

Campfire Cooking on a Budget

Week 1: An Introduction to Campfire Cooking

Week 1 – Introduction to Campfire Cooking (14:00 AEST, 31 May 2020)

1. What you will need and where to get it
 - a. The most basic campfire kitchen will require:
 - i. A fire pit and fire safety (see section below)
 - ii. Wood, kindling, firelighter of some sort
 - iii. Table for preparation
 - iv. A fire safe pot
 - v. Something to chop with, stir with, measure with
 - vi. Food appropriate for your recipe and the number of people eating
 - vii. Some sort of ‘kitchen sink’- a plastic kitchen sink or flat bucket can work for this.
 - viii. Some way of carrying water.
 - b. The kitchen that I will be working with:
 - i. A fire pit and fire safety (see section below)
 - ii. Wood, kindling, firelighter of some sort
 - iii. Table for preparation and a table for washing
 - iv. Several pots and pans appropriate to campfire cooking. This could include Dutch ovens, skillets, kettles, woks, steamers, griddle presses, etc.
 - v. Many things to chop with, stir with, measure with. In my kit we will include tongs, eggflips, and a knife sharpener.
 - vi. Food appropriate for your recipe and the number of people eating. And a printed book of the recipes, menus, and food matrixes.
 - vii. Food thermometer.
 - viii. Three plastic camping kitchen sink buckets. One for washing dishes, one for rinsing, and one with clean water and disinfectant for washing hands. Both the hand and wash buckets will have hot water. The rinse water can be cold.
 - ix. Hand towels, tea towels/dish towels, and paper towel.
 - x. A cool box of some description
 - xi. If possible, a set of storage shelves
 - xii. An awning or shade structure for over the kitchen (not the fire)
 - xiii. Chairs for resting
 - xiv. Some way of carrying water.
2. Who you will need to help you
 - a. This will greatly depend on what you are cooking and for how many.
 - b. Your kitchen team should be knowledgeable, team players who can take direction from your head of kitchen. And yes, you need to have a head of kitchen.
 - c. The Head of the Kitchen
 - i. This is the person who ultimately is responsible for the food/feeding of the camp.
 - ii. This person needs to be familiar with the recipes and have a book with them in it.

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- iii. They should also know the people who are in the kitchen and their level of experience.
 - iv. They should have a list of jobs to do (and when they should be done) and they should assign tasks to kitchen helpers. The preteen who is excited to help but doesn't know how to chop onions will have to be given a different job or trained on how to safely do the job.
 - v. I often suggest that this be the unflappable member of the group. They need to be able to continue to keep calm even when things happen... because things always happen.
- d. Kitchen helpers
- i. There are many areas where other people can help to make the cook go more smoothly. But it is important to only have as many people as you need. Too many cooks spoil the dinner is the old saying and for good reason.
 - ii. The following are the kitchen positions I fill when I have a small group of 20 to 50 people to feed:
 - 1. Dish Washer – this is your most important staff member. Treat them well. Make sure they are fed and watered. At the end of the cook, give them something nice. This is the person who will be washing everything that is used in the kitchen to cook and/serve the food. By having a person on this duty at all times, you will have clean items to cook with and no huge pile of dishes at the end of the night.
 - 2. Fire Watcher – We will get into how we manage a live fire in a few minutes but it is very important that you assign one person to tending (and possibly making) your fire. This person will make sure that you always have coals to cook with and that the wood is prepared for later. They will also make sure that the pots don't boil over but they are not cooking the food. So, they might yell out "Hey, Natal'ia, the bird buns are burning." But they are not the one to go get more water for them. Why? Well, they will have dirty hands and they have to watch the fire. As much as it is fun to put the pyromaniac in this position, I caution against that as we need a good cooking fire, not the open gates of hell.
 - 3. Cook – generally, this is someone the Head of Kitchen can work well with and has good communication with. This person should be familiar with the cooking of foods. They will be handling the more difficult parts of the cook. Level-headed is a plus.
 - 4. Food preppers and pot stirs – you know that teen who is always complaining about being bored? Well, we have a place for them. This person only needs to have clean hands and a willingness to try. This is where anyone new to my kitchen starts. We watch them and help them overcome challenges.
 - 5. Food Plater and General "Mom" of the Cook – this is the person, male or female who calls everyone in and gets the food out to them. Why would you need this person? Because something will

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go wrong if you don't have one. I promise. You will find that something didn't cook, something needs more attention, your child just got bitten by an insect, you are called away by someone... Or, your camp table in the kitchen has just caught fire.

