
Backpacking Meal Basics

Norland Hall

Backpacking foods must:

- be light-weight (dry)
- be easy and quick to cook (to save fuel and time)
- be nutritious and have a high calorie value (backpacking is no time to start dieting)
- be commonly available in supermarkets
- taste good, providing variety and adventure in meals
- not spoil on the trip (5-14 days)
- be prepared in a manner that will make clean-up simple

Backpacking Meal Hints

Mark Hammer

The easiest way to get meals ready for a backpacking trip is to stock up on pre-packaged freeze-dried meals at your local sporting goods store, but this is expensive. If you are willing to spend some time preparing and drying your own meals before your trip, you can save 2x-4x the cost of the pre-packaged meals and have your favorite meals prepared the way you like them.

Your backpacking meals can range from very simple (see next article) to more elegant, depending on how much time you want to spend preparing them and how much cooking equipment you are willing to carry. There are many dried ingredients readily available at supermarkets. A wide variety of foods can be adapted for backpacking by doing most of the mixing and initial cooking at home, then drying. Then, the preparation at camp is to simply add boiling water and stir.

Foods can be dried in an oven (at 130^o-150^o) or in a food dehydrator. The advantage of a good dehydrator (with a fan) is that it works faster than oven drying. For fast drying and fast rehydration on the trail, avoid large chunks and oily foods. Weigh all foods before and after drying to determine how much water will be needed to properly rehydrate them in camp.

An easy way to dry sauces (spaghetti sauce, salsa, BBQ, green chile) is to spread them out on plastic wrap on a cookie sheet or dehydrator tray and dry them to a "leather". After drying, roll up or fold with the wrap separating layers. In camp, remove the plastic wrap, tear into strips or pieces, and rehydrate with boiling water.

After drying, package all the ingredients for each food item together in a heavy duty (freezer) Ziploc bag. You can also save weight and bulk by removing cardboard packaging from purchased items. Write preparation instructions on the outside of each bag, including amount of water to be added. Leave room in the bag for the food to swell as it rehydrates. Put all the items for one meal together in a larger bag and label it.

In camp, many foods can be “cooked” right in the bag. Add boiling water, seal well, and carefully shake or knead the bag (wear gloves - it’s hot!) to mix contents. Cleanup is easy - the empty bags are a little messy, but are light and easy to pack out as trash.

For summer backpacking at 5 miles per day, plan for 1.3-1.6 pounds of food (dry weight) per person per day. You will need more for larger people, for cooler weather, and for more strenuous trips.

Simple Backpacking Meals

Norland Hall

The process is to prepare all food as much as possible at home prior to the backpacking trip. This helps reduce weight, saves fuel, helps food preservation, and saves time on the trail. Also, all meals are prepared in a manner that will make clean-up and dishwashing very simple.

The basic equipment used includes a food processor to cut up vegetables, a microwave to cook meats, a dehydrator to dry almost everything and Ziploc bags to package each item. On the trail the only required equipment is a pot, plastic cup and spoon for cooking and eating.

Meat:

Bacon & sliced round steak. Cook crisp and dry in microwave.

Vegetables:

1 lb bags of frozen French-cut green beans, peas, etc.

Fresh, sliced carrots, potatoes, etc.

Carbohydrates: (The main part of any meal)

Dried refried beans, mashed potato flakes, oatmeal, cornmeal,
Cream-of-Wheat, etc.

Simple recipes: (Heat with water in cooking pot)

Refried beans + bacon + onion flakes = GOOD meal!

Mashed potato flakes + onion + bacon = GOOD meal!

Cornmeal + dry milk + sugar = GOOD meal!

Vegetables + hot water = GOOD meal!

Hot Apple Cereal

Erica Hammer

2 C oatmeal	1 1/3 C dry milk
1 C wheat germ	2 tsp margarine
1/2 C brown sugar	1 C raisins
1/2 tsp salt	1 C dried apples, cut into pieces
2 tsp cinnamon	

At home: Mix all ingredients. Store in gallon zip-lock bag.

At camp: Add 4-5 cups boiling water to bag. Let stand a few minutes. Serves 6

Gorp

Ryan & Mark Hammer

Basic:

raisins
chocolate chips
peanuts

Fancy:

chocolate-covered
raisins
pepitas or sunflower
seeds
oat bran sesame
sticks

Gourmet:

yogurt-covered
raisins
cashews or
pistachios
dried apricot bits
M&M's

Mix ingredients and package in Ziploc bags. Use for quick-energy snack or lunch on the trail.

