

Camp Cookery with Pizzazz

Chris Ellsay, The Leader, May 1992.

Beans and Kraft dinner may be camp traditions with your bunch, but our kids deserve better! We need to grab every opportunity to help our young members grow.

Take some imagination to the dinner table with you. Camp meals can translate into valuable program time, if you use them creatively. With some guidance and encouragement, your kids can learn to plan, use a food guide, budget shop, and prepare some great meals outdoors.

Camp cookery is not only a great learning experience; a good meal can make the difference between a crummy time and an awesome experience. You can't always guarantee beautiful weather but, after a days slog through rain and mud, it sure feels great to sit down to a hot cup of tea, pork chops with apple sauce, zesty rice with mixed vegetables, and chocolate cake for dessert. The leaders I work with are always surprised to discover that, with a little imagination, you can cook at camp anything you can bake, microwave, or broil at home.

To make sure your camping or hiking trip is a success, plan well. Here are a few tips to help you organize your food.

1. Trip duration and type of camp are your first considerations. If you are on a weekend outing, you can take along fresh fruit and vegetables with little concern for weight or spoilage, but on a 10-day trek, you need to stick to dehydrated or freeze-dried food.

2. Menu planning is essential. When you are exerting yourself, you need a good daily energy intake of 4,000 calories to keep you warm and happy. Since your usual energy needs are 1,500 to 2,000 calories a day, you will need to use a food chart to work out a way to double your normal intake.

3. Variety is the key to enjoyable meals. Never rule out a food idea until you have exhausted the possibilities for making it. For example, if you want chocolate cake in camp, just hollow out an orange, fill the shell half-full of cake mix, wrap in foil, and cook on an open fire for about 10 minutes. Delicious.

4. Weight is extremely important when backpacking. As an alternative to freeze-dried food, try looking for tasty items in your oriental food store, or in the bulk food and boil-in-the-bag sections at your local supermarket.

5. Great chefs use herbs and spices to create culinary delights. You can use them to dress up even boring freeze dried food. Try some celery salt, dried onions, dried peppers, basil, or chili peppers.

6. You don't want to carry unnecessary bulk. Remove the packaging from all your groceries. Measure food in portions needed for each meal and add all of the seasoning and other ingredients at home.

7. Plastic bags are the backpacker's best friend. Bag individual meals and seal with elastics (twist ties will puncture the other bags). It's easy to practise no-trace camping when you don't carry extra packaging, and you can store away your plastic bags for the next trip.

8. A bit of organization helps the cause. Keep the cooking groups small--three people maximum--so that they can prepare all their food on a single-burner stove. This holds down weight and gives Scouts an opportunity to plan menu, budget, shop, pack, and cook their own food on the trip.

9. Fuel and equipment make a heavy load. Consider this when you plan. You may want to choose long grain rice for the great

taste, but remember two things: your stove might not simmer, 25 minutes worth of fuel adds a lot of weight. If you use instant rice, egg noodles, and quick-cooking oatmeal, you can cut both the weight and aggravation appreciably.

10. You need to pack emergency supplies. For a weekend trip, take one extra meal. On a two-week trip, carry enough food for an extra day.

Breakfast is the stage you play the day on. Include something hot such as the instant oatmeal that comes in individual flavoured packages (two per person) and a hot drink. You can also have fresh fruit if the trip is short enough. A nice alternative for lightweight backpacking is dried fruit heated with water, sugar, and spices of your choice.

On a short trip, you might try the old bacon-and-eggs standby. Pre-mix eggs at home with milk and seasonings. If you are going lightweight, Harvest Food Works powdered eggs are almost indistinguishable from the real thing.

If granola is on the menu, mix in powdered milk at home so that you can just add water for a good nutritious meal. Lunch is often a hassle to cook and, when you're on the move, likely just isn't worth it. Peanut butter, jam, salami, dense bread like rye or multi-grain, crackers, cheese, trail mix, and lots of water or juice make for an excellent mid-day meal.

Dinner is when you can be creative with your cookery. Turn supper into an evening activity by trying some of these menu suggestions. And don't forget dessert: the kids won't!

Dinner #1

(heavy weight, perishable, fire)

Tin Foil Dinner (serves one)

2 carrots
1 onion

1 potato
1 hamburger patty

Cut vegetables into small pieces. Seal with hamburger into a foil pouch. Wrap the foil in wet paper towel and wrap again in foil. Cook on the coals of a fire until the paper towel is dry. Eat.

Banana Boats

1 banana cut lengthwise (like a canoe)
1 small handful chocolate chips
1 small handful mini-marshmallows

Fill the banana with chocolate and marshmallows, wrap in foil, and cook on the coals of a fire until the sweets are a great goo.
Eat with a spoon!

Dinner #2

(lightweight, non-perishable, stove or fire)

Super Spaghetti (serves 3)

1 packet spaghetti seasoning
1 tbsp dried onion flakes
2 tbsp dried green pepper
1 tbsp dried celery flakes
500 g precooked and frozen or freeze-dried ground beef
1 small can tomato paste
500 g vermicelli or egg noodles (cooks faster than spaghetti) 1/4 cup parmesan cheese

Add sauce ingredients to three cups cold water, bring to a boil, then simmer five minutes. Remove from heat. Cook pasta and serve sauce over pasta with a sprinkle of parmesan cheese.

Cake-in-an-orange (in a fire, as described earlier) or Fruit Cake (cold)

Dinner #3

(lightweight, non-perishable, stove or fire)

Pork Chops with Apple Sauce

Rice with Mixed Vegetables

- 1 package freeze-dried pork chops
- 1 cup dried apples seasoned with sugar and cinnamon
- 2 cups instant rice
- 1 package dried vegetables
- 3 tbs seasoning mix (to your taste)

Boil 5 cups of water. Cook pork chops in 1 cup water and the rice, vegetables seasoning mix in 2 1/2 cups. Simmer the apples for 3 minutes in the last cup of water.

Pour apple sauce over pork chops and serve with rice and vegetables. Serves two.

Spicy Popcorn

- 2 tbs dehydrated oil
- 1/2 cup popcorn
- 1 tbs spice mix (to your taste; I like it hot)
- 2 tbs margarine

Use dehydrated oil instead of regular oil and pop away. Then add your seasoning mix and margarine and enjoy.

I hope these menus show that, with just a little imagination and research you can adapt anything you cook at home to work in the wilderness. Remember, too, that our young members deserve every challenge we can give them. On your next camp, let the kids plan, budget, shop, and enjoy their own meals. A good knowledge of foil will always be a valuable life skill.

Good Scouting; may all of your experiments in cooking be as much fun as mine.)

Recommended Resources

Campers Guide to Outdoor Cooking, by John G. Ragsdale, Gulf Publishing Company; \$12.95

The Basic Essentials of Cooking in the Outdoors, by Cliff Jacobson, ICS Books Inc.; \$6.95

The Well-Fed Backpacker, by June Fleming, Random House; \$11.95

Program Links

Cooking Challenge Badge;
Campcraft: cooking requirements, all stages

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