

# Scout Skills

# Basic Cooking

**info**

Scout  
Information  
Centre

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## INFORMATION SHEET

It used to be said that 'an army marches on its stomach'. It is equally true that good food, well cooked, is an essential part of any successful Scout camp. Scouts camp in a variety of situations, and the choice of menu and method of preparation will depend on the type of camp and the circumstances of the site. For instance, if one of the aims of a Troop summer camp is to provide a highly enjoyable opportunity for Scouts to progress through the Training Scheme, then learning camping skills such as cooking on wood fires may become an objective in itself, and adventurous menus may be chosen. On the other hand, if a backpacking expedition is being undertaken, camping is just a means to an end, and simple, lightweight food with high energy value, cooked on portable stoves would be more appropriate.

Similar considerations apply to the size of groups being catered for. Central cooking is normally appropriate for Cub Scouts, and occasionally for Scouts if the camp programme demands it. Cooking in Patrols is usually preferred for Scouts, however, while older Scouts and Venture Scouts camping in wild country may need to cook in smaller groups on a 'tent by tent' basis.

### Fires or Stoves?

Food is not cooked by equipment, but more by the correct use of an adequate and constant source of heat. The wood fire or portable stove is, therefore, the most important aspect of the kitchen and cooking arrangements.

The wood fire has been a popular means of cooking, but fuel supplies or sites which allow wood fires, can be increasingly difficult to find. Camping stoves of various types are becoming more popular and, therefore, the traditional approach to camp cooking is changing. Both wood fires and portable (pressure or gas) stoves

have their advantages and disadvantages, so you will need to decide which is appropriate for your situation.

### Wood fires are generally better:

- When large numbers are being catered for;
- For camps lasting more than two nights on the same site;
- For food with a cooking time more than about half an hour;
- When part of the purpose of the camp is to encourage the understanding of different cooking techniques.

### Portable (pressure/gas) stoves are generally better:

- When cooking for small numbers;
- For hiking and backpacking;
- When there is no wood available on the site;
- When all you want is a quick cup of tea or speed is essential;
- In poor weather conditions;
- If you are fed up with being blinded by woodsmoke!

### Cooking Methods

Everyone would soon get fed up if they had to eat the same food cooked the same way every day, but most foods can be satisfactorily cooked in a number of different ways, each with its own end result in terms of taste and texture. Cooking times vary however (always check with a recipe if you are unsure of how long to cook something for), and when using a variety of methods, take care to check that not only is the food well cooked (that is, not still raw!), but that all parts of the dish are ready to be served at the same time.

Many foods benefit from the addition of herbs or sauces, and you should not be afraid to use them just because you are at camp. Most sauces are readily available in dried form, packed in sachets and usually have simple cooking instructions

printed on the back - so there is little excuse for bland, tasteless food to be served at camp.

Here are some of the different methods or cooking techniques which can be used:

*Boiling* - Cooking in water ('It's boiling when it's bubbling!'). This is the simplest and most common method of cooking and, providing you don't boil the pot dry, the method least likely to go wrong! This method may be used for most vegetables, rice and pasta, and cooking periods range from about 10 minutes from the time the water comes to the boil for green vegetables, to 30 minutes for the harder root vegetables such as carrots. Root vegetables should be placed in the water and brought to the boil from cold; greens are best put into the water once it has boiled. All vegetables should be cooked with the pot lids on, but pasta is boiled without a lid. Take care not to overcook as all foods tend to lose colour, taste, texture and nutritional value if boiled for too long.

*Stewing* - Cooking in water below boiling point. This is the term used for bringing food to boiling point, and then simmering it at a temperature just below boiling point without letting it bubble furiously. An old saying 'a stew boiled is a stew spoiled' sums it up very well! It is normally used as a means of cooking meat or fruit. In the case of meat, at least an hour is required after the liquid comes to the boil. Root vegetables are normally included in a meat stew, but the softer ones, such as potatoes must be added part way through the cooking to avoid overcooking them and reducing them to pulp. Meat stews need the addition of stock cubes, and there is also a wide range of powdered sauce mixes which, as previously mentioned, can make a great difference. Sugar has to be added to all stewed fruit. For any stew, long simmering times require good fire management.

