

Museum on Main Street

LOCAL EXHIBITION IDEAS

Key Ingredients

Section 1: A Land of Plenty

- Topographical map of food resources in county, state, U.S.
- Local Native American food traditions, foods, methods of gathering, hunting, farming
Display: native cooking implements, baskets, foods, recipes, text/map/ illustrations describing what Native people from your area ate and why
- History of local ranchers/cowboys
Display: historic and contemporary juxtapositions of photos and stories (ranchers, horses, ranching equipment, elements of cowboy outfits, chuck wagon cooking equipment)
- Local methods and histories of hunting and gathering
Display: hunting/fishing equipment, family photographs, first-person accounts of gathering times
- Farming family histories
Display: historic/contemporary farm equipment, seeds, soil, farm family immigration stories, photographs, journals/diaries/letters
- Migrant workers' stories
Display: photographs, first-person accounts/introductions, recipes, samples of crops cultivated "here" and "there"
- For children: Highlight the international origins of local crops: where do the seeds come from and how did they get here?
- For children: Comparative displays of foods from the Old World/New World (tomato, potato, corn, rice, etc.); hands-on activity to move symbols correctly

Section 2: Local Flavors

- "Everybody Here Comes from Some Place Else" : With pictures and stories, map the immigration stories of twelve diverse local families; feature one or more recipes or food traditions they've brought to the community
Display: diverse ethnic recipes of residents (new & old) with photograph of each contributor, samples of food and their ingredients, equipment needed to make these foods, map of origin, immigration stories
- History of local farmer's markets / roadside stands
Display: historical photographs of markets or roadside stands, fruit ways, firsthand accounts, old signs, food labels, fruit baskets, scales, etc.
- Decide on the food specialty (ingredient or dish) that best represents your community (e.g. onion, beehive, bratwurst, chili, etc.); curate an exhibition showing its various uses in advertisements, parades, sports, politics, tourism, etc. How did our town/region come to be associated with this item? Does it accurately represent our cuisine?
Display: historic and contemporary signs, advertisements, kitsch, early photographs of specialty's origin in field or restaurant
- Hold a juried art show for artists of all ages/ media utilizing the food specialty that best represents your local town

- “What’s Our Dish?”: Illustrate local recipe/cooking variations on standard or symbolic dishes used widely in town; videotape disparate cooking methods, storytelling, show video in exhibition space
Display: videotape, photos of cooking processes, samples of variations on recipe, conflicting oral histories and stories of origin and preparation
- “Where’ve you been? What’ve you tasted?”: Create dynamic and changing exhibit made up of oversized map, case, or bulletin board that allows visitors to add tourist mementos that connect food/place/identity
Display: magnets, hats, bumper stickers, license plates, postcards, pins that highlight a place and its cuisine
- For children: Have kids create their own roadside sign advertising local food, crop or dish
- For children: Create child-sized pretend historic fruit stand with toy fruit, aprons, scales, etc.
- For children: Have kids learn steps to cooking/preparing/harvesting local favorite food/dish; create child-sized instructions with hands-on component to completion

Section 3: Dynamic Delivery

- “Canning: Memories, Technology, Excellence”: Interpretive exhibition of community members’ memories and mementos of canning
Display: family photographs, stories, canning equipment, old advertisements for cookbooks, equipment, and recipes
- “State Fair Winners/Town Canning Hall of Fame”
Display: historical family photographs, winning recipes over the years, ribbons, and don’t display any winner without a story
- Local examples of vintage packaging/food advertisements, juxtaposed with contemporary examples—interpret their uses and successes; have them critiqued by design and/or marketing specialists
- “Food During Wartime”
Display: ration books, sample soldier rations, eating utensils, cooking equipment, stories of feasts in the field, sample goodie boxes sent to soldiers, photographs of victory gardens, black market foodstuffs
- “Refrigeration”
Display: old ice boxes; photographs of iceman, gathering ice, local ice sources; video or oral/written histories of ice/refrigeration; cultivation tools; old & new refrigerators
- Biographies of local food heroes
Display: photographs, biographies, first- and second-hand memories, awards and samples of contributions, inventions or innovations (might even be beloved grocer, delivery persons, milkman, etc.)
- Evolution of food appliances/gadgetry: Select food appliances as they change over time, interpret them, explain impetus for technological change, effects of change on cuisine and tradition
Display: vintage or antique kitchen appliances with contemporary versions (e.g. blender, toaster, etc.), add narrative text which describes uses firsthand and any stories that relate

- For children: Formulate elementary kitchen technology questions with concealed answers: What did you do without Tupperware? How did you get popcorn without a microwave?
- For children: Create art station for kids to design their own advertising label for select canned goods from local community -- tape/paste them on to empty cans, display