Carrot-Raisin Salad (backpacking)

Mark Hammer

4 carrots
1/2 C raisins
4 individual packets mayonnaise

At home: Coarsely grate carrots and dry. Place carrots, raisins and unopened mayonnaise packets in a Ziploc bag.

At camp: Remove mayo packets. Add cold water to cover carrots and raisins. Rehydrate for 30 minutes, drain, mix in mayo. Makes 4 servings.

Camp Cooking

Sweet & Sour Shrimp (backpacking)

Ryan Hammer

- 1 lb shrimp
- 1 (16 oz) can pineapple tidbits
- 20 Maraschino cherries, halved
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 T dried onion
- 1 pkg sweet and sour sauce mix (see note)
- 2 C instant rice

At Home: Cook and peel shrimp, cut in half lengthwise. Thoroughly dry shrimp, pineapple, cherries, and pepper in oven (at 170°) or in food dehydrator. Place in Ziploc bag with onion. Put rice in separate gallon-size Ziploc bag.

Note: Choose a brand of sauce mix that doesn't require additional vinegar, catsup, etc, or take dried lemon juice powder to substitute for the vinegar.

At Camp: Add boiling water (enough to cover) into bag with shrimp and vegetables, and allow to rehydrate for 20 minutes.

Add 2 cups boiling water to rice and let stand for 5-10 minutes.

Drain shrimp/vegetables, saving enough water to mix sauce according to package directions. Add sauce mix and water to bag of shrimp/vegetables and mix thoroughly. Serves 4.

Spaghetti (backpacking)

Mark Hammer

- 3 C spaghetti sauce
- 3 C couscous

At home: Dry spaghetti sauce to a "leather" as described above in *Backpacking Meal Hints*. Place in gallon Ziploc bag. Put couscous in separate gallon bag.

At camp: Remove plastic wrap from sauce leather, tear into pieces. Mix thoroughly in bag with 2½ cups boiling water. Add 3 cups boiling water to couscous. Allow to set for 10 minutes, occasionally fluffing with a fork. Serve sauce over couscous.

Makes 4 servings.

Note: Couscous is a fine granular pasta which is ideal for backpacking because it cooks without boiling.

Gumbo

Mark Hammer

1 lb frozen corn, small kernel	1 T chicken bullion
1 lb frozen French-cut green beans	1 T dried minced onion
12 oz carrots, grated	1 tsp garlic powder
12 oz frozen okra, chopped	1 tsp dried parsley flakes
20 oz can stewed tomatoes, chopped	¼ tsp pepper
2 green or red bell peppers	½ C oil
1 lb spicy bulk sausage	½ C flour
1 lb smoked sausage links	2 ½ C couscous
	1 T file powder
	Tabasco sauce

At home: Roast, peel, and dice peppers. Dry peppers, corn, beans, carrots and okra. Make tomatoes into "leather". Brown bulk sausage and cook until semi-dry. Make roux by cooking oil and flour slowly in heavy pan for about 30 minutes until it is golden brown.

At camp: (Add cold water to corn earlier in day.) Boil corn, beans, carrots, okra, tomatoes, peppers, spices and dried sausage for 10 minutes. Add 3 cups boiling water to couscous. Slice the smoked sausage and add to vegetables. Stir in roux, and bring to boil to thicken. Serve gumbo over couscous, sprinkling with file powder and Tabasco sauce. Serves 6 hungry campers.

Pecan Pudding

Mark Hammer

1 sm pkg butterscotch instant pudding	1 ⅓ C powdered milk
1 sm pkg vanilla instant pudding	½ C chopped pecans

At home: Combine pudding mixes and dried milk in gallon Zip-Lock bag.

At camp: Add 4 cups cold water, mix thoroughly and let stand to thicken. Serve with pecans.

Camp Cooking

Turkey Dinner

Ryan & Mark Hammer

1 lb wafer-sliced turkey	1 pkg turkey gravy mix
1 can whole-berry cranberry sauce	1 pkg frozen peas
11 oz instant mashed potatoes	1 (16 oz) can yams
8 oz stuffing mix	½ C miniature marshmallows margarine

At home: Slice yams 1/8" thick. Dry yams, turkey, peas. Make cranberry sauce into "leather". Package each item in separate Ziploc bags, including appropriate amount of margarine with yams, stuffing mix, and potatoes. Note amount of water to be added to each bag.

At camp: Add boiling water to peas, cranberry sauce and yams. To turkey, add enough boiling water to rehydrate turkey plus amount needed for gravy mix. Allow to rehydrate for 30 minutes. Mix boiling water into stuffing and into potatoes. Add gravy mix to turkey. Add marshmallows to yams. Give thanks and enjoy! Serves 4.

This is a great celebration dinner towards the end of your trip.