

What is Hoppin' John?

Hoppin' John is a tasty Southern delicacy made of rice, black-eyed peas, and some sort of cured pork such as bacon, ham, or fatback. It is traditionally served at New Year's for good luck, alongside greens, cornbread, and sometimes tomatoes. The tradition—some might call it superstition—holds that eating these foods on the first day of the year helps ensure that in the new year, one will have an abundance of the things they symbolize: coins (black-eyed peas), cash (greens), gold (cornbread), and health (tomatoes).

As for the name of the dish, it seems time has shrouded its origin in mystery. Some say the dish was first hawked in the streets of Charleston, South Carolina in the mid-1800s by a one-legged black man known as Hoppin' John. Others maintain the name comes from the age-old tradition of Southern hospitality itself, where a visitor arriving at mealtime would be invited to "hop in, John".

Some linguists suggest the name came from the French patois spoken in much of the Caribbean, where a dish of rice, peas, and salt pork called pois a pigeon, pronounced something like "pwahahpeejawng", was popular. Over time, English speakers, pronouncing the name more or less phonetically, perhaps with a little humor, evolved it into "Hoppin' John". This explanation may be plausible as much of traditional Caribbean fare comes from African culinary traditions, having been brought along to the New World by those came involuntarily as slaves. Once here, they adapted their recipes to use locally available ingredients.

The Cook-off

Does your family have a time-honored recipe for hoppin' john? Do you like to get creative in the kitchen? Then the Hoppin' John Cook-off just might be the perfect opportunity for you to show off your culinary talents. The rules are simple and the competition should make a tasty complement to all that pickin' and grinnin' going on down at the Grove Stage.

1. Contestants must prepare their hoppin' john on-site in the designated cooking area. The only minor exception is that contestants using dry beans may soak them at home.
2. To qualify as hoppin' john, all dishes entered must contain rice and black-eyed peas. Beyond that, contestants are encouraged to exercise their creativity with other ingredients and seasonings. While hoppin' john traditionally contains pork, vegetarian variations are welcome.
3. Contestants must prepare a minimum of four quarts of hoppin' john for judging.
4. Contestants must bring their own ingredients and cookware (pots and pans, cutting boards, knives, spoons, spatulas, etc.)
5. Contestants must supply their own heat (propane camp stoves, butane burners, etc.) If you need a heat source, check in the cook-off tent early Saturday morning; we may have additional stoves available.
6. Cooking will commence at 12 noon on Saturday, Sept. 20. Contestants must register at the cook-off tent no later than 3:00, and serving/judging will begin at 5:00 pm
7. Judging will be by people's choice. All who wish to sample the competing hoppin' john entries will make a donation of \$3.00 for a ballot and a spoon. Samples of each hoppin' john entry will be served in individual cups or bowls.
Upon sampling all of the entries, tasters will mark their ballots.
8. The three contestants who receive the most votes will split the donation pot with the top vote-getter receiving 45 percent of the pot, the first runner-up receiving 25 percent, and the second runner-up receiving 20 percent. 10% of proceeds will be donated to Shakori Hills, Inc. non-profit organization.