

Freezer Bag Cooking: Trail Food Made Simple

By Sarah Svien
<http://www.freezerbagcooking.com/>

To Kirk, thank you for encouraging me to go after my goals and dreams and being there with me every step of the way.

To my son Ford who has been my hiking partner since his first steps.

To my friend and biking partner Tori, for encouraging me to go farther. Thank you for getting me to start the FBC website and for not letting me forget about my grand idea of eating ramen every day on The Wonderland Trail....

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Introduction

The long way to outdoor food bliss...“Do not take what you do not like to eat.”

Like many backpackers, when I got into backpacking, I thought that eating freeze dried meals was the only way to go. They were lightweight, packed well and easy to make, but are pricey, have little flavor and can make one's stomach upset. I started dreading dinner time for some reason all the dinners started tasting the same. Cost wise, freeze dried was killing my wallet as I went out more.

I started cooking on the trail. And that was even worse! I hated having to clean pans, using so much fuel up, and spending an hour in the evening cooking and cleaning when I was so tired. I also became tied down to campsites that had an adequate water supply, so I could clean up.

One day I saw mention of freezer bag cooking and I wondered how that would work for me. I experimented for a while with good results. I started borrowing some of Kirk's lightweight gear, getting some of my own and for the most part I have never looked back. Best of all, it has made it so I can have what I want for dinner, my son can have what he likes and we eat at the same time. It has simplified my outdoor life so that I can spend more time enjoying myself and less time hassling with food. Plus, the amount of gear I carry for my kitchen is a shadow of what I used to carry.

In fall 2004, my hiking partner, Tori and me got to talking and realized we needed to broaden our food assortment on the trail and come up with more gourmet recipes of our own. We worked to come up with new recipes for our weekly hikes and trail testing every one of them in the wilds. The rules were a stove, a tea kettle or small pot, a freezer bag with the food and a spoon. The FBC website was born on Thanksgiving weekend 2004. This book is my work of love of the past few years adventures.

While you look through this book, familiarize yourself with the different ingredients, food packets, techniques and ideas presented. You really can make a whole technique out of freezer bag cooking. So much so that someone on a web site coined the term “FBC style.” Many people have made this a style of cooking in the outdoors what they use on every trip, regardless of outdoor activity. Among the benefits are that it saves cooking fuel, packing space, makes meals easier to prepare at home and in camp. The list goes on. So while you can take the recipes as individual items, you might find as you try them you like the style more and more and transform the rest of your menu, creating your adaptation of the FBC style.

I hope you enjoy it!

Sarah

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Techniques & Gear

Eating well doesn't mean you need to carry a big kitchen with you on the trail. You needn't carry heavy pans, multiple pans, a lot of fuel, and have to do cleanup after your meals. You can eat great, have a nice variety of foods, and be done eating before dark. There are a few items and techniques that will go a long way to achieving edible nirvana....or as close as we can get to it.

Tools needed

A backpacking tea kettle or lightweight pot with lid. It should hold around 2 1/2 cups of water. While most any metal will work well, try to look for aluminum or if you can afford it, titanium. The lighter the weight the better.

A traditional backpacking, canister style or alcohol stove.

Some sort of windscreen to go around the stove. You can make them from a turkey pan, stove liner pan or heavy duty foil folded 3 times. This will increase fuel efficiency.

A lexan spoon to stir and eat with.

A lexan mug/cup. Get one with measuring markers on the side. It can double as your drinking vessel and measuring cup for boiling water.

A box of quality freezer bags. (See section on bags).

A permanent black magic marker. You will use this to write on bags.

A pot cozy. While optional, it is VERY recommended for keeping your food warm while the boiling water does its magic. (See section on pot cozies)

When getting ready to "cook" your meal, bring your water to a boil. Pour the water into your cup, measure, and then add it to your freezer bag. This way you avoid painful burns, adding too much water, or touching your freezer bag with a burning hot piece of metal-and melting the bag.

Stir with a Lexan or plastic spoon. NO sporks or forks!!!! Holes in the bag are bad.

After you have mixed well, get all the air out of the bag, zip it up tightly and wrap in a fleece hat, jacket or cozy made for the purpose. Then let sit for 5-15 minutes, stir well and eat. I usually put my freezer bag into my cozy before I add the water (since I use a fulltime cozy), this works well as I don't have to hold the bag upright while I add the water.

Breakfast

Breakfast on the trail can mean many things to many people. Some like to wake as dawn is coming up, boil a pot of water, have a cup of coffee and oatmeal and get on the trail. Others like to sleep in, waiting for the sun to fill the sub alpine bowl they are camped in and have a long morning, enjoying being lazy.

