

Emergency and Outdoor Bread Manual



How to Make Bread without an Oven

Methods and recipes for making bread without an oven in an emergency or while camping

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Bread is an important part of living. Yet, we may not always have an oven available. Terrorists may strike or Mother Nature may wreak havoc. It's nice to know, you can still have bread.

And for those of you who like to visit the woods, it's nice to be able to make bread at a campsite. In fact, many of these recipes and techniques have been developed camping through the years-often with scouts or other youth groups. Deep in the woods, bread is a welcome, filling commodity.

Whether it's an extended power outage or leading a group of Boy Scouts through the woods, it's nice to know how to make bread without an oven.

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Emergency Bread

A winter storm roared through the area. Winds reached nearly 70 miles per hour. Roads were suddenly closed, including the interstate highways, and hundreds of motorists were stranded. Icy snow pelted everything, clinging to power lines and poles. Soon there was a 300 mile swath of power outages. As the storm blew past, temperatures dropped toward zero.

At our home, we broke out lanterns and extra bedding. With the outside conditions, with the road closures, and the wide swath of the storm, we knew we could be without power for days. We began to think about how prepared we really were for an emergency. We had lots of food in the pantry—including bread mixes and flour to make bread, the staple of our lives—but no stove or oven.

What would you eat if you were stranded without power? It could happen; it does happen. A natural disaster, a breakdown in the delivery system as the Northeast experienced recently, or a terrorist strike against the infrastructure could leave you without power. Don't despair. You probably have a source of heat—a camp stove, a barbecue grill, a fireplace, or a place to build a fire to cook with. (Never use a grill or camp stove in an enclosed room.) In most cases, you can find a way to eat your daily bread—even without an oven.

Fry it. Those indulgent raised, glazed donuts are fried. You can do the same with any dough. Serve them hot with a little butter and syrup or honey and you will have a treat that the kids will clamor for—even without an emergency. Simply mix the bread as instructed and let the dough rise. Instead of forming loaves, roll or pat the dough on a counter until it is about ½-inch thick. Slice the dough into wedges, separate the pieces, and let them rise again until twice as thick. Heat a pan of oil until hot and slip the dough pieces two or three at a time into the hot oil. When one side is browned, turn the dough over. If the oil is hot enough, the dough should absorb little oil. When done, drain the fried bread on paper towels.

Pictured above is bread dough fried into five-inch wedges then slathered in butter and served with apricot preserves.

Boil it. Bagels are boiled. Actually, they are boiled and then baked. You can form your dough into a bagel shape, let it rise, and then gently slip it into a large pan of rapidly boiling water. Once the bread is firm, remove it with a slotted spoon, let dry, and then fry each side in a lightly greased skillet to create a crust and finish the cooking. The advantage in this technique is that you can use much less oil (and oil may be limited in an emergency) than deep frying.

Bake it. That's right—even without an oven you can bake bread. It's easy to do on most outdoor grills. (Be prepared. Always have extra propane or charcoal on hand but never use an outdoor grill indoors.) Baking requires heat from both

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above and below. If your grill doesn't have a cover, use a bucket or tub to capture the heat and direct it down onto the bread. (You want as much heat coming from above as below.) If the bread is too close to the heat—as it likely is—stick something under the bread pan to raise it—a couple empty tuna cans, an old brick—almost anything will work as long as it doesn't insulate the bread from the heat.

You can use a Dutch oven to bake bread. Line the Dutch oven with aluminum foil and place the dough on the foil or lay the bread pan in the Dutch oven. Stack hot coals on the lid.

You can bake bread over an open fire with two pans. Two pie tins will work for biscuits. To form a makeshift oven, put a large heavy pan on warm coals, a lid or baking sheet over the top, and stack on hot coals. Remember, you are trying to get as much heat from above as below. (The tendency is to have too much heat at the bottom.)

A good place to practice these techniques is on your next camping trip. You can become a real pro at making unconventional bread while enjoying the treat of fresh bread while camping. We guarantee that fresh bread over an open fire will make you the envy of the campground.

With a little imagination, you can bake almost any bread without an oven. If you want to try frying bread, most white or wheat bread recipes are nearly foolproof. Even without the emergency, it won't go to waste.

We can hope that disaster never strikes but it's nice to know that those bread fixin's in the pantry can be used in an emergency.

Making Bread Outdoors

The snow is almost gone and you have spring fever. You're thinking about those camping trips you're going to take this summer. Food is a big part of camping and bread is a big part of eating. Bread just tastes better outdoors, it sticks with you through those active days and there's a sense of accomplishment in making bread without an oven. Here are some ways for making bread in the great outdoors.



