

Columbia County 4-H Cupcake Wars – April 11, 2026 ***(Loosely based on the Food Network Series)***

2026 Theme: “175 Years and Still Going Strong”

Time of event:

9:00 Arrive and set up

9:15 Decorate cupcakes and create display

10:00 Presentations and Bite-ability Testing

- Team Presentation (random order)
- Presentation and Theme Reaction by Guest Cupcake Expert/s and Audience
- Team’s Choice Selection for each Division
- Guest Cupcake Expert/s Bite-ability Testing (random order)
- Cupcake Expert/s Choice Selection for each Division

10:45 Announce Selections

11:00 Clean-up Workstations

11:15 Awards

Note: Teams are invited to place extra cupcakes on the display table to share with audience members following the team presentations.

Location:

Health & Human Services Building, 111 E. Mullet Street, Portage. Meeting rooms 2-3.

Grade Divisions: Team must enter in the Division of the oldest member of their team. (See guidelines below for Cloverbud participation.)

- Division 1: Grades 3 – 5
- Division 2: Grades 6 - 8
- Division 3: Grades 9 and older

Objectives:

To promote self-confidence.

To develop public presentation ability.

To showcase baking and decorating ability.

To work together as a team.

To allow for self-expression in a safe supportive environment.

To develop safe food handling skills.

Orientation (*NEW for 2026*):

Cupcake Wars **required orientation** will be held on **March 7, 2026** at the same location.

Orientation will include food safety training plus tips, tricks, and techniques of cupcake decorating.

CUPCAKE WARS GUIDELINES –

Note: Each team will have **45 minutes** to frost and decorate their cupcakes **AND** prepare their display prior to the presentation.

Cupcakes –

1. Teams shall consist of two or more Columbia County 4-H members. Cloverbuds may be part of any team.
2. Participants **do not need** to be a member of foods or cake decorating projects, unless they intend to enter their cupcakes in the county fair.
3. Each team will create a display following the annual Columbia County Fair theme.
 - A minimum number of cupcakes is required which is equivalent to the number of team members. (For example, if you have 3 team members, you must display a minimum of 3 cupcakes). **Each cupcake must have a different cake and icing flavor.**
 - There is no maximum number of cupcakes required for the display.
4. Cupcakes must be made from scratch (no box mixes).
5. Each team will bring “naked” cupcakes. The cupcakes should not be frosted but should be in the paper wrappers.
6. Each team will bring the frosting mixed in bowls. The frosting should not be tinted prior to event. Teams will tint and place in frosting bags, if needed, at the event.
7. Participants need to exhibit knowledge of their recipe and bring three copies of each recipe.

Display –

1. Each team will be assigned to a preparation table and a display table. A team may bring their own card table.
2. Electricity is available at the event. Teams should bring extension cords if electricity will be needed.
3. Additional decorations may be used if the size does not exceed a card table display (34” X 34”), however, there is no minimum or maximum height for the display.

Food Safety –

1. Food safety: Each team should bring a food safety kit (enough for each member) which includes the following: plastic aprons, head coverings, disposable wipes, garbage receptacle (ice cream pail sized), non-latex gloves. Teams should practice proper food safety and be prepared to discuss food safety practice used by their team in their presentation to the judges. Guest Cupcake Experts will observe preparation to assist in determining the safe food handling score.
2. Each team must provide their own equipment. Teams cannot share equipment.
3. Handwashing facilities are available.
4. Each team is to clean up their preparation area at the end of the competition.

Miscellaneous –

1. Adult leaders may be on site but cannot assist with decorating the cupcakes or putting the display together.
2. Teams with additional cupcakes may share them with the audience between team presentations and bite-ability testing.

JUDGING GUIDELINES –

Team Presentation

1. Each team will present a verbal presentation to the Guest Cupcake Expert/s and the audience describing their team's efforts. Describe the steps your team followed to create your display. Details may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. How your team made decisions.
 - b. How you decided on your cake and frosting recipe.
 - c. How your team incorporated the theme in your display.
 - d. Skills your team needed to practice.
 - e. How you made and decorated your cupcake and created your display.
 - f. Role each person on the team played in creating your Cupcake Wars product.
 - g. What your team learned because of your participation in Cupcake Wars.
2. Each participant must complete a self-assessment form following team presentations.