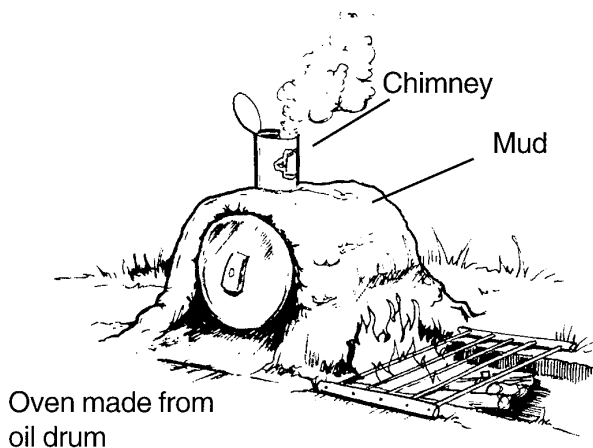
*Frying* - Cooking over heat with a film of fat covering the bottom of the pan. This is often assumed to be the most common method of cooking at camp: in fact it is the most difficult cooking method to do well. The main problem is maintaining a moderate heat source over a large enough cooking area to allow more than two or three people to be served together. A fire can provide a large enough cooking area, but it can be difficult to hold the critical temperature needed for more than a few minutes. Stoves have a flame that can be more readily controlled

over a period of time, but burners are rarely large enough to cook in large quantities. Frying, and hence the use of fat, has had a bad press in recent years on health grounds, and is best used sparingly.

*Stir-frying* - Is a relatively new technique in this country. It has the advantage of cooking all of the ingredients - meat and vegetables - in the same pan at the same time, and therefore has considerable potential for camp use as it reduces the space required over fires, takes less time compared to other methods, and it can be prepared and served together. Care will, however, need to be taken to perhaps start certain ingredients before others such as meat before vegetables as their overall cooking time is different.

*Deep frying* - Cooking the food by complete immersion in hot fat or oil is more difficult and can be dangerous in a camp situation, but can be done. This method may be used for cooking food such as fish and vegetables coated in batter or breadcrumbs.

*Baking* - Cooking in an oven without covering and roasting or cooking in an oven with fat, are feasible in a camp oven constructed from a biscuit tin or similar metal box, encased in clay and fitted with a chimney (see below). This arrangement allows the heat from a fire burning in a trench underneath to completely surround the oven and give a very good result. No calibration is possible, however, and cooking times must be determined by trial and error! Baking can be used for most foods from pastry and bread to meat and vegetables. Potatoes can be baked by wrapping them in foil and placing them in the glowing embers which are left after the flames have died down in a fire. Roasting is used for meat and vegetables.



vegetables or puddings. Steaming can be done by one of two methods: firstly by placing a small amount of water in a saucepan and by keeping it 'on the boil', and with a tightly fitting lid, the resulting steam cooks the food or, secondly, by using a specifically designed 'steamer'. The timing varies considerably depending upon what is being cooked, for example, fillets or thin cuts of fish will take about 10- 15 minutes, a whole chicken, three to four hours, vegetables about five minutes longer than boiling them and puddings, take between two and three hours. For both methods, you need to check that they don't 'boil dry'.

**Pot-roasting** - Is a method of roasting a joint of meat, without an oven. An ideal container is a large billie, having a capacity of seven to eight litres and a diameter of about 20 cm. Hard root vegetables such as turnips, swedes, parsnips are cut into large pieces (onions are best left whole), packed tightly into the bottom of the billie to a depth of about 10 cm, and just covered with water. The meat is then placed on top of the vegetables, standing clear of the liquid. The billie is brought to the boil and simmered with a lid on until the meat is tender - this normally takes about half an hour per pound, depending on the cut. The billie must be checked regularly during cooking to make sure it does not boil dry.

**Grilling** - Cooking over or under a direct fierce heat. This method is appropriate for thin cuts of meat, fish, poultry or game, a few vegetables such as mushrooms, and tomatoes and bread (for toast). This is a relatively quick method of cooking which should not be left unattended and, indeed, food often needs 'turning' during cooking. A 'barbecue' works on this principle.

**Poaching** - Cooking food in simmering water. The water is boiled and then kept simmering at just below boiling point. This method is suitable for eggs and fish. Eggs can be done by individually breaking them onto a plate or saucer and then sliding them into the simmering water. With the help of two spoons cover the yolks with the white of the eggs. The pan should then be covered and the eggs allowed to cook for five or six minutes. For fish, cover with lightly salted water and leave to simmer until it flakes easily when tested with a fork, allowing about 10 minutes for 500g of fish.

**Steaming** - Cooking in the steam resulting from boiling water. This can be used for fish, poultry,

**Braising** - Cooking in an oven in a tightly closed container. This method, like pot-roasting, is a slow method and therefore requires more planning. It can be used for meat (smaller cuts of meat rather than a joint), fish, poultry, game and vegetables.

### Measuring quantities

We take measuring ingredients at home for granted as we have the equipment that will do the job! However, at camp, we may be limited in what equipment is available. Here are a few hints on what can be used: 25g (1 oz.) flour, cocoa, custard powder = a well-heaped tablespoon.

25g (1 oz.) sugar, rice, butter, fat = a level tablespoon.