- **Fry Bread:** Fry Bread can be the hit of any camping trip meal, especially if there are kids along. Serve fried yeast bread with syrup or jam for breakfast or rolled in cinnamon and sugar as a doughnut-like pastry. They can be cooked in an RV, over a camp stove, or an open fire. We've cooked these at almost 11,000 feet—though we had to stick the dough in a sunny tent so that it would rise.
- **Steamed Bread:** Steamed breads are great at home or in the woods. All they take is a tin can or a deep pot and can be cooked on the grill, over a fire, or on a burner. No oven is required.
- **Indian Flatbread:** This is a quick and hearty camping bread that lends itself to a homemade mix. Mix it up at home and throw it in the RV or the backpack. When you get there, you can cook it with only a frying pan and because it is not a yeast bread, it's quick.
- **Makeshift Pizza on the Trail:** For a number of years, we took groups of Explorer Scouts into the Beartooth Mountains of Montana. A half day's hike from the trailhead are some broad meadows with two beautiful streams running through them. We dubbed them Pizza Meadows—we always stopped at the edge of the meadows to make a pizza lunch.

To make these pizzas, we packed a couple of Italian flatbreads the size of our frying pan—in fact, we nestled them in the frying pan to protect them on the trail. We would build a small fire with flames only a foot high. While the fire was burning down, we would cover the bread with tomato paste, sprinkle the top generously with Italian herbs, add pepperoni and mushrooms, and smother it in cheese. We would cover the pan in aluminum foil, nestle the pan into the coals, and wait for the cheese to heat to bubbling. Granted, these pizzas do not match those at the pizza shop but they are quick, energy-filled, and better than most trail food.

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Baking Bread in a Dutch Oven

Dutch ovens were made for baking. In the hands of a practiced baker, a Dutch oven will create beautiful breads and desserts. (Though some of us tend to burn breads in a Dutch oven.)

You can always bake bread in a well-oiled Dutch oven but instead of baking directly in the oven, consider this method: Put the dough in a baking pan and the pan in the Dutch oven.

Recently, a reader from California told us of her success baking bread with a pan inside of a Dutch oven. She used a mix for Irish Potato Bread. This mix creates a large loaf and she made it according to package instructions. She formed the dough into a round loaf and placed the dough in a greased nine-inch metal pie pan. She then set the pan atop small rocks in the bottom of her twelve-inch Dutch oven. She put the lid on the Dutch oven and the oven on ten briquette coals. Another fourteen briquettes went on the top. She baked the bread for 45 minutes, turning the lid occasionally. She was baking at an elevation of 7,000 in the Sequoia Mountains.

“I was surprised and delighted to find that the bread was perfect,” she said. “The crust was brown on top and it was a real treat . . . a great success.”

You should have similar success baking rolls on a baking pan or a loaf in a traditional bread pan. To get the right-sized loaves for a Dutch oven, consider bread machine mixes or recipes for single loaves. A bread machine mix will give you that single loaf or smaller batch of rolls, just right for a Dutch oven. If you crowd two loaves into a Dutch oven, there may not be adequate air circulation between the loaves. Without adequate space, the loaves will tend to be lopsided.

It is important that you elevate the pan off the bottom of the Dutch oven using small stones so that it does not burn the bottom of the bread. Make sure that you have enough top clearance so that the rising bread does not reach the lid.

You can use this same technique to bake great desserts or pastries. Consider baking sweet rolls or pastries in a raised pan in your Dutch oven.

Biscuits

Buttermilk biscuits can be baked wonderfully well in a Dutch oven. The heat of the Dutch oven causes an “oven burst” of steam that helps make the biscuits light and fluffy, they don’t take long, and they brown up beautifully.

In some parts of the country, buttermilk biscuits are a staple and a comfort food whether in an emergency or out camping. When time is scarce and you may not have the time to roll and cut the dough, here's the answer—drop-style biscuits. You can bake them directly in a well-oiled Dutch oven or in an elevated pan as described above. We have a straight-sided, ten-inch cake pan that is perfect.

Here's the recipe that we recommend.

