

Culinary Institute of Virginia 2026 Culinary Decathlon Competition Guide



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Purpose

The Culinary Decathlon is an exciting annual event where high school seniors can demonstrate their culinary knowledge, skills, and creative abilities while competing for scholarships to attend Culinary Institute of Virginia (CIV).

Eligibility

The competition is open to 2026 graduating high school seniors who submit their Culinary Decathlon Application by July 15, 2026, and are accepted to CIV with a start date on or before August 31, 2026. All deadlines are final; late or incomplete submissions will not be accepted.

Scholarship Awards

Scholarships will be awarded to the top five students as listed below. Scholarship awards will be distributed evenly each semester over the length of the program. Scholarship awards can only be applied toward tuition and fees. Students must be enrolled and attending CIV on or before August 31, 2026.

PLACE	SCHOLARSHIP
1st	\$3,000
2nd	\$2,500
3rd	\$2,000
4th	\$1,500
5th	\$1,000

Competition Design

The competitors in the culinary decathlon will be evaluated in 10 different areas broken down into three (3) categories. These categories are:

1. Written Quiz
2. Demonstration of Culinary Skills
3. Presentation of Entrée

Competition Rules and Expectations

- Competitors must arrive on time, be fully prepared, and maintain professional conduct throughout the competition.
- Only ingredients from the CIV-provided Ingredient List may be used and must be requested in advance, except for standard ingredients automatically provided; outside ingredients are not permitted.
- Competitors are responsible for proper use and care of all equipment.
- Electronic devices are prohibited in the kitchen.
- Failure to comply may result in point deductions or disqualification.

Uniform and Knives

Competitors must wear appropriate kitchen attire:

- Chef's coat
- Non-porous, closed-toe, non-slip, hard-soled black shoes
- Checkered or black pants (recommended)
- Hair restraint (chef hat, ball cap, or hair net)
- Jewelry (rings, earrings, watches) must not be worn during competition.
- Aprons are provided at registration.

Competitors must supply their own knives. Students unable to do so must contact their CIV admissions representative in advance.

Culinary Decathlon Timeline

Boot Camp, Friday, June 26th, 2026, 9:00 am:

- Check-in begins at 8:30 am.
- Demonstration and practice of competition culinary skills.

Student Application Deadline, Wednesday, July 15, 2026, 5:00 pm

- Students may download contest applications from www.chefva.com.
- Completed applications (including essay and requisition) should be emailed to webchefva@ecpi.edu.

Competition Day, Friday, July 24, 2026, 8:00 am:

- Check-in begins at 7:30 am and all competitors must be checked in by 8:00 am.
- Competition starts at 8:30 am.
- Award ceremony starts at 12:15 pm (subject to change).

Competition Day Outline

- Written Quiz (15 minutes)
- Station Set-up (15 minutes)
- Culinary Skills Demonstration (2 hours)
- Station Clean-up (30 minutes)
- Judge's Tasting and Presentation of Entrée Critique (30 minutes)
- Award Ceremony and Dismissal (15 minutes)

Written Quiz

- Each competitor will have 15 minutes to complete a written quiz. Questions will be based on sanitation, US weights and measures, and basic cooking methods.
- Please see page 9 for the study guide.

Culinary Skills Demonstration

Each competitor station includes one portable gas burner as the primary heat source. Shared commercial gas ranges and ovens may be used as needed, subject to coordination with other competitors, safety guidelines, and judge direction.

Each competitor has two (2) hours total, including plating, to complete all required tasks.

Required Production

Each competitor must produce:

- One (1) fabricated chicken (8-piece fabrication; airline breast permitted)
- One (1) pint classical chicken velouté
- Knife cuts:
 - 10 pieces, julienne carrot ($\frac{1}{8}'' \times \frac{1}{8}'' \times 1\frac{1}{2}-2''$)
 - 10 pieces, vichy-cut carrot ($\frac{1}{8}''$ thick; bias optional)
 - 10 pieces, large-dice potato ($\frac{3}{4}'' \times \frac{3}{4}'' \times \frac{3}{4}''$)
 - One (1) orange cut into supremes
- Knife cuts, velouté, and fabricated chicken are judged as completed before entrée production begins.