Section 4: A Festival of Feasts

- “Barbecue: What is it?”: Collected objects, artifacts, photographs, and stories of barbecue as family event, as dish, as illustration of local/ethnic traditions
Display: barbecue ingredients, sauces, recipes, diagrams of meat cuts, barbecue cooking equipment, bbq aprons, photographs of local backyards with grills/smokers, firsthand memories of “the best BBQ I ever had was...”
- History of local festivals (holiday, food and heritage festivals, church gatherings, annual fund raisers)
Display: photographs, posters, stories of early town festivals, memories of organizers/participants, queens’ photos sashes, dresses, floats, etc.
- Histories of long-time local restaurants/cafes; include biographies, stories of patrons and workers
Display: restaurant memorabilia, bills, advertisements, menus, seating, tables, placemats, silverware, china, lighting, music, first person memories, historical photographs of patrons and owners, date memories, uniforms, etc.
- Exhibition on the architecture of eating on-the-go: campouts, drive-ins, fast foods, famous hotspots in neighboring towns or getaways
Display: recreated environments for campout eating, drive-ins, or picnics; may feature photographs and/or stories
- “The Local Salad”: Historical and contemporary first-generation immigration stories: what did German immigrants add to our local cuisine? What do Hmong or Indian immigrants add to our local “salad”?
- For children: Matching game of ethnic specialties/foods/cooking implements and their national or regional origins (e.g. pita, wok, keilbasa, fondue, etc.)
- For children: Reading area of children’s picture books about ethnic foods and family memories

Section 5: Home Cooking

- Table Settings highlighting different ethnic and family traditions of town residents
Display: actual table settings, may want to change weekly or host in conjunction with program/event, text should highlight unique table traditions/customs
- Home cooking: American kitchens by decade
Display: dioramas/recreations of decade changes in American kitchens, complete with cookbooks, appliances, decor, etc.; be sure to include sample food products from the era in which they were introduced and contemporary audiotapes with period music and/or local citizens telling memories of each specific decade
- “Thanksgiving Tables”: Complete table settings changed weekly during exhibition
Display: Table settings, Thanksgiving recipes, centerpieces, historic and contemporary photographs of Thanksgiving dinners, oral and written memories

organized via questions such as, “Do you remember sitting at the kids’ table?”
“What two football teams always play on Thanksgiving Day?” “Did your family
ever eat out for Thanksgiving?” “What was your loneliest Thanksgiving?”

- “Tea Settings” changed weekly
Display: samples of various teas, settings, silver, recipes of teatime snacks, the history of tea, tea maps, cultivation, rules for etiquette
- “Best and Worst of Local Family Food Traditions”: Guest-curated by community members (high profile, perhaps), who share food stories unique to their family. Give them a shadow box of uniform size, ask them to fill it as they will to answer a specific curatorial/exhibition question
- “Recipe Archeology”: What can we learn about our ancestors based on their recipes? Copy and enlarge one or more handwritten old recipes, diagram and interpret meanings/questions revealed in the recipe, e.g. how many did the recipe serve? What does that tell us? What ingredients were available or not available? What technology was used or not available? Is there something personal revealed in the recipe? On what occasions was the recipe made?
- Vintage Cookbooks
Display: cookbooks of different eras, highlight and interpret changes in cooking methods, ingredients; include local first person accounts of favorite and worst recipes, photographs of people with their favorite cookbooks
- For children: Etiquette quiz, design place settings for children to test their manners, label right and wrong methods
- For children: Have kids set the table, use actual tableware to set a table, reveal correct diagram; distinguish differences in setting the table in different cultures
- For children: Craft table at which they decorate recipe card dividers or recipe boxes

Overall exhibition ideas

- “Local Tidbits” -- review tidbits featured in Smithsonian exhibit, carry same theme throughout exhibition space by revealing little known facts and history of common foods and food traditions
- Photography of local architecture of local markets, restaurants, diners, and food factories; use as platform for architectural preservation
- Apron fashions
- Corporate histories of significant brands, e.g. Jell-O, Nabisco, Birdseye, Del Monte
- Live internet link to *Key Ingredients* Web site—*Key Ingredients* Web site will expand on American food history, visitors will be able to see changes in food history and culture through an in-depth timeline, search a national database for favorite recipes, and add their own recipes and stories
- ‘What Is This?’: Display exhibition guessing games on kitchen gadgetry of the past.
- Create a dynamic community cook-book, changed and updated on-site by exhibition visitors, organize cookbook via stories, recipe type, or holiday/ occasion, or accept interest to add to cookbook, volunteers call to gather recipes which are then compiled, displayed, and resold as museum fund raiser