250ml (half a pint) liquid = a normal camp mug full.

It is also possible to use a 'camp mug' for measuring all sorts of things. For example, when lightly filled, it will hold the following approximate weights:

125g (5 oz.)	flour
200g (8 oz.)	sugar
100g (4 oz.)	grated cheese
175g (7 oz.)	rice
150g (6 oz.)	dried fruit

Wherever possible, of course, ingredients can be prepared or weighed at home before leaving for camp, or other containers can be checked for how much they hold.

## Tricks of the trade

- Always wash your hands before handling food;
- Keep the insides of cooking utensils scrupulously clean;
- If you use frozen food, ensure that it is completely thawed before use;
- If frying on a wood fire, use a covered frying pan, or splatter guard;
- If you are using a portable stove, make sure that you have enough fuel before you start cooking;
- If you are using a wood fire, ensure that the grid will take the weight of the utensils safely;
- If you are using a wood fire, make sure that you light it in plenty of time - it's not like switching on an oven!
- The best cooking fires are not only smokeless but also virtually flameless. A good bed of hot ashes gives a constant heat - and constant heat is a secret of good cooking.
- If you are using a wood fire, coat the outside of cooking utensils with detergent before using - it makes them much easier to clean afterwards;
- Keep a container of hot water on the fire or stove whenever you are working in the camp kitchen - you will always have an instant supply for washing-up water and cups of tea;
- Always stoke up the fire under the washing-up water before you sit down to eat;
- Do not attempt to lift heavy containers of boiling water - to transfer water, use a jug or ladle to avoid scalds;
- Handles of cooking utensils can become very hot - use oven gloves or pads to avoid burns;
- Serve your food in an attractive and appetising way, even something which tastes 'perfect' can be off-putting if not presented well;
- Keep the kitchen area tidy if you want to be able to find everything when you want it;
- Burn or bin food scraps immediately after every meal;
- When removed, lids of cooking utensils should always be put down rim uppermost;
- Serving spoons, ladles and other implements should be put on a plate - never on the ground;

- Finally, remember, 'too many cooks spoil the broth'!

## Further information and resources

Talk with other Leaders who have experience of catering (menus, quantities, techniques and so on) in camp situations. Perhaps there is a Quartermaster who can give you some hints and tips on what equipment is currently available and on its use.

There are various books available: *Back to Basics* (available from the Information Centre at Gilwell Park) covers various aspects of cooking at camp; *Fire Lighting* in this series outlines the different types of fire that can be used for cooking; conventional cooking books will obviously offer many suggestions for different types and sizes of meals. Camping shops and other equipment suppliers may also have a selection of publications which give ideas specifically for camp menus.

# TEACH YOURSELF

## Time

This will vary depending upon what you choose to cook and how many of the cooking techniques are chosen to practise at any one time. However, as a guide, it is probably not practical to undertake a meal including several techniques in less than two or three hours. Individual techniques may take anything from five minutes to three hours!

## Equipment

Wood supply and/or portable stove, cooking utensils, cleaning materials, clock or timer and food as per your choice of meal(s).

## Learning all about it

Details of the techniques used for cooking are contained in the Information Sheet and you will need to have read this before proceeding. There is really only one method to learn about basic cooking techniques and that is, of course, to do it! This could be done all in one go, but is probably best done over a series of evenings or sessions to benefit from being able to properly sample the results! If there is an opportunity to practise in a camp situation, this is better still.

Cooking techniques that might be covered include:

boiling	stewing	frying
stir-frying	baking	roasting
pot-roasting	grilling	poaching
steaming	braising	

Decide on whether you are going to prepare a series of complete meals or just individual dishes. Plan your menu and check that by cooking them all you will have covered all the different cooking techniques that you want to try out. It is possible to design a meal which allows for the different foods to be prepared by each of the techniques, for example boiling (green vegetables), stewing (meat casserole), frying (mushrooms), roasting (potatoes) and so on. But be warned, this may not result in the most economical or 'well timed' meal!

If your experience of these cooking techniques is limited, try them out at home or at a Scout Headquarters first, before over a fire or at a camp where hungry mouths are anxiously awaiting the results!

Offer to work alongside and help out an experienced caterer at a camp or event. There is no better way of finding out about the shortcuts and pitfalls of preparing food.

Taking an egg, tomato or a potato, use as many of the cooking techniques as possible for each or all of these items.

When you feel happy about the different techniques and when they should be used, try them out using different types of fire or stove and decide on the best type of heat source to use for each technique.

## Can I do it?

When you feel confident about basic cooking and the various techniques, check how you are doing and see which of the following you can tick off:

Can I list the advantages and disadvantages of wood fires and portable (pressure/gas) stoves?