Easiest Buttermilk Biscuits

2 cups all purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
2 teaspoons sugar
3 large eggs
1 1/2 cup milk
1/2 tablespoon sugar
1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 pound (one stick) cold butter
1 cup plus one tablespoon buttermilk (if buttermilk is not available, use fresh milk or reconstituted dry milk with one tablespoon of lemon juice added)

Directions:

1. Measure the flour. Add the baking powder, baking soda, sugar, and salt and stir these ingredients into the flour. Slice the cold butter into the flour mixture. Use a pastry knife or two kitchen knives to cut the butter into the flour mixture. Work the butter into the flour mixture until you have a coarse, grainy mixture. (See picture.)



3. Make a well in the middle of the flour and pour the buttermilk into the flour mixture. Stir until just moistened. The dough should be of a consistency like drop cookie dough or just a bit stiffer. If it is not moist enough, add another tablespoon of buttermilk.

4. Spoon the dough into rounded mounds in the bottom of the Dutch oven or a pan to go into a Dutch oven.

5. Bake in a hot Dutch oven for 12 to 14 minutes or until the biscuits begin to brown. Remove the biscuits and let them cool. If they are left in the Dutch oven with the lid on, they will sweat and become soggy.

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Baking Bread on the Grill

One of the slickest tricks we know is baking bread on the grill. Once you get to know your grill, it's easy—like baking your favorite recipe in the oven.



We can think of all kinds of reasons to use the grill. You can enjoy fresh baked bread while camping, or at the cabin, or at the next family reunion. Sometimes, it's just nice to get out of the kitchen, enjoy the spring air, and bake outside. (Watch the neighbors turn their noses upwind when the smell of fresh baked bread wafts over the fence.) And in the summertime, you don't have to heat up the kitchen to bake. Finally, if there is ever an extended emergency when the power is off, you may have the only fresh bread in town.

You can bake nearly anything with a covered grill. (If your grill doesn't have a cover, improvise with a large inverted pot.) The heat rises and circulates in the covered area just as it does in your oven. The heat source can be charcoal, gas, or even wood. We prefer gas because it is easier to control and does not impart a smoked taste to the bread—but in an emergency, don't be picky. Since it is hottest near the flames, elevate the bread to get it away from the heat. Some grills have a secondary shelf that you can use or create a shelf with a baking sheet and four bricks, stones, or cans.

Just like with your oven, the trick to grilling bread perfectly is controlling temperature and time. If your grill comes equipped with a thermometer, you've got it made (though ambient temperatures and winds may impact how well your grill retains heat). If you have a thermometer, just heat to the temperature designated on the package or in the recipe. If not, guess. After a few loaves you'll have it perfect but we bet that the first batch off the grill will be just fine.



Your grill can be as versatile as your oven. In preparing for this article, we used white bread mixes but any mix or recipe will do. We mixed according to package directions. After it had risen, we formed one batch into oval country loaves, another into

hamburger buns, and another into dinner rolls.

Rolls and buns will probably bake in 15 to 20 minutes and loaves will take 20 to 30 minutes depending on size and temperature. An occasional peek as it nears completion to see how your bread is doing is okay.

We made twelve giant-sized hamburger buns, just the ticket for that quarter-pounder. We scaled the buns at four ounces each. To make hamburger buns, form the buns as you would dinner rolls then press them flat several times until they are disc-shaped as shown in the picture to the right. Cover and let rise.



Just before baking, we washed the buns with an egg white wash (whisk one egg white with one tablespoon of water) then sprinkled them with sesame seeds. On our grill, we baked them with the heat turned about two-thirds open for about 18 minutes.

For the dinner rolls, we used an 8 1/2 x 15-inch pan and made 20 rolls scaled at 2.5 ounces each.

We made two country style loaves from one double mix. If you look closely you'll see that we forgot to slash the tops to release the steam and consequently ended up with a split on the side of the loaf. Don't do as we did—score two or three quarter-inch deep slashes on the top of the loaf just before you begin baking.

Here are a few more hints to help you along the way:

- Bake the buns before the burgers. The bread can cool while you cook the rest of the food. Burning grease dripping from the burgers makes the temperature harder to control and the soot can stain the bread.

- If you are letting your bread rise outside where the temperature may be less than indoors or where breezes may swirl around the bread, consider using a large food-grade plastic bag as a greenhouse. Simply slip the bread dough--pan and all--inside the bag, inflate it slightly, and close it. If the day is cool, set the bag and the bread in a sunny warm place to capture solar energy.



