

1

Food, Glorious Food!

What better way for Floridians to show pride in our heritage, our towns, and the fruit of our fields or the catch of our rivers and oceans, than to host a food festival? These festivals have always been a means of uniting communities through celebrations of harvests and giving thanks for a plentiful growing season. They can be traced back thousands of years to celebrating the arrival of harvest time, the autumnal equinox, and the honoring of earth gods.

Combining the excitement of celebrations with the fresh taste of local foods, Florida's food festivals continue those traditions today—typically honoring a crop grown or seafood harvested in the region. From mullet to crawfish, frog legs to sausage, mangos to kumquats, garlic to swamp cabbage, flap jacks to chocolate, and anything and everything in between, there's a festival for every taste.

Florida's food festivals are ideal entertainment for the whole family. Besides the main attraction—delicious food—these festivals feature a variety of events. Education abounds at the “Garlic University” during Delray Beach's Garlic Fest. Country music fills the sprawling festival grounds in daily concerts at the Plant City Strawberry Festival. Eating contests are popular, as well as off-beat competitions such as the “pig chase” at the Jay Peanut Festival or the “Tickle Pig” contest at the Pig on the Pond where participants decorate



Heading to a kid's zone.

porta-potties. Like fairs or carnivals, food festivals often feature children's activities and exciting midways with their flashing lights, daredevil rides, and games of chance.



Playing on the midway.

Pageants are often highlighted by the crowning of the festival queen. Small or elaborate parades create fun for all ages with imaginative floats and marching bands. Races burn off calories—or build an appetite. Evenings are crowned with firework shows. Slower-paced attendees can meander through arts and craft booths, farmers markets, or displays of antique cars, fire engines, or farm equipment. For those strictly there for the food, many festivals hold recipe competitions or cookoffs.



Waving at a passing float.

The best thing about Florida's food festivals is that none of the rules your mother taught you apply. You can eat with your hands and put your elbows on the table, wipe your mouth on your sleeve, and lick your fingers before wiping them on your pants. It's no wonder people love food fests!

The Sunshine State is known internationally for its great food. The best places to find the heart and soul of tasty Florida fare is in the multitude of local food festivals held throughout the year in the state's

pleasant and welcoming climate. So get outdoors and enjoy the clear air and sunshine.

Many festivals have a small-town character, while others have gained nationwide recognition. Festival length varies—from one-day affairs to a week or more.

While most Florida food festivals are free or charge a nominal admission fee, and many offer free samples, some are ticketed events for admission and/or the food. Depending on the location, there may be a parking charge. Since fees change frequently, please contact the festivals ahead of time so there are no surprises. Keep in mind that many festival proceeds go to charity, which may make swallowing the cost more palatable.

At most food festivals, you go from booth to booth (pay as you go) and sample different foods or recipes of the same food. But others have whole meals for purchase or are sit-down meals. Festivals may feature a particular raw ingredient (like strawberries or tomatoes) while others involve preparing dishes onsite (like chili or barbecue). Or if you crave variety, “Taste Of” events typically feature the signature dishes of local restaurants.

Bon appétit!

Tips and Suggestions

- Always consult the website, call, or e-mail to confirm the details of each festival before you set off. On occasion events get moved or cancelled. Though we’ve checked and double-checked, you should still verify dates and times. Find out what day and time special activities will be held. You don’t want to travel even a short distance only to find the most interesting activity at the festival occurred a day or an hour before your arrival! Ask about admission fees—they often change year to year.
- Check the weather—always an important consideration while traveling. Bring rain gear, especially in the summer months when storms pop up without notice. If you’re at an outdoor festival and hear thunder, take cover as soon as possible. Florida isn’t called the Lightning Capital of the World for nothing. Fried food may be detrimental to your health, but fried you is downright hazardous.
- If you’re bringing kids or a large group, consider taking walkie talkies. If you split up you can contact each other without paying for cell phone minutes. Besides, they’re fun toys—even for grownups. Don’t forget to decide on a frequency channel before going your separate ways.

- Bring the sun protection your dermatologist (and mother) always hound you about—sunscreen, hat, water. It's hot in Florida.
- Wet naps or hand sanitizers will help with grimy hands, especially on the car ride home. You don't want a sticky steering wheel.
- Take a lightweight tote to carry purchases and essentials—like this book!

Book Organization and Event Listings

Each broad food category has a chapter in this book. Festivals are grouped under the appropriate category based on the primary food highlighted. Within each chapter, the events are listed by date held and then alphabetically. Though we took great effort to be thorough, there may be some events we inadvertently missed.

Each listing includes pertinent details for each festival, including the general date, location, contact information, description of activities, and featured food. In cases where a festival did not have a dedicated website, e-mail, or phone number, we listed the contact information for the local city, Chamber of Commerce, or tourist information bureau. These organizations often provide information for events in their local areas.

Admission prices often change from one year to another. While we have included specific costs when available, please allow for some variation. Public admission fees are coded as follows: Free, \$ = \$1-\$14, \$\$ = \$15-\$34, \$\$\$ = \$35+.

For those with kids, look for “- *Great for Kids*” printed beside the festival name. This indicates specific activities (e.g., games, parades, etc.) catering to children.

Various specifics for each festival may not have been available at the time of printing. Every effort was made to contact the festival organizer to verify the information, but we did not receive responses from them all. We opted to include the event regardless, knowing any responsible festival-goer will confirm the event before making plans!

The dates in the listing are general. For example, the date may be listed as “First weekend in March.” Consult the companion website (see next section) for the festival calendar for the current year.

Help us keep the festival information accurate. If you find that a festival has been dropped, moved, or changed dates, please let us know so we can update our information. Any new or changed festival information will be

posted on the companion website and considered for inclusion in the next edition of the book. Send us an e-mail either via our website contact form or to info@FoodFestGuide.com.

The book also provides directories of the festivals by region, month, and event name (alphabetical). Eat your way through the calendar and across (or up and down) Florida!

How to Use the Companion Website

The companion website (<http://www.FoodFestGuide.com>) to *Food Fest! Your Complete Guide to Florida's Food Festivals* offers many interesting features that complement the book. Among other things, the website includes a discussion forum, details for upcoming festivals, and a list of the Florida Chambers of Commerce.

Additional bonus features are available if you register on the website and then log in with your user name and password. Registration is free. This special area includes a yearly calendar of festivals so you can plan ahead. The calendar indicates the specific festival dates (e.g., March 10-11, 2006) when available for the current year. Optimally, this information can be printed and placed inside the book for quick reference. Also available to registered users is a listing of new festivals discovered since the printing of the book.

For more information, or to register and activate your account, go to <http://www.FoodFestGuide.com>. If you would like to send us information or provide feedback, please use the contact form on the website, send us an e-mail at info@FoodFestGuide.com, or drop us a note via the postal service P.O. Box 8598, Seminole, FL 33775. We'd love to hear from you!