- iii. So, that's five people beside the head of kitchen for a group of up to 50. You can have fewer for less number eating (I could make 3 total work for a camp feast of up to 20... but we would be prepping and cooking all day).

3. Food Safety

- a. So a bit about food safety. We all want to have a good time at events. We all want to avoid the Chirurgeon. There are a few things that we must consider when cooking for groups, especially at camp.
 - i. Food allergies/intolerances – Make sure that everyone is okay with the food before you feed it (I prefer to ask before I have planned my menus). Make sure to check labels on packages to ensure that there isn't any cross contamination. Have a list of ingredients for people to check. For more on this, please contact me and I will send on an excellent paper by Master Drake Morgan on the topic.
 - ii. Food temperature safety – You need to make sure that food stays within its required temperatures before being prepared. This may require a cool box or canning. For more information on this, please think about attending Mistress Rowan Perigrinne's class "Campfood – storage and preservation" on 28th June at 2:30 AEST.
 - iii. Cleanliness – wash it down, keep it clean.
 - iv. Hands – wash them and glove them. Change your gloves as you change dishes. **DO NOT WEAR GLOVES TO THE FIRE.** Instead, wash and dry your hands thoroughly and then use a hand sanitiser (allow that to dry. Wet hand sanitiser can catch fire and burn the wearer).
 - v. Hair – restrain it
 - vi. Are you sick? Let someone else cook.

4. Making your fire pit

- a. Your fire pit will depend on the site location. Many places do not allow you to dig your own pit. Some have pre-dug pits. Those who do not allow pits, may allow raised fires. If they do, then you will need a raised pit (a raised wok, or large flat bbq could work). Please note that some sites do not allow open fires, or they do not allow them at certain times of the year. Make sure you check before getting to camp.
- b. In my demonstrations I will be using a combination of pits so that you can see the differences.
- c. Which ever type of pit you use, please make sure that you are taking into consideration the environment. Check your pit for dried grass nearby or trees that could catch alight with embers from your fire. You will also need to think about radiant heat from the fire.
- d. Make sure that your pit is properly covered and that your coals are cold (and placed where they should be) before you leave the fire.

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5. Fire safety
 - a. Check the site rules about fires.
 - b. Never leave a fire unattended, even just to run to your tent to grab something or to go to the toilet unless you have handed the fire to someone else.
 - c. Before lighting your fire, make sure that you have selected the appropriate location (not the middle of your camp's thoroughfare or near things that are combustible).
 - d. Always have appropriate fire suppressers near the fire. Metal buckets of water, sand, or dirt. And always have more than you think that you will need. It's better to have to dump them out than have your camp burn down. You might want to consider fire blankets as well. These work well for putting out garb on fire.
 - e. Make sure that you are wearing natural fibres. Poly-blends burn people and catch fire easily. Extra skirting, longer or billowy sleeves, those beloved tokens hanging from your belt. Maybe they should stay in the tent for the cook.
 - f. HAND SANITISER – Okay, with Covid-19 the topic of the time, let's talk about those hand sanitisers we all carry with us now. Hand sanitisers are made up of 60% plus flammable liquid. Please make sure that your hands are completely dry before working near the fire. When wet hand sanitiser ignites, it forms a nearly invisible fire that encases the hands. It is hot enough to cause second degree or worse burns. The fire it produces is various enough to catch other flammable material alight (like clothing).
 - g. Ensure that the fire is out completely, and the coals are cooled before you leave the fire.
 - h. Mark off pits so that people do not fall into them at night.
 - i. Return the site to how it was before you came by reverting your pit.
6. Differences between campfire and kitchen cooking (heat/radiation/environment temp)
 - a. There are a lot of differences between cooking in your kitchen at home and in a camp kitchen with gas burners... and even more so when cooking over the cooking fire. Next week we will get into types of fires. But I would like to you to start thinking about how the environment is going to effect your cook over a campfire.
 - i. The weather can work against you. Cold or wind will lower your cooking temperature and require more coals or food pots to sit closer to the heat. Heat can require you to keep an eye on your pans to prevent burning.
 - ii. Water is the enemy of fire. Rain and storms can make cooking over open fire a challenge.
 - iii. Likewise, damp is a killer. Especially if your kindling gets wet (wood can be worked with but make sure that you cover it all with a tarp even if you are not expecting rain).
7. Q/A