Ingredients Provided*

- 1 whole chicken
- 1 pt chicken stock
- 4 oz butter
- 4 oz flour
- 1 lb carrots
- 1 lb russet potatoes
- 1 orange
- Access to common dried herbs and spices

**Additional quantities must be requested on the requisition form.*

Knife Skills Portion Rules

1. Knife cuts are evaluated on quantity and adherence to specified dimensions.
2. Ten pieces are required for each cut; fewer than ten will result in point deductions.
3. Uniformity of size and shape is the primary standard; minor trimming is acceptable.
4. Cuts must be presented at the competitor's station in a $\frac{1}{4}$ -size pan.
5. A designated knife skills judge will evaluate all cuts after completion.
6. After judging, cuts may be further processed or used in the final entrée.

Poultry Fabrication Portion Rules

Required Production

Each competitor must fabricate one (1) whole chicken into eight (8) usable pieces, excluding the carcass, as follows:

- Two (2) boneless breast halves*
- Two (2) boneless thighs
- Two (2) drumsticks
- Two (2) wings

**An airline breast cut is permitted as an optional variation.*

1. Upon completion of fabrication, the chicken must be presented at the competitor's workstation on a 1/2 -size sheet pan for evaluation.
2. All carcass and trim must remain with the fabricated chicken until judging is completed. Overall yield will be considered as part of the poultry fabrication score.
3. Poultry fabrication will be evaluated by a designated fabrication judge immediately upon completion of fabrication and prior to entrée production.
4. Fabrication will be judged on skill, technique, sanitation and safety.
5. After fabrication judging is complete, competitors may further process or incorporate any portion of the fabricated chicken into their final entrée.

Presentation of Entrée

Each competitor must prepare a chicken-based entrée accompanied by an appropriate starch, vegetable, sauce, and garnish.

Competitors are required to present two (2) identical plates:

- One (1) plate for tasting
- One (1) plate for presentation

All plates must be completed within the two-hour time limit. Once placed on the judging table, plates may not be retrieved, modified, or replaced.

Entrée Judging Criteria:

- Accuracy of cooking techniques and visual presentation
- Seasoning, flavor, and compatibility of all components
- Balance of portion size, texture, and flavor

Judging Criteria

The judge's panel will consist of three (3) judges. Judging will be based on the following areas:

- Written exam score
- Kitchen sanitation and technical skills demonstrated by competitors
- Final presentation, flavor, and balance of plated entrée

Penalties

- Competitor leaves his or her station in an unsanitary manner.
- Competitor does not complete presentation of entrée within allotted time.
- Competitor does not produce two (2) identical plates.
- Competitor removes plate from display table

Equipment Available for Checkout

The following equipment is available by request and is to be shared amongst all competitors.

- 4.5 qt. Mixer
- Cast Iron Griddle
- Chinois
- Fluted Ring Cutters
- Food Mill
- Food Processor
- Jaccard Tenderizer
- Meat Mallet
- Pasta Machine
- Pepper Mill
- Portion Scoops
- Ricer
- Ring Cutter
- Spice Grinder
- Spiral Cutter
- Stick Blender
- Toaster
- Waffle Iron

Recommended Knives/Small Wares to Bring

The knives and tools brought to the competition should be determined by the competitor's chosen entrée. The following items are suggested based on common methods of preparation.

Competitors may bring additional knives and small wares not listed

- Boning Knife
- French Knife (Chef Knife)
- Metal Spatula
- Paring Knife
- Rubber Spatula
- Thermometer
- Tongs
- Vegetable Peeler
- Whisk

Ingredient List

The following ingredients will be provided by CIV.

Please note that common dried herbs and spices will be available in each kitchen.