Bite-ability Testing

1. Each team needs to select **3 different flavored** cupcakes from their display for the Bite-ability Testing.
2. The Guest Cupcake Expert/s will taste test each team's selected cupcakes for "Bite-ability".
3. Teams should be prepared to answer any questions asked by Guest Cupcake Experts. Think about where your cupcakes might be served and why you made the design decisions you did. Also, how will it be served?
4. The Guest Cupcake Expert/s will share their reaction with the team and audience. (See Bite-ability Testing Sheet for testing categories.)

Recognition/Awards:

Participation Ribbons and gift bags will be awarded to all participants.

One **Cupcake Expert Choice** will be awarded in each division based on bite-ability.

One **Best Overall Display** will be awarded based on participant and audience votes.

One **Best Overall Cupcake Flavor** will be awarded based on participant and audience votes.

Cupcake Wars Participant Checklist

Bring the following items to the event:

Cupcakes & Frosting

- Naked cupcakes (unfrosted, in paper wrappers)
- Frosting mixed in bowls (not tinted)
- Ingredients list and **3 copies of each recipe**

Decorating & Display

- Decorating tools (spatulas, piping bags, tips, etc.)
- Food coloring for frosting
- Display items (must fit within 34" x 34" table space)
- Optional: extra cupcakes for audience tasting

Food Safety

- Plastic aprons (one per team member)
- Head coverings (hairnets, caps, etc.)
- Disposable wipes
- Garbage receptacle (e.g., ice cream pail)
- Non-latex gloves (provided at event)
- Practice proper food safety—be ready to explain your process!

Equipment

- Mixing bowls, utensils, and any tools needed for decorating
- Extension cords (if electricity is needed)
- Towels or cleaning supplies for workstation cleanup

Other

- Completed self-assessment form (provided at event)
- Team spirit and creativity!

Columbia County Cupcake Wars Bite-ability Testing – Judging Score Sheet

Team Name	Possible Points	Score	Comments
Three Presented Cupcakes (different flavors)			
Bite-ability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate cake-to-frosting ratio • Ratio allows a complete bite without needing a fork • Cupcake size is balanced – not too large or too small • Paper wrapper is easy to remove • Cake stays intact when unwrapped 	10		
Frosting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flavor complements the cake • Texture is appropriate for the style of frosting • Frosting type fits the cupcake concept • Amount of frosting supports each bite – not too much or too little 	10		
Cake: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moist texture • Flavor is well developed • Ingredients enhance the overall taste • Crumb texture is appealing • Flavors blend well (not dry, burnt, or underdone) • Cupcake structure supports the frosting without collapsing 	10		
Cupcake Presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visually appealing overall appearance • Icing colors complement the flavor theme • Creative flair and originality are evident 	10		
Safe Food Handling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper attire to minimize cross-contamination • Bare-hand contact is avoided or properly managed • Workstation remains neat and orderly 	10		
Knowledge of Recipe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can explain ingredient choices • Can explain ingredient roles in both cupcake and frosting 	10		
Total Score	60		

Ways to enter Cupcake Wars in the Columbia County Fair –

NEW- Added for 2026 Fair

Foods

Junior Dept 25

- Foods & Nutrition Poster/Display (New Class, Lot 9)
 - 4-H Cupcake Wars Poster or Display (recreated from 4-H Cupcake Wars Event)
- Food Decorating (Class C, Lot 8)
 - 4-H Cupcake Wars Cupcakes (recreated from 4-H Cupcake Wars Event)

Current Fair Entry Process

Communications

Junior Dept 31

Class G – Cupcake Wars

- Youth in all project areas are eligible to participate in this class, but must have participated in the 4-H Cupcake Wars Spring Orientation and Event.
- Guidelines for the Cupcake Wars Spring Orientation and Event are available at the Columbia County Extension office and on the Columbia County Extension website.
- Teams will create a display that shows the process they used to create their “4-H Cupcake Wars” exhibit. Display information could include recipes, photos, equipment used, team roles and responsibilities, and decorated cupcakes recreated from the Cupcake Wars Event.
- The exhibit must reflect the current year’s fair theme.
- All team members must be present during the face-to-face judging unless an exemption is requested and approved, otherwise the entry will be penalized one placing.
- Team members will describe to the judge the steps followed to complete their exhibit using effective communication skills.
- All team members must enter the 4-H Cupcake Wars exhibit on their fair entry form in order to receive fair premium.
- All team members must enter in their specific grade area on the fair entry form to receive fair premium.