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## Cornbread Craze



For much of the year, South Pittsburg, Tenn., is a quiet, close-knit community of just 3,300 people. But come the last weekend in April, a crowd of more than 40,000 descends upon the town. The big draw? The National Cornbread Festival, a weekend-long celebration complete with live music, a midway, farm animals, and the famous National Cornbread Cook-off, where 10 finalists compete for the top prize: \$5,000 and a Brown FiveStar Range. (Contestants must use Martha White brand cornmeal and bake their bread in a Lodge cast-iron skillet. Both companies, along with FiveStar, are sponsors of the event.) "The festival is a great way to bring Southern food to a national level," says Mark Kelly, the communications manager for Lodge Cast Iron Cookware. "For two days each April, we're on the world stage of cooking."

ABOVE LEFT: A judge samples the winning entry. Contestants had just under two hours to prepare their recipe. ABOVE RIGHT: Volunteers prepare for the arrival of visitors.



**COOK-OFF QUEEN  
JENNY FLAKE**

of Gilbert, Ariz., won the 2007 Cook-off with Chicken Taco Cornbread Wedges with Ranchero Cilantro Drizzle.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A cook-off finalist; the fair features a midway with dozens of carnival rides; fried cornbread chitlins; oversized livestock such as the six-foot-plus giant steer is a crowd-pleaser; local students volunteer at Cornbread Alley, where church and community groups serve up recipes from previous years; cornbread patties; a church volunteer at work; local vendors sell Southern specialties, such as chicken on a stick.

Each year more than 1,500 volunteers work the festival.



### NATIONAL CORNBREAD FESTIVAL 2008

THIS YEAR'S fair takes place April 26 and 27 from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.; admission \$3. Look for buttermilk-chugging and cornbread-eating contests, a 5K road race, arts and crafts vendors, and live rockabilly from local favorite the Sammi Moore Band. Last year *Country Living* Senior Editor Frances Bailey was one of 10 cook-off judges (pictured with, from far left, Sharon Franke of the Good Housekeeping Institute, and

grilling expert Elizabeth Karmel). "I'm from the South and make pretty good cornbread, but the contestants here created some amazing recipes," says Frances. "I came away with a whole new perspective." For more information about the festival, call (423) 837-0022; [nationalcornbread.com](http://nationalcornbread.com). Visit [countryliving.com/cornbread](http://countryliving.com/cornbread) to see video from last year's festival and to try the winning 2007 Cornbread Cook-off recipes.