Wonderful smells drift over the Tickfaw River, swirling up from a large black pot in the back yard of Justin Wilson's camp near Holden. The smell brightens anotherwise drab, rainy morning.

Behind the doublewide mobile home where Justin and his wife Jeannine live, a camera is mounted on a wooden platform set on concrete blocks. Another camera rests atop a platform near the roof. Five rows of folding chairs are lined up under the trees, which drip water onto the metal seats. A television monitor can be viewed from the chairs. Various crew members, clad in shorts and jeans, scurry back and forth. Others pop in and out of a mobile television unit parked in back of the camp.

The campers are trained on a long table filled with bowls of chopped vegetables, bottles of Chablis and Louisiana Hot Sauce, and other kitchen staples. A white tarpaulin hangs over the table, and a cuecard listing ingredients rests on there, about five cups. "Chablis-wine, spoken as one word, is emphasized with relish. He adds dried mint "instead of bay leaf - a half-bottle of Louisiana Hot Sauce. "Made from cayenne peppers - we use about three and a half tablespoons of this," he says, pouring more Chablis into the tomato-sauce cans to get every last bit of sauce into the mixture. With a great, rattling flourish, he tosses the empty cans into a wastebasket. He adds garlic, then says, "I don't want this to feel neglected, so I think I'll put a little Chablis-wine in it. I'm gonna put a little salt in that, not much," he says, throwing in a handful. "A teaspoonful. And a little olive oil to keep it from boiling over. Get in there, spaghetti, all of you," he commands, stabbing straws into the pot. "Ooh, he'ed on!"

He turns to a huge turtle shell hanging on the wall behind him. "This turtle rat behind me, we caught that devil and polished it up," he says. "Actually, my good friend Buddy Gregoire caught the turtle we gon' cook today. I got the meat, so he can have the shell."

"Got a roux going," he continues, peering into the black iron pot on the over-head camera gives the audience a glimpse on the monitor. "Don't that pretty?" With a long-handled spoon, he stirs the mixture of flour and bacon drippings, then turns down the fire. "I want to burn this, no. Then I'd have to start all over again," says the man whose cookbook advises slowly cooking a roux for an hour or more to get rid of the flour taste.

Shifting to the spaghetti pot, he gives it a quick stir as the cameras follow him back and forth. "Go 'head, there, you wormy-looking thing," he advises the pasta, as the audience giggles. He adds bell pepper and a handful of parsley that he calls "about a cup. And two bays, cayenne peppers - we'll use about three and a half tablespoons of this," he says, pouring the seed into his hand. The audience laughs, skeptical. "Let me see if that's a teaspoon," he says, pouring the handful into a teaspoon. It is, exactly. "I could tell to the seed that was right," he says triumphantly.

Back to the roux, he adds six cups of water. "Always put cold water in your roux to make it come back nice," he says. Audiences in northern states must occasionally wonder about such enigmatic rules.

"Always put cold water in your roux to make it come back nice."

— Justin Wilson

Sitting quietly in the back row is John Poise, owner/chef of Lafitte's Landing in Donaldsonville; he wears his white chef's jacket. Jeannine Wilson comes out to greet the audience. "Today Louisiana Public Broadcasting is taping the 25th of 26 programs of Justin Wilson's outdoor-cooking series," she tells them. "There are 284 stations currently airing the show we shot three years ago "Justin Wilson's Louisiana Cookin', California and Illinois are buying the most cookbooks."

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"I'm glad for you to see me, I on-tee," says Justin, then gets right down to business, lighting a fire under water for spaghetti. "I'm gonna put a little salt in that, not much," he says, throwing in a handful. "A teaspoonful. And a little olive oil to keep it from boiling over. Get in there, spaghetti, all of you," he commands, stabbing straws into the pot. "Ooh, he'ed on!"

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Suddenly taped accordion music wafts a Cajun tune through the air, and Justin Wilson strides onto the set, wearing a blue shirt, khaki pants, brown belt and his white caps imprinted "Justin Wilson's Louisiana Cookin" — Outdoors. The audience arranges itself in the folding chairs; many have brought pads and pencils to jot down recipes.

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— Justin Wilson

“Jes about did.”

— Justin Wilson