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- Grills tend to not circulate the hot air as well as ovens. To keep the bottom of the bread from burning, place one pan beneath the other. The second pan will tend to insulate the bottom of the bread and keep it from burning. Sometimes place a wire rack between the pans for even more insulation.
- If your bread is baking faster on one side than the other, turn the pan 180 degrees part way through the baking cycle.
- The tendency is to burn the bottom of the bread. Place the bread as far away from the flames as you can, even if it means elevating the bread.

We hope that you have fun baking bread outside this summer. We do know that you will be the envy of the neighborhood, campground, or RV park.

Steamed Bread at Home or Camping

Steamed breads are so versatile. We love the outdoors and are always looking for interesting and different foods that we can cook while camping and steamed breads can be cooked as you lounge around the campfire. They make wonderful treats at home. And they make great emergency fare since you don't need an oven or even a range to cook these breads.

Many heritage cookbooks have recipes for steamed bread but you can experiment with quick bread recipes. Many will work steamed as well as baked. Steamed breads tend to be moister and denser than most quick bread recipes.

We put the following recipe together for a trip into the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming with a group of Varsity Scouts. We assembled the ingredients in plastic bags before leaving home. At the camp site, we started it cooking next to the morning fire and by the time breakfast was over and the dishes were done, the bread was ready. It was a little rich for morning food--more like a cake than a bread--but these backpackers didn't seem to mind and it certainly turned out good enough to be a great treat at home.

Apricot-Date Nut Bread with Caramel Sauce

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup apricot nectar
2 cups chopped dates
1/2 cup chopped Brazil nuts

Caramel Sauce

3 tablespoons butter
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1/2 cup water
1/3 cup dry milk
1/2 teaspoon vanilla

In a medium bowl, combine the dry ingredients. (If you are taking this camping, combine these ingredients in a plastic bag before leaving.)

Stir in the juice until just combined. (An individual serving-sized can of apricot nectar is just about the right size.) Stir in the dates and nuts. (If you prefer, you can substitute raisins, dried apricots, or cranberries for the dates. Of course, you can use your favorite nuts.)

Pack the dough into a well-greased large can or other cooking container. Cover the top with heavy foil and tie it securely with string. The objective is to capture steam inside the container to cook the bread.

Place the can on a rack in a large pan or kettle. (At camp, a few clean pebbles work as well as a rack.) Fill the pan with water and set it to simmer. Let the pan simmer for two hours, adding water as necessary. When done, invert the bread onto a plate and slice to serve.

For the caramel sauce, melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the sugar and cornstarch and stir. Then stir the water and dry milk together and add to the pan. Cook and stir until thick and bubbly, about five minutes at low heat. Add the vanilla. Serve hot or cold over the nut bread. (For camping, put the dry ingredients in a plastic bag adding the vanilla to the brown sugar. Melt the butter; add the dry ingredients and then the water.)

Fried Bread

When we think bread, we think baked—but donuts and pancakes are examples of breads that are fried. We would like to introduce you to fried bread choices that will do in an emergency, work wonderfully well on camping trips, and are even a treat at home. We suggest trying some of these at home—you'll discover that your family likes these and become familiar with them before using them in the woods or in an emergency.



Flatbread

While any bread recipe can be used to make fry bread in an emergency, here's one that is a camping favorite and would be a staple for us in an extended emergency. It's simple, kids like it, and it can be made on any heat source. It's not a lot of trouble and you don't have to wait for the yeast to work. When we go on youth backpacking trips, this is a staple.

We served it on a dark night early last spring in the Big Hole Mountains to a group of hungry venture scouts. Served around the campfire with hot maple syrup, this was a real hit. It's called Indian Flatbread. See the sidebar for a maple syrup that you can store or take backpacking.

Indian Flatbread

This makes a quick side dish to feed the kids, a bread that you can make without an oven, and a great trail bread. You can double or triple the recipe depending on how big your tribe is.

4 cups bread flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
1 cup dry milk solids
1 teaspoon salt

Trail Syrup

(Emergency or Camping Syrup Mix)

Measure two cups of granulated sugar into a heavy duty plastic bag. Form a depression in the sugar and drop in 1/2 teaspoon imitation maple flavoring. The sugar will absorb the liquid flavoring. Seal the bag and place inside a second bag if necessary.

When ready to serve, mix the sugar with one cup of boiling water and stir until the crystals are dissolved. Reheat if necessary. (When we make this at home, we add corn syrup for thicker syrup.)

2 tablespoons sugar
1 1/2 cups warm water
Enough vegetable oil to fill the frying pan to 1/2-inch deep.