Bases

- Beef
- Chicken
- Demi

Dairy

- Cheddar Cheese
- Heavy Cream
- Large Eggs
- Parmesan Cheese
- Plain Yogurt
- Sour Cream
- Swiss Cheese
- Unsalted Butter
- Whole Milk

Fresh Herbs

- Chive
- Cilantro
- Dill
- Mint
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Sweet Basil
- Thyme

Dry Goods

- All Purpose Flour
- Arborio
- Baguette
- Barley
- Converted rice
- Cornmeal
- Cornstarch
- Couscous (Semolina)
- Dijon Mustard
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Granulated Sugar
- Light Brown Sugar
- Panko
- Plain Breadcrumbs
- Rice Vinegar
- Soy Oil
- Tomato Paste
- Vinegars: cider, red, white
- Worcestershire Sauce

Fruit

- Blueberries
- Granny Smith Apples
- Lemons
- Limes
- Oranges
- Strawberries

Produce

- Baking Potatoes
- Button Mushrooms
- Carrots
- Celery
- Fresh Ginger
- Globe Tomato
- Green Pepper
- Leaf Spinach
- Parsnips
- Plum Tomatoes
- Portabella Mushrooms
- Red Bliss Potatoes
- Red Peppers
- Romaine Lettuce
- Shallots
- Shitake Mushrooms
- Spanish Onions
- White Turnips
- Whole Garlic
- Yellow Squash
- Zucchini Squash

Written Quiz Study Guide

- **Weight:** the effect that gravity has on an object. We measure weight by using a scale usually used to measure solids.
- **Volume:** the amount of space something takes up. We measure volume using various sized containers i.e. measuring cup or teaspoon usually used to measure liquids.

Weight

- Written as # / lbs. / pounds
- Written as oz / ounces
- 16 oz = 1 lbs.
- # converts to oz ex.: Number of # x 16 = number of oz's (ex.: 2 # x 16 = 32 oz)
- oz converts to # ex.: Number of oz / 16 = number of # (ex.: 32 oz / 16 = 2 #)

Measures

- 1 gal = 4 qt = 8 pt = 16 c = 128 fl oz
- 1 qt = 2 pt = 4 c = 32 fl oz
- 1 pt = 2 c = 16 fl oz
- 1 c = 8 fl oz
- 1 T = 3 t
- 1 fl oz = 2 T = 6 t
- 1 T = .5 fl oz

Minimum Internal Cooking Temperatures

- **165°F** Poultry, stuffing, stuffed meat, and TCS ingredients
- **155°F:** Ground meat, injected meat, ground seafood, shell eggs hot-held for service
- **145°F:** Steaks/chops of pork, beef, veal, lamb and fish
- **145°F:** Roasts of pork, beef, veal, and lamb
- **135°F:** Fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes

Note: When using a bimetallic stem thermometer always insert the probe into the thickest part of the meat. A bimetallic thermometer, Thermocouple, or Thermistor can also be used.

Food Allergens

The most common food allergens are: Milk, Eggs, Fish, Shellfish, Wheat, Soy, Peanuts, Sesame, and Tree nuts.

Sanitation and Safety

Sanitizing is reducing microorganisms on a surface to a safe level. Cleaning is removing food or soil from a surface. You must clean before you sanitize and you cannot clean with sanitizer.

Temperature Danger Zone (TDZ): 41°F - 135°F (this is where microorganisms grow well) food should never be held in this zone for more than 4 hours.

- Foods should be cooled to 70°F before placed into refrigeration. When using the two-stage cooling method, foods must be cooled to 70°F within 2 hours and 70°F to 41°F within 4 hours.
- All food contact surfaces and equipment must be cleaned and sanitized before use.