Can I describe the different cooking techniques used for specific types of food?

Which of the following cooking techniques can I demonstrate?

Boiling  
Stewing  
Frying  
stir-frying  
baking  
roasting  
pot-roasting  
grilling  
poaching  
steaming  
braising

## **So you want more?**

Have a go at making and constructing different types of wood fires and cooking a variety of foods on them. Which were the most successful and why?

Try cooking without utensils, that is, cooking with aluminium foil and backwoods cooking.

Investigate and try out menus for expedition cooking. These are usually lightweight to carry, but high in calories or energy.

## **Your notes on this session**

# HOW TO TRAIN OTHERS

This section is designed to give some practical ideas about how you can help other people to learn about basic cooking. They might be Leaders or Scouts - either in an informal way on a Troop night or more formally on a skills workshop, training course or something similar.

## Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- I. State the advantages and disadvantages of wood fires and portable stoves;
- II. Select the best cooking method for a particular type of given food;
- III. Demonstrate six of the following different cooking techniques:

boiling	stewing	frying
stir-frying	baking	roasting
pot-roasting	grilling	poaching
steaming	braising	

## Time

This will depend upon what activities are chosen and how many cooking techniques the participants undertake. However, as a guide, it is probably not practical to undertake a meal including several techniques in less than two or three hours. Individual techniques may take anything from five minutes to three hours!

## Equipment

Wood supply and/or portable stove, cooking utensils, cleaning materials, clock or timer, food as per choice of meal(s) and any other items specified for the training activities.

## Training method

For participants to learn about the different cooking techniques that are available to them, the only real method is for them to have a go! It may be useful for there to be some demonstration for the more unusual techniques and if participants are working in small groups, try to ensure that there is one member of the

group who has some experience. An ideal place for participants to practice would be in a camp situation. However, for a first attempt, a Scout Headquarters, Troop room, or any other facilities with a kitchen may be more helpful.

You could use the following method, devise your own, or alternatively use the training activities without any prior information being given, depending of course upon the experience of the participants.

With participants in small groups, give them some means of cooking the food (a gas or pressure stove, materials for making a fire or access to a cooker), a menu, some food, a clock or timer, and ask them to prepare the meal for a given time. They will need to plan what needs to be done, share out the work and manage their time. Depending upon the experience in the group, you may like to give them a cookbook which outlines the cooking techniques or copy the details from the Information Sheet in this pack.

One or more of the following training activities might then be undertaken to reinforce the learning or to check the participants understanding of basic cooking.

## Training activities

*Circuit cooking* - Set up a series of bases which requires the participants to visit the bases and undertake a task such as boiling an egg, poaching a kipper and so on. These tasks can be as simple or as elaborate as you like. Alternatively, this principle could be used to demonstrate basic cooking techniques before participants have a go.

*Cooking competition* - Arrange a competition for small groups of participants (or Patrols) who have to plan and prepare a menu in competition against other groups. The choice of menu and food can be left to the groups, or food and techniques can be specified.

*Menu planning* - With participants working as individuals or in pairs, ask them to plan a balanced menu for a camp or event. The results should then be discussed and justified with another individual or pair.

*Camp ovens* - With participants in small groups, supply them with the necessary materials and ask them to build a camp oven and use it.

*International cooking* - Ask each group of participants to try out a menu or meal from another country and link it with an international evening. This again, could be the choice of the group or be specified to ensure a balance of different menus.

'*Cooks challenge*' - With participants in pairs, give each pair eggs, tomatoes, or potatoes and challenge them to prepare them using as many different cooking techniques as possible.

*Pancake party* - With participants in small groups, give each group 2 eggs, 100g plain flour, 250ml milk, pinch of salt, lard or fat for frying, spoon and spatula, frying pan, a pressure or gas stove (or other source of heat), and anything else you wish to add for variations.

Challenge participants to: make coloured pancakes, hold a pancake race (perhaps over an obstacle course), make the largest pancake (not the thickest!), or hold a pancake tossing competition.

### Checking their progress

Ask participants if they can answer the following questions:

- 1) Can I explain the advantages and disadvantages of wood fires and portable stoves?
- 2) Can I select the best cooking method for a particular type of food?
- 3) Can I show how to do six of the following different cooking techniques?

Boiling	Stewing	Frying
Stir-frying	Baking	Roasting
Pot-roasting	Grilling	Poaching
Steaming	Braising	

### So they want to know more?

Build different types of wood fires and try out different cooking techniques. Which are the most successful?

Investigate more 'elaborate methods and techniques of cooking. Try them out by planning and preparing a three course meal for guests.

Try cooking without utensils, that is, 'backwoods cooking'. Again, try and prepare a three course meal.

### Your notes on this session