etc.) should enhance the pie's presentation without overpowering it.

Crust (25 Points)

The crust is one of the most important parts of any pie, and judges will evaluate its flavor, texture, and appearance. The ideal pie crust should be flaky and tender

with a slight crispness. It should not be tough, doughy, or soggy. A good crust should complement the filling without competing with it, providing a balanced texture against the softness of the filling. The crust should have a pleasant buttery flavor, and while it should not be too salty or too sweet, it should have a flavor profile that enhances the entire pie. If the pie has a bottom crust, judges will look for an evenly baked, crisp layer, ensuring the crust holds its shape and does not become soggy from the filling.

Filling (35 Points)

The filling is the heart of the pie, and judges will pay close attention to its texture, consistency, and flavor. For fruit pies, the filling should have a balanced texture that is not too runny or too thick. The fruit should retain its shape and provide a tender bite, but not be mushy or overcooked. The filling should be flavorful, with the natural sweetness or tang of the fruit (or the savory ingredients in a non-sweet pie) coming through without being overly sugary or bland. For cream or custard pies, the filling should be smooth, rich, and well-set without being too stiff or watery. The flavor should be well-balanced, and in pies with mixed ingredients, each component should complement the others. The consistency of the filling should also be uniform, without any separation, lumps, or uneven textures.

Taste (25 Points)

Taste is one of the most critical aspects of the competition. Judges will assess the overall flavor balance of the pie, ensuring it is not too sweet, too tart, or too bland. The pie should be enjoyable from the first bite to the last, with the flavors working together in harmony. In a fruit pie, the fruit flavor should be prominent, and the sugar and spices should enhance, rather than overpower, the natural flavors. For cream pies, the custard or filling should have a rich, balanced flavor,

while savory pies should have well-seasoned, complementary ingredients. A pie's filling should leave a pleasant aftertaste that is not too heavy or cloying, and the combination of crust and filling should leave the judge wanting more.

Creativity and Originality (10 Points)

In this category, judges will reward participants who bring new ideas or unique twists to their pies. This might include unusual flavor combinations, such as a savory pie with unexpected ingredients or a fruit pie with a unique blend of spices. Creativity also extends to how the pie is presented—whether it's a traditional pie or a more unconventional style, such as a hand-pie or galette. If the participant has added a personal or seasonal touch, such as using local ingredients or incorporating a flavor inspired by a holiday or regional dish, it will be evaluated for originality and how well it enhances the overall pie.

Overall Impression (10 Points)

The overall impression considers the entire experience of eating the pie. Judges will think about how well the pie balances all its elements, from crust to filling, and whether it is an enjoyable dessert. Does the pie leave a lasting positive impression? Is the pie satisfying and memorable? It should have a cohesive flavor profile where the crust, filling, and any garnishes all come together to create a delightful and harmonious dessert. The pie should also have a good texture that's easy to cut and eat, with each bite being a pleasure. This category considers everything in totality, focusing on the pie's ability to impress and satisfy.

Bonus Criteria (Up to 5 Extra Points)

Judges may award up to 5 additional points for exceptional pies that go beyond the ordinary. This could be a pie with an extraordinary level of creativity, whether

through the ingredients, presentation, or concept. Pies that reflect a unique cultural influence, such as a regional or holiday-inspired recipe, may also earn bonus points. Similarly, pies that are exceptionally well-crafted in terms of both texture and flavor may receive bonus points for being a standout example of baking skill and artistry.

Judging Process:

After tasting each pie, judges will score it based on the criteria outlined above. Each judge will evaluate the pies independently, taking notes on appearance, crust, filling, taste, creativity, and overall impression. Once all pies are tasted, judges will submit their individual scorecards before any discussion takes place. After deliberation, the pie with the highest overall score will be crowned the winner of the competition.

Cheesecake Judging Criteria (Total Score: 100 Points)

Appearance (20 Points)

The first impression of the cheesecake is important, and the judges will start by evaluating its visual appeal. A well-arranged cheesecake should look polished, with no drips, uneven crusts, or excessive toppings that could detract from its appearance. The cheesecake should have a clean and neat presentation, showcasing the baker's attention to detail. The crust should be evenly distributed, holding the cheesecake together without cracks or separation. If the cheesecake features decorations such as fruits, sauces, or whipped cream, they should be aesthetically pleasing and complement the overall design without overpowering it.

Crust (15 Points)

The crust is an essential part of the cheesecake, and judges will evaluate its texture, flavor, and consistency. It should have a crisp, crunchy texture without being too hard or soggy. The crust should provide a contrast to the smooth, creamy filling, and its flavor should enhance the overall experience of the cheesecake, without being too dominant. A graham cracker crust, for example, should have a subtle sweetness and butter flavor that complements the filling, but judges will also consider any other types of crusts used, as long as they are a deliberate and thoughtful choice. The crust should be evenly distributed across the base, with no gaps or spots that are too thin or thick.

Cheesecake Filling (35 Points)

The filling is the heart of the cheesecake, and the judges will place a significant focus on its texture, consistency, and flavor. The ideal cheesecake filling should be creamy, smooth, and velvety, without being too heavy or too airy. It should have a dense, rich texture that is still light enough to melt in the mouth. The consistency should be uniform throughout, with no cracks or air bubbles. The flavor of the cheesecake should be a delicate balance between sweetness and tanginess, allowing the cheese to shine through without being overly rich or sweet. If the cheesecake is flavored (such as with lemon, chocolate, or berries), the flavor should complement the cheese and not overwhelm it. The flavor should be harmonious, and the overall combination should be well-balanced.

Taste (25 Points)

The taste of the cheesecake is one of the most important aspects of the competition. Judges will evaluate the balance of flavors, considering whether the cheesecake is too sweet, too tangy, or perfectly balanced. The cheesecake should have a rich, smooth flavor that evolves as you eat it. The sweetness should not be overpowering, and there should be a nice contrast between the rich cheese and

any added ingredients. If toppings are used, such as fruit or sauces, they should complement the cheesecake and enhance the flavor without overshadowing it. The aftertaste should be pleasant and lingering, leaving a positive impression without being too heavy or artificial.

Creativity and Originality (10 Points)

Judges will look for creativity and originality in both the flavor and presentation of the cheesecake. This could include the use of unexpected or innovative ingredients that elevate the flavor profile, such as incorporating herbs or spices like basil or cardamom into the filling. Unusual flavor combinations that work well together will be rewarded, as will any creative or unique toppings that make the cheesecake stand out. If the cheesecake incorporates a personal or seasonal touch, such as a theme or a flavor inspired by a holiday, it will be evaluated based on how well it reflects the baker's creativity and ingenuity.

Overall Impression (10 Points)

In this final category, judges will consider the overall experience of the cheesecake. This includes how enjoyable the cheesecake is to eat from start to finish. Does it leave a lasting positive impression, making the judge want to have another bite? The overall balance between the crust, filling, and any toppings is key, and no single component should dominate the others. A good cheesecake should be balanced, pleasant, and satisfying, without any one aspect being overpowering. The overall "wow factor" will be assessed based on how memorable the cheesecake is as a dessert.

Bonus Criteria (Up to 5 Extra Points)

Judges may award up to 5 extra points for any cheesecakes that go above and beyond in certain areas. This could include exceptional attention to detail in presentation, such as intricate decorations or a refined design. If the cheesecake features an innovative or unexpected ingredient pairing that surprises and delights the judges, it could earn bonus points. Additionally, cheesecakes that reflect a seasonal or cultural theme in a creative and fitting way may receive bonus points for originality.