

COOKING WITH IRON

BY BILL CHISAMORE

When people come into the Scout Shop, and see our display of cast iron cookware, inevitably the question is raised, “Why would anyone want to carry around something so heavy to go camping?”

For generations, pioneers and settlers of our country travelled with cast iron pots; cookware that was as rugged and as versatile as they were. A great many things were left behind, but not the cast iron dutch oven.

It is a common belief that lighter is better, and in some instances this is true. However, if weight is not an issue, this may just be the meal ticket for you.

Cast iron cooking for a “Scouting” camp can create a wide range of gastronomic delights. If you have ever tasted anything cooked in a dutch oven, you’ll know exactly what I mean. There should never be a camp where you eat just hot dogs and hamburgers. Not to say that hot dogs and hamburgers are wrong or bad; however, there is a multitude of recipes that can change the way you look at cooking while at camp.

Great camp food is successful because of the planning and preparation that is done long before you leave on your trip. The camp menu is built upon and created from a number of key components. They are:

1. Time available.
2. Equipment and supplies.
3. Dietary needs and concerns.
4. Number of people to feed.

Time available

How much time do you have for this meal? If you arrive at camp at 9 pm at night, setting up is the first priority – you won’t have two hours to do a three course meal. On the other hand, if you have all afternoon then a much more elaborate meal can be prepared.

Equipment and supplies

For each meal, key questions should be asked every time. Do I have enough equipment? Do I have the right equipment (i.e. a can opener)? Do I have all the provisions necessary to make this meal? Is this the best meal to eat at this time?

Dietary needs and concerns

Will this meal provide the necessary calories and nutrients? Is there someone in the group who really hates onions? Does everyone like this meal? Or more important, is there anyone with food allergies? It’s much better to know these things before preparing a meal and someone not being able to eat it.



Photos: Courtesy of Lodge Cast Iron Cookware, <http://www.lodgeimg.com/>

Number of people

Are the number of servings going to change from meal to meal? Cooking for five people is different than cooking for fifty. Can the numbers be broken up into smaller groups?

Favourite Recipes

A typical weekend camp will consist of six meals – two breakfasts, two lunches, and two dinners – not necessarily in that order (Friday night dinner, Saturday breakfast, lunch and dinner, and Sunday breakfast and lunch).

Start by asking the youth what they like and what they want to eat. If you get the standard responses, prompt them into thinking outside the norm. Using a dutch oven, anything that can be cooked at home can be cooked at camp. Yes, even pizza. Nothing should be off limits at the start; you can always narrow the list down afterwards. Block their ideas into the appropriate meals. Once everyone has had their say, and keeping in mind the criteria mentioned above, create your menu. Stuck for ideas? There are a number of

great camp cookbooks available, either in your Scout Shop, bookstores or on-line. Create your menu. Then make a duty roster so that the youth are the ones cooking the meals. They'll enjoy it more if they make it themselves (under supervision of course).

The following menu is one my youth and I enjoyed at a past camp. With them doing the cooking, each meal was designed to be simple, easy to do, and with very little clean-up involved.

Friday Night (late arrival): Chicken Fajitas

Cook chicken strips in a little oil in the bottom of the dutch oven. Mix in chopped peppers and onions. Add any other ingredients as desired. Season to taste. Serve in flat bread with shredded lettuce, cheese and salsa sauce.

Saturday Breakfast: "Measles Pancakes"

Traditional pancake batter mixed with cut up strawberries. Cook in bottom of dutch oven or skillet/griddle.

Saturday Lunch: Bill's Camp Hash

Fried hash brown potatoes with everything but the kitchen sink. Makes a great way of using up those leftovers at the end of camp as well.

Saturday Dinner: Camp Lasagna

Use pre-made/canned sauce, no-cook noodles and shredded cheese. Layer the dutch oven with alternating layers of sauce, noodles and cheese. Build up your lasagna three or four layers high. Cook with coals or charcoal for one hour. Rotate pot occasionally and watch it doesn't burn.

Sunday Breakfast: Oatmeal (not instant) with raisins and brown sugar.



Sunday Lunch (for a quick getaway): Grilled Cheese Sandwiches

Pre-make the grilled cheese sandwiches and freeze them, separating each with wax paper. Thaw in the morning. To warm up, just heat them in your dutch oven or skillet. Serve in napkins or paper towels for quick clean-up.

With every new adventure, there is a learning curve. Cooking outdoors is no different. Given time, you and your youth will agree that there really is no place like the outdoors to cook their favorite meal, with choruses of "Is there any more?" heard X
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Coal Secrets: It's in the Ring by Susan Muehlherr

Want to prevent burnt bottoms, raw tops or over-cooked food when dutch oven cooking? A simple formula is to always use coals the size of charcoal briquettes or briquettes themselves. To determine how many coals you need, take the diameter of your oven and multiply it by two. For instance, a 12 inch diameter oven will need a total of 24 coals.

How many do you put on top and how many under? Place two more coals than the oven size on the lid, and two less than the oven size under it. Using this formula for a

12-inch oven, $12 - 2 = 10$ coals under the oven, and $12+2=14$ coals on the lid, for a total of 24. The same formula applies to all ovens. Once you determine how many coals your oven needs, use the same number every time to create a 350 F oven for about two hours.

The secret to perfect cooking? Place the coals under the oven in an evenly spaced ring. The heat will radiate towards the centre of the oven, so don't put any in the middle. Place the coals on the top also in a ring, with four coals placed towards the centre. That's all there is to it! Now you're ready to enjoy mouth watering meals.



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