What you need is food to fuel your morning, to get you moving, to warm you up. Food that you desire to eat, drinks that make you want to sip.

My favorite time of the day backpacking is right at dawn, as the sun just starts to show itself...the peaks turning warm. There is something about that time; no one else is up; just me and my hot coffee-standing alone in the wilderness. It is a reason why I backpack, a primal statement that I can survive the night in the wilds. You know what the day will bring, but for now it is just your time.

Fruity Morning Couscous

In a quart freezer bag put:

1 cup couscous

1 handful dried fruit (raisins, craisins, apples, peaches, coconut, etc - diced size)

Take brown sugar in a separate bag.

In camp: add 2 cups boiling water to the bag and stir well. Put in a cozy for 10 minutes, fluff and top with brown sugar to taste.

Yield: Serves 2

Breakfast Trail Rice

In a quart freezer bag put:

1/2 cup instant rice

1/2 cup powdered milk

1/2 cup chopped dried fruit

A small handful of chopped walnuts or pecans

2 1/2 tbl brown sugar

1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

Pinch of salt

In camp: add 1 cup of boiling water, stir well and put in a cozy for 10 minutes.

Yield: Serves 1-2

Soups

Soup to me is a staple of life that is overlooked quite often in the backcountry. When I do see soup being consumed it is usually some bland, over salted package that is water, MSG and a couple noodles. Soup to me is what winter is all about. There is nothing like sipping on a warm mug of chowder while sitting in a winter wonderland. Soup is an excellent choice when you are too tired to make a full dinner-it warms you, it rehydrates you. Pair it with bread or bagels and cheese you carried in. When it is cold outside, I know this is all I need sometimes.

I like to drink my soups out of my mug, but a secret is to carry a straw with you...you can sip out the bag easily.

Clam Chowder

In a quart freezer bag put:

1 cup instant mashed potatoes
1/2 cup dried milk
1/2 tsp dill
1/2 tsp black pepper
1/2 tsp thyme
1/2 tsp granulated garlic
1/2 tsp salt

Also take:

3 oz. pouch of clams
2 packets parmesan cheese

In camp: Put the clams in the freezer bag, and add 2 cups boiling water. Stir well, pop in a cozy and let sit for 10 minutes. Top with cheese.

Yields: Serves 1 or 2 as a starter course.

Potato Soup

In a quart freezer bag put:

1 Tbl dry onion
1 package Idahoan potatoes (flavor of your choice, 2 cup water package)
1 Tbl dried bell peppers

Also take:

1 small bag shelf stable crumbled bacon (2 1/2-3 ounces)
Packets of salt and pepper.

Add 3 cups boiling water and bacon, stir well. Put in a cozy for 10 minutes. Season to taste.

Yield: Serves 2 or 3 as a starter course.

Lunch

The hardest meal for most trips seems to always be lunch. It is pushed to the back of planning-usually lunchtime is not when one wants to stop, unload half of your pack to get to a stove-or spend an hour doing prep and cleanup. So you see too many people eating protein bars, bags of trail mix, summer sausage and candy bars for “lunch”.

For the first 3 recipes, add the water to the bag before you want lunch. This seems obvious, but otherwise your compatriots will want to leave just as you are getting ready to eat. For example, you are feeling a little hungry and think you’ll stop in about a half an hour. Take the bag out, put the water in and throw it back in your pack, set aside or wherever you can put it. Just remember to think ahead. You will be thankful when your friends are eating power bars and you have a nice lunch that actually fuels you. Talk about a conversation piece at lunch!

Ramen Salad

Put in a freezer bag:

1 Pkg. Ramen noodles (save the flavor packet for another day)
2 Tbl freeze dried vegetables

Take 1 packet salad dressing of choice (shelf stable, or use 2 tubs of Ranch dip)

Add 1 1/2 cups water (any temperature), squeeze the air out and seal the bag. Let sit for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Drain well. Add dressing and toss well. This is really good with cubed cheese, pepperoni slices or whatever you feel like adding.

Yield: Serves 1

Spinach Couscous

At home in a bowl mix:

1 cup couscous
1 pkg Knorr Cream of Spinach Soup
3 Tbl dry milk or soy milk

Take one 3 oz. pouch of tuna with you per freezer bag.

In each of two quart freezer bag put half of the ingredients. Each bag gets a pouch of tuna with it.

When ready, add approximately 1 cup water, and stir well. Let sit for 30 minutes or so, add tuna and eat.

Yield: Serves 1 per bag.

Note: You can substitute the tuna for chicken or other shelf stable meat.