



CAMPFIRE COOKOUTS

Family-friendly recipes plus great tips from parents who love food & the outdoors.

by Donald Fraser

Many of the magical memories of family camping trips occur at mealtime. Cooking around – and sometimes over – an open fire makes everything seem more like a wilderness adventure. Kids get to take part in ways they never would at home, roasting foods on sticks, helping to create makeshift kitchens, and even foraging for berries.

And then there is the food itself. “Food just tastes better when you are camping,” says adventurous mother of two, Alix. “The fresh air and activity make the whole family hungrier. And the woodsmoke adds flavour that you can never recreate at home.”

Dinner in particular is the time when the whole family comes together for a shared activity. While camping often provides sensory overload, dinner offers up some quiet time – which all parents can appreciate. It is the perfect warm-up for sing-a-longs, games, or even an evening “ghost” story.

I talked to several well-traveled camping parents about their culinary experiences and found that they were all enthusiastic about sharing memories, tips, and recipes.

Keep breakfast simple

“Be prepared” is Alix’s motto, and it should be yours too if you want positive camping cookout memories. “I like to have ingredients pre-cut, pre-measured, and, preferably packed together in the same bag or container,” says Alix. “I also make sure that we are having easy to prepare foods. That way, there is less fuss, muss, and downtime for the kids.”

When it comes to breakfast, Alix believes in simplicity. “Kids are going to want to get going – they’ll be itching to start the day’s adventures. The last thing they are going to want to do is sit around waiting for breakfast.”

Her two main breakfast staples? “I love having oatmeal,” she says. “It is super quick,

filling, and has lots of carbs for lasting energy. And you can pack it with either fresh or dried fruits to make it even healthier. This is particularly fun when you’ve picked your own raspberries, blackberries, or blueberries during your camping trip. When we have a more leisurely day planned, we all love pancakes.”

For those who are in even more of a hurry, a simple bagel with cream cheese will hit the spot and get the kids fueled for fun.

Of course, some folks like to linger over breakfast. Dave and Anna Russell own a gourmet food shop, and love to cook. “When I was a kid, my family never camped,” recalls Anna. “Dave, on the other hand, was an avid back-country hiker and camper. As a family, we have struck a happy medium: car camping. For the last dozen years our camping trips have involved a minivan full of tents, sleeping bags, folding chairs, and a well-equipped camp kitchen.”

Camp Breakfast Hash

- 1 can of corned beef (or 4-6 fresh breakfast sausages)
- 1 can sliced potatoes
- 1 can mushrooms
- diced onion and bell pepper
- vegetable oil
- eggs
- favourite seasonings

Slice or chop corned beef (or sausages) and brown in a skillet.

Set aside on a plate with a pot lid over top

to keep the meat warm. Reserve the fat in the skillet.

Drain the canned potatoes and brown in the skillet until golden. Set aside with the corned beef.

Soften the onions and peppers in the skillet, adding oil if necessary. Toss the mushrooms and heat through. Add the potatoes and beef to the skillet and season to taste. Keep warm.

Scramble the eggs (or cook to order). Spoon the hash onto plates and serve the eggs on top, with hot sauce and ketchup on the side.

Bannock Dogs

- weiners
- bannock

To make bannock, mix together the following ingredients at home in a zipper-lock bag and seal:

- 1 cup white flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

To make dough at the campsite, add 1/2 cup water and 1 tbsp vegetable oil slowly into the bag filled with your pre-made bannock mix. Seal the bag and knead until dry ingredients are wet.

Separate dough into 4 portions.

Secure your weiner to a good cooking stick – green wood works best. Flatten a piece of bannock to about 4" x 4" and wrap around the weiner, pinching the ends tight.

Roast over campfire coals – away from the open flames – rotating regularly to ensure it is cooked evenly.

Cook for roughly 15 minutes.

Add your favourite toppings – cheese, chili, mustard, BBQ sauce – whatever you like on a hot dog!

Their favourite cookout breakfast? Camp Breakfast Hash* (*Recipes with a star appear below.*)

Lunch on the run

No one dawdles over lunch at a campsite. After all, there are trails to explore, lakes to swim in, and cool wildlife to discover.

