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Beyond burgers

Campfire cuisine is more than soups and s'mores these days.

By Julie Young
Star correspondent

John Peterson is no stranger to cooking outdoors. As an Eagle Scout, the 17-year-old has had his share of cooking over an open fire and using camping equipment to make his meals in the wild.

He and other members of Boy Scout Troop 221 camped this spring at Morristown Community Park as part of a crossover ceremony welcoming new members to the troop.

"We're having hot dogs and hamburgers tonight, but I'm making ramen noodles for lunch," said Peterson.

The troop's camp kitchen consists of a small stove and a few cooking utensils. Since the main meal would be cooked over an open fire later in the evening, Peterson said, they didn't have to pack as much as they would for a longer trip.

Camp cooking can run the gamut, depending on the level of outdoor cooking you prefer. Folks with fully loaded RVs can cook with most of the comforts of home, while backpackers must choose their food and equipment with care, taking into consideration every ounce.

Jim Roberts, the former executive chef of Grand Canyon National Park and the current chef at The Garrison restaurant



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Updated: Indian Fry Bread, a modern version of a traditional recipe, can have a savory filling, such as cheese or cooked meat, or drizzled with honey, as shown here. -- Jeri Reichenadter / The Star

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TIPS SIMPLIFY CAMP COOKING

Here are some tips for cooking during campouts:

- Measure ingredients for each meal ahead of time and pack in zippered plastic bags. Label each bag accordingly, and reuse bags if possible.
- Prepare soup, stew or chili ahead of time. Freeze and keep in the cooler. Reheat for a quick meal.
- Don't forget the heavy-duty aluminum foil. There are many uses for it at camp.
- Be very careful with gas canisters. Keep upright at all times. Keep outside in ventilated area. Check for leakage by putting liquid soap on all connections, Turn off when not in use.
- Freeze meat before putting it in a cooler. Frozen meat will keep longer and will help other items stay cold.
- Cover pots when cooking outdoors. Food will get done quicker and you will save on fuel. It also helps keep dirt and insects out of your food.
- For ease of cleanup, and to protect from smoke and fire damage, put liquid soap on the outside of your pots and pans before

at Fort Harrison, said adventurous people could find all kinds of food in the wild that can add to their camping cuisine.

"You really only need a skillet for that," he said. "You can use crawdads for fat if you don't have any lard with you."

Roberts said campers who are fishing on their trip could make "Shore Lunch," which consists of freshly caught sunfish coated in a batter made of a fresh duck egg, cornmeal and seasonings, and fried to golden brown.

The trail, he said, is loaded with roots and herbs that can be incorporated into meals "Dandelion greens make great salads, and wild herbs are fantastic," Roberts said.

As a chef, he tries to bring his cuisine down to the simplest of forms. He has his own herb garden at The Garrison and notes that the satisfaction in cooking is greater on the trail.

"I can't think of anything better than going camping and finding your ingredients as a family," he said. "It would be something you would talk about when you are old."

What about water?

Ron Lewis of Rusted Moon Outfitters in Broad Ripple said the first thing campers need to consider is how they would purify their water when out on the trail. Generally, water must be boiled for 10 minutes if a stove is available; if not, there are purification pellets that will kill viruses and parasites

In addition, deciding what type of stove and fuel you want to use is important. Again there are many options, sizes and weights involved.

Backpackers may want something as light as 4 ounces, while those in an RV will have something significantly bigger.

"The stove is the most used piece of equipment, and it's important to find the one that's right for you," Lewis said.

Keep it simple

putting over the fire.

- Block ice will last longer than cubed ice.
- To avoid unwanted visits from animals, keep food stored away or hang it above ground level.
- Cans of frozen juice will help keep other foods cold.
- Put a pan of water over the fire while you eat so it will be heated and ready for cleanup when you are done.

Source: www.lovetheoutdoors.com

COOK UP SOME CAMPFIRE CUISINE
Here are some resources for cooking on campouts:

www.lovetheoutdoors.com: This is the Web site of the Good Sam Club, a group for owners of RVs.

Camp food: www.backpackerspantry.com

"The Trailside Cookbook": (Firefly Books, \$15.95), by Don and Pam Philpott.

"Babes in the Woods": The woman's guide to eating well, sleeping well, and having fun in the backcountry (Falcon, \$12.95), by Bobbi Hoadley.

"Cooking Aboard Your RV": (Ragged Mountain Press, \$14.95), by Janet Groene.

When it comes to kitchen equipment, Lewis and the Scouts agree that there is no need to go for the expensive gear you find in the catalogs. Keeping the gear simple will make the cooking part of the camp experience more enjoyable.

"You can go a long way with a minimal amount of gear," said Lewis. "Just start with a few basic items that will be easy to buy and then make small purchases to fill in the gaps."

Mike Becker is Scoutmaster of Troop 137, sponsored by Old Bethel United Methodist Church on the Eastside.

He said that, although the boys have a tendency to want to eat easy camp foods such as s'mores, hot dogs and hamburgers, he encourages them to cook fancier stuff at least once a day.

"We are pretty fond of Dutch ovens when we camp," he said. "We make roasts and fresh breads, along with burrito wraps for breakfast."

Julie Ramon and husband Dave of Warren Township have never "roughed it" the way the Scouts do. They have a travel trailer which they use to camp at state parks and Hickory Hills campground in western Indiana.

The couple's 32-foot trailer has all of the modern conveniences of home -- a microwave, coffeemaker, three-burner stove and water heater. She says it's best to stick with what you know during camping trips, especially if you are camping for the first time.

Try some shortcuts

"We try to do things simply because it is convenient," she said, noting that it isn't uncommon for her to make stuffed green peppers and fresh corn on the cob.

"Just cook what you would at home. I'll go out and buy bulk hamburger, cook it up at home and put it in Ziploc bags for tacos, hamburger, chili or spaghetti sauce so I don't have to worry about draining grease."

She also makes a point to stock staples, such as spices and canned goods, in her trailer's pantry.

Nancy Sarver of Speedway said she and her friends have camped in cabins and used an outdoor fire pit for cooking.

"We'd get the fire going and put the grill over it, making fish fillets wrapped in foil," she said. "That's always the best."

Another one of Sarver's favorite meals is the "hobo," which consists of putting meat, such as hamburger patties, and sliced potatoes in a foil packet and cooking it in the fire's embers.

She recommends it for novice campers because it's easy to make.

The most important thing, Sarver said, is to just get out there and try it. No matter what level of camping appeals to you, there's a wealth of options to sustain you on the trail, she said.