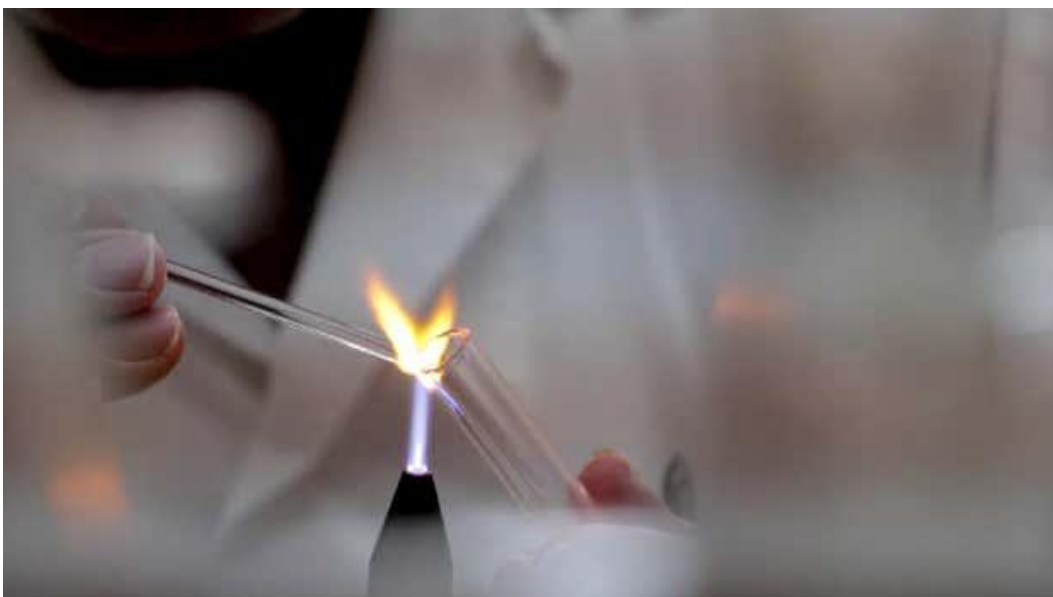


# Texas Chili History: How a Simple Bowl of Red Became the State Dish



When the weather cools down, Texans thoughts turn to chili, but the traditional bowl of red has a long history in the state. And, many factors of Texas chili history contribute to what constitutes a true bowl of goodness. Texans love chili so much, in fact, that it is the official dish of the state of Texas.



## Chili Queens of San Antonio



Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Though apocryphal stories exist about chili originating on the range, the true heroes – or heroines – of the tale are the Chili Queens of San Antonio. These women cooked food for nearly 200 years for the men at the Military Plaza, but by the mid-1800s, chili became the dish they were known for. They would prepare the dish at home and bring it out to the square to sell it. This continued until almost the mid-20th century when health officials put their collective foot down on homemade treats sold to the public.

### What Doesn't Go Into Texas Chili?



Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Though many have their own recipes for Texas chili, the official dish lacks certain ingredients which may cause others to throw up their hands in protest. According to Texas chili history, the ingredients included in the dish were those readily available on a daily basis. These include meat and dried chiles. (Chile refers to the pepper, while chili refers to the dish.) Nowhere in Texas chili history are beans or tomatoes included in the recipe. In fact, the official rules for preparing chili at the International Chili Cookoff prohibit the inclusion of these ingredients as anathema to the heritage of the dish itself.

### How Chili Spread to the Rest of the Country



Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Texas chili traveled to other parts of the country in a couple of ways. Notably, trail wagon cooks took the dish of easy-to-carry dried herbs and spices mixed with fresh meat along the cattle drives to places further north. In such a setting, beans and tomatoes would not travel well. For those not along the cattle drives, chili

arrived through news from the San Antonio chili stand at Chicago's Colombian Exposition in 1893. People from across the country arrived at the fair to try new things, and among those was Texas chili. After this, local chili parlors popped up in towns all over the United States, where local chili cooks would prepare their own version of the dish, giving rise to regional recipes that don't necessarily reflect Texas chili.

### Celebrating Heritage – Terlingua Chili Cookoff



Photo: [Facebook/CASI Terlingua International Chili Championship](#)

Today, Texas chili history is still celebrated at the official [International Chili Cookoff](#) in Terlingua. This competition started when a New York food writer described chili without beans as an abomination. Texas journalist Frank Tolbert challenged him to a cookoff with recipes from Texas and New York, the latter of which included beans. Though the competition ended in a draw, a chili cookoff has taken place annually in Terlingua since.

*References:*