As a result, lunch is best made up of lots of good snack foods. Crackers, cheese, hummus, nuts, pepperoni sticks, and fresh or dried fruit all make for wholesome and quick lunchtime fare. The simplest lunch of all may be, in fact, the most universal – peanut butter and jam on bread or crackers.

“Bring food your kids normally eat,” suggests Alana, who regularly camps with her kids. This is not the time to try new foods. “Familiarity is your friend on camping trips.”

Of course, camping isn’t always sunshine and blue skies. So it is good to have a backup plan for when the weather isn’t cooperating. Instant soup and boxed macaroni and cheese make for popular wet campsite lunches. (Tip: put your macaroni and cheese in a resealable bag for easier packing).

“Our rainy day lunch is Bannock Dogs on a Stick*,” says Alix. “Nothing like combining

the traditional with the modern.” Bannock, for those who don’t know, is a traditional First Nations flatbread – often fried over a fire or cooked on a stick. The dog part of the recipe is, of course, that great kiddie treat: the weiner.

One pot dinner a hit

When it comes to dinner, there is a bit more time for food preparation – after all, other

is add water, veggies, and then cook.”

Dave and Anna’s one-pot meal is Chicken Pesto Pasta – really, what kid doesn’t like noodles? They use fresh cooked chicken from the cooler on the first day or two of camping and canned chicken later in the trip. Just cook and drain the pasta, add jarred pesto, grated parmesan, and chicken, then stir.

Perhaps the most kid fun/friendly recipe comes from parents Ray and Amy. Their One-Pot Burritos* are the hit of any campsite they find themselves on.

“With two very young kids, we are going for something that is fun for the whole family and takes absolutely no thought,”

says Ray. “The best part is that you don’t have to measure. You just eyeball things and throw them into the pot. It is ready in minutes.”

Satisfying desserts

While parents often tell their kids to not play with their food, the opposite is generally true when camping. During a cookout, dessert is often hands-on, gooey, messy, and fun. Half the enjoyment comes from preparing it.

Two absolutely sensational recipes that will have the younger camping set both attentive and excited are Individual Orange Spice Cakes* and Banana Dreamboats (*see box*).

May your camping trip this summer be filled with good times and good food.

Donald Fraser is a local/seasonal food expert and backcountry camper.



Photo: Alana Cullen



Photo: Kevin Callan

than a good campfire and some games, you’ve pretty much done your activities for the day.

“Because you have a bit more time,” says Alana, “you can and should get the kids to help out with your evening meal.”

But don’t even attempt complicated dinners. “No one wants to spend too much time cooking or cleaning up when they are camping,” says Alix.

BBQ and campfire cooking – hamburgers, hot dogs, sausages and the like – are all quick, easy, and fun. Alana also suggests fresh-caught fish. “When you’re surrounded by lakes and rivers, you may as well enjoy the freshest catch you’re ever going to find!”

“We have quite a few one-pot meals,” says Alix. “Our particular favourite is Daal. We have all the ingredients – the lentils, spices, and everything – in one bag. All we have to do



Sweet & Gooey Banana Dreamboats

www.peterboroughkids.com

One Pot Burritos

- diced green or red pepper (or whatever veggies you have on hand)
- canned beans (black or kidney)
- ground cumin
- chili powder
- cubed cheese (old cheddar travels well)
- salsa (homemade or store-bought)
- cooking oil
- wraps/tortillas

Saute veggies in a small amount of oil until they start to soften. Add beans and heat through. Toss in cubed cheese and salsa.

Season with cumin and chili powder (just a little for younger kids). Stir until the cheese is melted.

Spoon into flour tortillas, wrap/roll, and enjoy!

Individual Orange Spice Cakes

- medium or large oranges (one per person)
- “just add water” spice cake mix
- water
- aluminum foil

With a sharp knife, slice the top off each orange so that it will fit back on like a cap. Using a spoon, scoop out (and eat) the inside of the orange.

In a container, mix the cake mix and water according to the package instructions.

Scoop the cake mix into the hollow orange until it is 3/4 full. Replace the top of the orange, then wrap the orange well in aluminum foil and place in the hot coals to cook.

After about 15 minutes, unwrap the top of one cake, and lift the cap. If the cake is dry on the top, test for doneness by poking a knife or toothpick through the centre to see if it comes out clean.

Unwrap your orange and scoop out your cake.