

# Dear Boots,



## Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas



**Dear Boots,**

**My family does a chili cook off every football season and I'm looking for a winning recipe. What goes into a blue-ribbon bowl of Texas chili?**

- Bean Brother

As luck would have it, my family has a chili recipe that has been winning blue ribbons since the hottest wheels in town were attached to wagons. In fact, I think I've got a copy of the recipe around here. I just know I could find it if you give me a second to look. Wait, I just heard something. Did you hear that, Bean Brother? That loud, creaky, crunch? I'll be darned, I think that was the sound of my great grandfather rolling over in his grave.

I don't want to dilute the truth with a bunch of broth so I'm just going to

give it to you straight: No Texan in their right mind is going to just hand over a winning chili recipe. I'm all for brotherly love. Neighbors helping neighbors. And I happen to believe community building is the best use of human life-saving energy since the rodeo clown joined the circuit. But just giving somebody a chili recipe seems awfully close to just giving an 18-year-old kid the keys to a brand-new mansion. Everything seems slick right up until that point in life when you realize it isn't about what you get at the end of the road. That all along those darn coffee mugs were telling the truth: it's what you learn along the way.

But maybe coffee cup wisdom isn't your thing, Bean Brother? If that's the case, I get it. I tend to lean toward embroidery pillow messaging myself. So let's attack it a different way. If you were to ask 100 different Texans what goes into a great pot of chili,

you'd probably get (and this is just a ballpark) 100 different answers. A pot that wins in Harlingen may not take home the gold in Wimberly. Maybe in Lubbock, people prefer more heat than they do in Plano. If you go around asking people's opinions, and then attempt to actually cater to all those, you're only going to end up with one outcome: mediocrity.

I recommend that instead of asking others for guidance, get your hands in the mix yourself. Invite your own taste buds to the party. Chop up onion. Experiment with different chili peppers. Pour a tall glass of tea and have a sit-down with yourself to ascertain how you feel about the holy grail of Texas chili debates: to bean or not to bean.

There was a time when people had one certain way to make chili. But there was also a time when they thought wind power would never come to Texas. And that they needed

to blame every property tax increase on Californians. Now almost all of that has changed! The future is yours for the taking. Please don't doubt it just because the saying is often found on a mug.

Also, spoiler alert, even if you end up with the very best pot of chili this side of the Pecos, there's still a real chance your family may not like it. Keep in mind this has nothing to do with the chef you are today and everything to do with how you once blew up the microwave trying to make a bowl of mac 'n cheese. Family never forgets. But there are a whole bunch of other people out there you can impress—starting with yourself.

Love,  
Boots

**Dear Boots,  
Every Halloween when I was growing up, my father would drive us by haunted houses in the older part of town. This year I'm missing the tradition. Do you know if Waco has any good ones?**

- Looking to Get Spooked

Out in the piney woods of East Texas, there's a two-mile rambling road that's always getting patched but never rides smooth. By three o'clock on a summer day, it is hotter than a devil's pimple, and it just so happens to connect my grandmother's house with a small convenience store that sells ice-cold slushies. When I was a wee little boots visiting my grandma in the summer, she would fire up her golf cart so we could sojourn down that road and buy ourselves a couple of cherry slushies. As an adult I have sometimes found myself in a situation where I hear the engine of a rickety old golf cart roar to life, and in that moment something in my chest roars to life too. I understand the desire to return to those childhood roads, even if only for

an afternoon, to feel so carefree and cared for again.

Sadly though, I know not which roads to steer you toward. Around the time I began visiting my grandma in the summer, I also went on my first camping trip where I heard my very first ghost story.

Now this camping trip happened not far from the Houston suburbs and we were likely still a hop, skip and a jump away from The Gap. Nothing spooky was going to happen. But I was young and didn't yet understand the consolation that could come from a power-fleece-lined jacket. So when one of the adults started talking ghouls and ghosts, I got as scared as I'd ever been in my short life.

By the time I crawled in my sleeping bag, I was one fly fart away from a meltdown. With my heart pounding away, I realized it was decision time. I could spend my life waiting to see if a ghost was about to blow through the door. Or if every creak in the floor or cold gust of wind meant I was not truly alone. Alternately, I could not believe in ghosts. Let floor creaks be creaks, the wind be weather and spend my life worrying about things like whether I needed a power-fleece lined jacket in the shade of olive.

I chose the latter. And because that puts haunted houses out of my wheelhouse, my answer to you is: "I bet Waco does have some good ones." Please imagine my hand supportively on your shoulder as you use our worst friend, Google, to locate people in the area that might steer you toward them.

Happiest of hunts, but more importantly, happy trails on your sweet ride down memory lane. I'll be with you in spirit. But if the floor gets creaky, it ain't me.

Love,  
Boots

**Got questions for  
boots? Send them to  
*[boots@wacoan.com](mailto:boots@wacoan.com)***