

Variant rules for players who like to cook what they kill

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Introduction

Everyone needs to eat, and sometimes, you need to eat when you're hacking through the pits of a dank, dark dungeon. Sure, you can roll to root out safe-to-eat mushrooms or kill the dire boar, but how do you cook up dire boar ragu with a wild mushroom reduction? These rules are for the more culinary-minded players who want to stir fry tentacles with root veggies, soft boil lightning bird eggs or make mandrake tempura.

When to cook

Humanoid creatures might fare best on three meals a day, but frankly, your average *Dungeons & Dragons* hero will probably be too busy to cook that often. More importantly, a lot of players might come to resent the dungeon master who actively monitors their daily nutrition intake. Breaking the flow of a game so often might result in a jagged plot.

It's a good idea to cook only when it will add a little spice to the game. Players who wish to make an end-of-the-day meal while digesting the day's deeds will find that cooperative meal-making is a great way to be creative together. Cooking tasks—like impressing noblemen with stew made of fresh-caught fish or successfully sneaking poison into a berry pie—are a great way to move a plot forward. Also, consider challenges: Perhaps an NPC asks players to find the two largest monsters in a dungeon, force them to fight and cook up the survivor. When you want cooking to be the centerpiece of a quest, try pairing it with one other traditional *D&D* element, like combat, exploration or role-playing.

What to cook with

A pot, a pan, a cooking spoon and a tripod should do. Distributed throughout a party, they won't add too much weight to the average pack. Melee fighters can use their weapons (i.e. swords, daggers) to cut up ingredients. Lure prey with a bardic tune or a rogue's subtle traps. Sure, a few extra things might be fun, but it's important to keep some aspects of cooking simple to better focus on actual meal-prep.

It's best to be resourceful. Surprise yourself. A swinging scythe trap might make a great butcher. A ceiling trap could help pulverize meat. One animal's tusk could help grind the essence out of a plant. And, hey, maybe you'll encounter a fire elemental who'd lend a helping hand when you're hungry and without fire.

Gathering ingredients

A typical *D&D* adventure's location descriptions might not highlight the various root vegetables, fungi, herbs and berries players pass in the course of their travels. It might not be obvious that dragon blood could enhance a curry or that giant birds' eggs make delicious giant omelets. In adventures that involve cooking, the dungeon master must encourage players to look at the world through a culinary lens.

Finding ingredients should involve some combination of a dungeon master pointing them out and characters rolling Perception (Wisdom) checks. In practice, that means that, along with other environmental features like foliage, ground material and weather, the dungeon master might pepper location descriptions with ingredients players can forage for. These features are easy to make up on the go, but dungeon

masters more devoted to the culinary arts should feel free to research what plants and animals are native to certain climates and find (or make up) *D&D* analogues.

Players on the hunt for a meal can make Perception checks for ingredients by saying, for example, “I’m smelling around for herbs” or “I’m digging under that tree for underground vegetables.” When it comes to meat ingredients, a little creative license is necessary. Salvage the remains of dead monsters. In the real world, lizards might taste a little nasty. In *D&D*, it may be more fun to pretend that dragon meat is a delicacy. That said—humans might find the idea of eating the meat of other humanoids deplorable.

Ingredient-gathering should not be the sole domain of PCs with high wisdom. Barbarians and rangers make excellent hunters. Sorcerers, wizards and warlocks can use magic to transport far-off foods to the party, preserve perishables and transmute ingredients. Bards and rogues can lure and trap prey--and so on.

How to cook

Gather your ingredients. Set up a cooking method (i.e. a pot over a fire). Then, cooperatively, decide on what meal to make. The possibilities are infinite. Keep in mind: This is a fantasy world. Pry at the limits of your creativity.

In terms of complication, meals may range from “Every vegetable, meat and spice we’ve collected in a pot with some water” to “almond-crusted Quipper fish stuffed with basil squash and dire crabmeat.”

Here, players may be as detail-oriented or abstract as they please. It’s important to

dungeon masters to be mindful of players’ limits when it comes to cooking knowledge which, at its extreme, borders on chemistry. For example, if players wish to make a pie, a binding agent like cornstarch or gelatin (or in the fantasy world of *D&D*, perhaps, an ooze) may prove essential to a filling’s texture. One set of players might find that too granular a consideration. So, they’d mash fruit up with herbs and honey and bake it in a pie crust. For other players, the nitty gritty could prove to be an exciting challenge.

Mechanics for cooking may be separated into three parts: prep, execution and appearance. Each portion relies on skill checks. Two are listed per portion for added flexibility—if there’s nobody in your party who excels in Charisma, for example, a PC with great constitution can fill the role of “plater.” The dungeon master will choose which skill check works best with each stage of cooking and decide on DCs for each. After cooperatively deciding on a meal plan, it’s best for players to delegate tasks to each other based on ability scores.

If players are being asked to cook a meal to another character’s liking, the dungeon master may ask the party to average together the three skill checks into a final “taste” score, which, to taste palatable, must beat a designated DC.

- **Prep** relies on **Dexterity** or **Wisdom**. The PC(s) assigned to prep must chop up ingredients, debone or remove potentially poisonous organs from animals, properly preserve perishables, etc.
 - Examples of success: Chopped vegetables are of equal size; adding baking ingredients in the right order;

poisonous organs are removed and in-tact; no bones left in meat

- Examples of failure: Chopped vegetables are comically different sizes; dry and wet baking ingredients are combined poorly, so batter is lumpy; poisonous organs are not removed, making dishes inedible; fingers are lost
- **Execution** relies on **Intelligence** or **Strength**. The PC(s) assigned to execution must perform the actual cooking aspect of meal-prep. They're frying up fish, sautéing vegetables, baking cakes and simmering stews.
 - Examples of success: The food is cooked through; nothing is burnt
 - Examples of failure: The food is raw or burnt; the cook burns themselves
- **Plating** relies on **Charisma** or **Constitution**. The PC(s) assigned to plate the food must plate the food quickly, so it's still warm, without compromising its structural integrity. The meal ought to look appetizing! This role also involves taste-testing the food. So, if there's any, er, hazards, they're the first line of defense.
 - Examples of success: The meal appears edible; portions of the meal meant to be kept separate are separate; nothing is dropped on its way to be eaten; there are garnishes; the food tastes delicious!
 - Examples of failure: The food is everywhere except a plate; everything is mushed together; The food has grown

cold or is too hot; the food is poisonous or disgusting

Conclusion

Tossing some cooking challenges into a campaign can solve several common problems dungeon masters might have with designing a varied, complex and fun campaign. After an encounter, players might be left wondering: Why did we need to fight? What did we gain here, aside from a few experience points and a little loot? Repurposing monsters' bodies can add a little purpose to the average encounter. Also, if players aren't offered too many opportunities to collaboratively role-play in the process of dungeon-crawling, organizing a meal can help them all interact and fathom something together. It's also a great way for the party to get to know each other and be a little goofy.