Mix the dry ingredients together. Form a depression in the dry ingredients and slowly pour half the water in. Mix and add the remaining water as needed to form a soft but not sticky dough. Knead the dough lightly. Cut pieces from the dough and form them into round discs about 1/4-inch thick.

Heat the oil until hot. When the oil is hot enough, a small piece of the dough placed in the oil should brown quickly but not burn. Slip the dough pieces into the hot oil, fry them until brown on one side, and turn. When done, remove them to paper towels. Serve them hot as a bread or with syrup or honey as a side dish.

Sopaipillas

We like the versatility of sopaipillas. They are great at home as an accompaniment for meals, a vehicle for our favorite Mexican foods, or dipped in cinnamon and sugar and served as a snack for the kids. But they also work as camping food or in an emergency. They can be made ahead of time as a mix and they work as great, fresh bread on a backpacking trip. And keep them in mind for emergency bread—they can be cooked over any heat when the power goes out. Best of all, they are quick and easy.



Here's a recipe that works well and can be used as a mix. It can be frozen for long term storage but will keep for weeks without refrigeration.

Santa Fe Sopaipillas

2 1/4 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
1 tablespoon sugar
1/3 cup dry milk
3 tablespoons shortening
3/4 cup cool water

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Optional cinnamon-sugar coating:

1/3 cup sugar

1 tablespoon cinnamon

Directions:

1. Mix together the dry ingredients. Cut in the shortening. At this point, you have a mix. Store the mix for no longer than thirty days in the pantry, six months in the refrigerator, or two years in the freezer.
2. To use the mix, place the ingredients in a medium bowl. Form a depression in the middle and pour in the water.
3. Cut the water into the mix. The dough will be crumbly and dry. Remove to a clean surface and knead for two minutes. You will have a stiff dough.
4. Form the dough into balls the size of golf balls. Smash the balls flat with the heel of your hand until they are no more than 1/4-inch thick.
5. Heat cooking oil in a heavy fry pan or Dutch oven. The oil should be 3/8-inch deep and hot enough that there is a slight sizzle when the dough is placed in the oil.
6. Fry each side until brown. Dip in cinnamon and sugar if desired.

This recipe will make about a dozen three-inch sopaipillas.

Pancakes: Not Just for Breakfast

Pancakes don't have to be a sweet breakfast food. We're fascinated with savory pancakes. It's a great, quick way to get bread with a meal without heating up the oven.

Again, unusual pancakes make great camping or emergency food—solid, stick-to-your-ribs food without a lot of fuss. Use your imagination when making pancakes; we like this combination of corn and cheese in a bread.



Colorado Corn Pancakes with Cheddar-Onion Sauce

For the sauce:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese
- 1/2 small onion, grated

For the pancakes:

- 1/2 cup stone ground cornmeal
- 1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 15.25-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 1/4 cup milk, more or less

Directions for the sauce:

1. Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan. Stir in the flour to make a paste.
2. While on low heat, add a little of the milk and stir until combined. Add the rest of the milk a little at a time, stirring constantly. Continue heating, stirring regularly, until the sauce starts to bubble.
3. Add the cheese and onion and stir until smooth. Set aside.

Directions for the pancakes:

1. Mix the dry ingredients together in a medium bowl.
2. Whisk three eggs together in a small bowl. Add the milk. Add the milk and egg mixture to the dry ingredients. Add the corn and melted butter and stir until combined. Add more milk as needed to bring the mixture to the consistency of pancake batter.
3. Cook as you would pancakes.

Food Safety: Living without Refrigeration

How long will your food last without refrigeration? There are enough bacteria and mold spores in the air to contaminate any food left out. If conditions are right, they will multiply and your salad or casserole will become unsafe. The primary condition required for bacteria is temperature—between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, bacteria will multiply. So, chill it or heat it. Get the temperature below 40 degrees or above 140 degrees. (Some high sugar content foods, like properly formulated pies, will not support bacteria growth even at room temperatures.)

The longer that the food is left out, the more bacteria it will contain. The warmer the environment, the faster the bacteria will multiply. The greater the contamination before refrigeration, the more bacteria will grow as the food is brought to room temperature. So what is the answer? The official answer from the State of Idaho is that foods should not remain between 40 degrees and 140 degrees for more than four hours in total from initial processing to consumption. Bacteria begin to grow in the food as soon as the temperature is suitable. When chilled, the bacteria become dormant only to start growing again when the temperature rises. After four hours of growth, foods may be dangerously contaminated.