- Do not handle food when ill. You must report your illness to your supervisor and be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to work.
- Proper personal hygiene is essential.
- Thaw frozen foods safely (under refrigeration).
- Hold hot food at proper temperatures above 135⁰F.
- Reheat to proper temperatures (165⁰F).
- Cross Contamination is the transfer of harmful bacteria to food.
- Sources of Food Contamination: biological, chemical, and physical
- Clean spills immediately and keep work area clean and dry.
- Use a damp brown paper towel under the cutting board to avoid cuts.
- Assume all pots are hot and use dry towels.
- Carry only what you can handle.
- Open oven and steamer doors slowly.
- Never leave knives or other sharp items in the sink unattended.
- Use designated cutting boards.
- Keep shellfish tags on hand for 90 days after the last product has been used.

Knife Cuts and Dimensions

- **Brunoise:** 1/8" x 1/8" x 1/8" dice
- **Julienne:** 1/8" x 1/8" x 2" stick (or the length of a spoon if for soup)
- **Macédoine:** 1/4" x 1/4" x 1/4" dice
- **Bâtonnet:** 1/4" x 1/4" x 3" stick
- **Tourne:** 7-sided football shape
- **Vichy:** 1/8" or 1/4" slice round on biased
- **Parisienne:** Sphere or ball (1" average)
- **Payasanne:** 1/2" x 1/2" x 1/8"
- **Noisette:** Sphere or ball (1/2" to 1/3" average)
- **Mirepoix:** 1" or 1/2" rough cut (25% leeks, 25% onion, 25% carrots, 25% celery)

Cooking Methods

- **Moist Heat**
 - Poaching: 160⁰F - 180⁰F; Liquid has small movement
 - Simmering: 185⁰F - 205⁰F; Liquid has small bubbles
 - Boil: 212⁰F; Big bubbles
 - Steaming: 250+⁰F; under pressure
 - *Note: All of the above are convection heat transfers.*
- **Dry Heat**
 - Baking
 - Roasting
 - Grilling
 - Broiling
 - Sauté
 - Pan-frying
 - Deep-frying
- **Combination Technique**
 - Stewing
 - Smothering
 - Braising

Vocabulary

Stocks

- **Mirepoix:** A French word that refers to the mixture of coarsely chopped onions, carrots, and celery. This mixture provides a flavor base for stock.
- **Aromatics:** Herbs, spices, and flavorings that create a savory aroma, such as bouquet garni or sachet d'epices.
- **Degreasing:** The process of removing fat that has cooled and hardened from the surface of stock.
- **Fumet** (foo-MAY): A highly flavored reduced stock made with fish bones.
- **Glace** (glahs): A highly reduced stock with a jellylike consistency, made from brown stock, chicken stock, or fish stock; it is sometimes referred to as "glaze."

Sauces

- **Grand sauces:** Five classical sauces that are the basis for most other sauces. These are sometimes called "mother" sauces.
- **Au jus** (oh ZHEW): A thin sauce made from meats own juice.
- **Hollandaise** (HALL-en-daze): A rich, emulsified grand sauce made from butter, egg yolks, lemon juice, and cayenne pepper.
- **Velouté** (veh-loo-TAY): A grand sauce made from veal, chicken, or fish stock and a white or blond roux.
- **Béchamel** (BAY-shah-MELL): A grand sauce made from milk and white roux.
- **Espagnole sauce** (ess-spah- NYOL): A grand sauce made from brown stock and brown roux.
- **Tomato sauce:** A grand sauce made from a stock and tomatoes (roux is optional).
- **Roux** (ROO): A thickener made of equal parts cooked flour and a fat, such as clarified butter, oil, or shortening.
- **Slurry:** Cornstarch mixed with a cold liquid, which can be used instead of roux.

Miscellaneous

- **Poach:** To gently cook in liquid at 160°F -180°F.
- **Blanch:** To briefly or partially cook in hot liquid.
- **Shock:** To stop the cooking process, usually by using an ice bath, cold running water, or super circulated cold air.
- **Render:** To slowly extract a liquid fat from a solid fat.
- **Sweat:** To cook in a small amount of fat over medium heat covered without coloring.
- **Temper:** To gradually equalize two extreme temperatures. Hot to cold or cold to hot.
- **Concasse:** A rough dice chop of a product.