

Backpacking Meals

When planning backpacking meals first consider nutritional value. Next, think of the four "P's": portability, palatability, price and ease of preparation.

The purchase price of prepackaged "backpacking food" is prohibitive. Such dehydrated foods are convenient, however, as well as light and easy to carry. This article details some very simple ways that you can save money when feeding yourself on backpacking trips while keeping that convenience and conservation of weight and space found in store-bought dehydrated foods.

Food Types

The fact remains that we need certain nutrients to survive. Something as mundane as Vitamin C becomes a valued commodity when you are out backpacking. Although you won't get scurvy by not eating an orange a day on a week-long backpack trip, nutrition is still a factor when it comes to keeping your body supplied with the necessary energy (in the form of carbohydrates, sugars and fat) to get your body back OUT of the woods.

The single most important food item you need when trekking the backcountry is water. Drink as much as possible. Period. You can survive much longer without food than you can without water. Even if you do eat, you still need water in your system in order to metabolize that food; much in the same way that wood needs oxygen in order to burn.

Many people find that meat is not a necessity when backpacking. Protein in sufficient quantities can be found through many lighter foods that won't spoil, such as nuts, beans, and peas. Peanuts are fairly high in protein, as well as lentils. Jerky, in all it's wonderful forms, is great for its flavor Plus, it won't spoil the first day you hit the trail.

Carbohydrates keep your muscles fed with energy, and also help to keep your body warm as well. Carbs can be found in many wonderful food items such as pastas (great source!), fruit (dehydrated, of course!), and dairy products, such as powdered milk and cheese.

Fat, typically, is not a desired food item during the regular hustle and bustle of everyday life. But in the woods, it equates to energy, approaching carbohydrates in value. If you are taking a particular food item on a backpacking trip, and you have a choice between the regular or the low/non-fat type, get the regular kind. You'll be burning plenty of calories huffing it up that trail,

Preservation

The standard method of preserving and conserving food is through a method called "dehydration". To dehydrate something is simply to remove any and all moisture from it, thereby making it "dry". This often results in a substantial space and weight reduction in the food item, while leaving most, if not all, of the nutrients intact.

Many foods come without water in them right off the shelf, such as pastas, beans, peas and nuts. Meats, fruits, and vegetables, however, usually need to be dehydrated separately, or bought that way from the store.

Many different kinds of fruit can be purchased in a dehydrated state: apples, apricots and peaches can often be found either in the produce or baking section of the grocery store. Banana "chips" are found in the bulk-food isle, as well as other more exotic fruits such as papaya.

Meat is typically found in the form of jerky, as mentioned earlier. There are many meals that can be prepared with canned meat or tuna.

Vegetables aren't very easy to find dehydrated in the store This usually requires the use of a food dehydrator at home.

Saving Money

Keep your eye open when traveling the aisles of your grocery store. If something requires that you add hot water in order to prepare it, it is a good candidate for backpack food. Base your ultimate decision on the nutrition gained vs. the preparation time, weight, and size.

Preparation

Assuming you have plenty of no-cook food items, such as granola, fruit, or jerky, there is then little or no preparation to be done, thus saving fuel and time. Most other food items that require cooking only need the addition of hot water.

Feel free to experiment with combinations of foods. Take along a small container of table spices, such as Mrs. Dash, to liven up otherwise boring soup mixes or pastas.

Menu Suggestions

Breakfast

Hard boiled eggs (boiled at home), bacon bits, Au gratin potatoes
Oatmeal
Cold cereal
Hot chocolate
Orange drink

Lunch

Sandwich
Peanut butter & jelly in container w/ crackers
Cheese w/ crackers
Stick pepperoni w/ crackers
Fruit (dried or fresh)
Drink mix (lemonade, Gatorade, etc)

Dinner

Ragu Express
Cup of soup
Mini muffins
Hot chocolate

Dinners for Four People

Lipton Dinner

3 packages-Lipton flavored rice
1 6-ounce can chicken

Curried Rice & Tuna

2 cups instant rice cooked at camp
1/2 cup seedless raisins
1 6-ounce can tuna in water
2 teaspoons curry powder
Parmesan cheese to taste

Ham a la Ramen

3 3-ounce packages Ramen noodle
1/2 cup dried vegetable (peas, corn, etc)
1 5 ounce can ham
Red pepper flakes to taste
1 hard-boiled egg boiled at home

Chicken Stroganoff

3 3-ounce package Ramen noodles
1 packet onion soup mix or dry brown gravy
1 6-ounce can chicken
1 small can sliced mushrooms