You and I don't know how long the food was above 40 degrees in the processing plant, in the delivery truck, in the grocery store, or maybe on the way home so it pays to minimize the time at room temperature. Some experts say that it is okay to leave food out for two hours below 80 degrees or one hour above 80 degrees. If we follow that advice, we won't exceed two hours from the time the food comes off the stove until it goes into the refrigerator. That dictates keeping the food hot—above 140 degrees—until serving time and refrigerating the food soon after meals.

Don't leave hot foods on the counter or stove to cool. Modern refrigerators have enough cooling power to cool hot foods without raising the ambient temperature too much. Transfer hot foods into shallow glass or plastic containers—no more than three inches deep—and place them in the refrigerator with enough room around each container so that the air can circulate.

Proper refrigeration will not only keep foods safer but protect the quality and nutritional value as well.

What to Do When the Power Goes Out

We heard from someone in Florida who had been pounded by a hurricane and whose power had been out for several days. Gratefully, they and their family are all right. But what about that food that was in the refrigerator or in the freezer. Is it salvageable?

Follow the cardinal rule—when in doubt, throw it out. Remember that bacteria will start growing as soon as the food temperature reaches 40 degrees. In a warm climate like Florida, food is only safe for one hour outside of the refrigerator.

Keep your refrigerator and freezer closed. An unopened refrigerator should keep foods cold for up to four hours and a freezer that is half full for 24 hours. Evaluate each item individually when the power comes back on. You should have an insta-read thermometer in your kitchen. (If you don't have one, pick one up at the department store or purchase one on our site. They are only \$10 or so.) Use the thermometer to determine the temperature of your food. If the temperature of the item is above forty degrees and you think that it might have been so for several hours, throw it out.

If you think the power is going to be out for more than four hours, pack meat, milk and dairy products into a cooler with lots of ice. Depending on the climate, they may last a day or two.

A while back, we read a story of a lady who lost the power to her freezer. She had lots of chicken that she had bought on sale. Rather than let it spoil, she cranked up the barbeque and cooked all the chicken. She then went through the neighborhood sharing chicken with the residents. Since they were all without power and meals were difficult, I bet she was a real hero.

Campfire Cooking Tips

If you are going camping this summer, don't miss these tips—especially if you are camping with kids. Have a great time and leave the woods better than you found them.



Divide and teach: Make sure each kid has a cooking related chore. One suggestion is to divide the work into fire building, cooking, and clean-up and then rotate the chores. Of course, you'll have to help with younger children. Think of it not so much as a way to get the work done (though that helps) but the means of teaching kids outdoor skills and building confidence in the outdoors. You'll be surprised how interested and capable even young children will be.

Plastic containers: Paper containers don't work well on camping trips. Consider plastic containers and you'll keep your precious food dry and have less trouble with critters. It will last longer too. Put sugar and salt in plastic containers with lids that snap on firmly—or even better, screw on. Any of your dry goods, such as pancake mix or rice, are candidates for plastic. Use a plastic pop-up container for salad or vegetable oil. (Put a piece of tape over the top if you are afraid it will open accidentally.) Be sure to label your containers.

The kitchen cupboard: We have a plastic “catch-all” container that we call the kitchen cupboard. It catches all the little extras that sooner or later, are handy around camp. All the spices are in the kitchen cupboard as well as extra matches, candles, lantern mantles, Ibuprofen, moleskin, and dozens of other little goodies that have accumulated over time. Here you will find a needle and thread, a small roll of duct tape, a length of tie wire, and a small screwdriver along with a canister of cooking oil and a little extra flour, just-in-case. At the end of the season, throw any unused perishables out and restock in the spring.

The kitchen cupboard has become one of our most valuable camping accessories. Consider buying an inexpensive tackle box at the local department store and converting it to your kitchen cupboard.

Leave it better than you found it: It's common courtesy to clean up the campsite before leaving. We think the campsite should be left cleaner than when we arrived. Assign one of the kids the role of “detective”. His or her job is to see if they can “detect” any signs of the family's presence.

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Don't burn aluminum: Don't throw foil wrappers or aluminum beverage cans in the fire. They might look like they burn but they don't. They simply melt into the ashes and contaminate the soil and the campsite. Pack 'em out.

Campsite dishwashing: The dishes have to be washed. If you use biodegradable soap, you will have less impact on the environment. And no one likes to see old noodle strung around the site—not to mention, they attract critters. Bring along an old colander and pour your dishwater through the colander to retrieve bits of food. If you don't want to bring a colander, consider cheesecloth. And never washes dishes at the water pump.