

# *HOW TO COOK AND STORE FOOD OUTSIDE*



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## INTRODUCTION

**No Electricity? No Gas? No Refrigeration? No Problem!**

When you think about it, you realize that constant, dependable electricity is a very recent development. People survived and thrived for thousands of years before we had the convenience of refrigerators – and so can you.

If you've been camping, you already have a good idea about certain survival basics like building a fire and boiling water. Those are a good start, but depending on the resources around you, there are plenty of other ways to safely, effectively feed yourself.

## FOOD TYPES AND PRESERVATION

You're going to be dealing with two basic kinds of foods – perishable and non-perishable. Perishable foods are things that go bad such as milk, meat, fresh veggies, or anything you would normally store in a refrigerator. Non-perishable foods are dry goods, better known as the things you can store in your pantry and forget about for a long time.

Your perishable foods are usually also the most nutritious. That's why you'll want to preserve them as best you can. If you have to rely on whatever you can grow or gather seasonally, you're going to have a long, unhealthy winter.

Most modern preserved foods are actually good for quite awhile past their expiration date. That's why it's legal to sell bread and sweets at Hostess Outlets and other brands of

“day old bread” stores. These will last for weeks, but not forever. If you’re planning for the long haul, you can safely stock up on flour, sugar, yeast, pancake and biscuit mix, dried beans, and all canned goods. These foods should stay edible for years.

Plastic is a wonderful thing for everyday use, but when it comes to long term food storage, it’s not your friend. You want metal, glass or crockery. First, plastic is porous. You may not be worried about flavors leaching in over time, if you store anything moist in plastic, those pores also give bacteria a place to flourish and live. Worse yet, plastic becomes brittle over time – especially the more you use it. If you must use plastic, only use it for dry goods.

That said, your best bet for storing dry goods is metal or crockery. Your grandmother probably had three big metal jars on her kitchen counter – a huge one for flour, a medium one for sugar, and a small one for either tea or coffee. Similar containers are your best option for long term storage.

Wet storage items need to go into glass for the sake of easy sterilization. Luckily, you’re going to want to stock up on glassware anyway for the sake of canning. This is the best way to ensure you’ll have vegetables and fruits over the winter. It’s also a good way to store fully cooked soups in case you have to eat on the run with no time to heat your food.

### **Primitive Canning**

You can do primitive canning without any electricity, but you’re going to need a few things. Namely, a fire, a stockpot, glass jars, metal

canning lids, and lots of sugar, salt or vinegar, depending on what you’re preserving.

First, boil the glass jars and lids so they’re sterile. This is vital. If you don’t, you could trap bacteria inside your nice canned goods and end up with a terrible case of botulism if you eat the contents. Carefully remove them from the boiling water with metal tongs and let them cool enough to handle. Now, add more water to the pot and keep it boiling.



While the jars and lids boil, mix up your fillings. Fruit is best mixed with sugar and a dash of salt. Vegetables are best mixed with a lot of salt. You can also pickle nearly anything by adding a mix of vinegar and sugar. If you’re canning leftover soup, make sure you add extra salt to that as well. Salt is an additional preservative. Give yourself extra ammo against infection.

Fill your glass jars nearly to the top and carefully return them to the boiling water. The water should come up to the neck of the jars. Let the jars boil for 45 minutes. Using your nice sterile tongs, remove them from the boiling water and quickly screw the canning lids into place. Once they cool, they should be safe to put on a shelf and forget about for awhile.

## Primitive River Storage

If you don't have access to canning jars and lids but do have a reliable method of killing and butchering game, you can use an ancient method of food preservation that few people have heard of in modern times.

Sausage casings are nothing but well-cleaned intestines. If you like breakfast, you've eaten them before. You don't have to make sausage to use the large intestine for food storage, though. Carefully clean it of all internal residues, cut your meat into chunks small enough to thread into the intestines, weigh each section down with some reasonably heavy rocks, and knot the sections off every foot or less. Put the weighted intestines in a dense wicker basket or something else that will let water flow in but keep fish and animals out. Then, dive into the coolest part of the river, weigh your intestines down under more rocks, and hope they're still waiting when you come back. This won't substitute for a refrigerator, but you can preserve your meat for 24 hours before having to cook it. A day of easy meat you don't need to hunt can make a world of difference.

## COOKING OUTDOORS

Through most of history, cooking has been an outdoor activity. It was too hot and uncomfortable to do indoors, and often less efficient. Whether or not you have access to power, you have a lot of outdoor cooking options.

### Portable Stove

Kerosene is a wonderful thing. If you have a good store of it, you can fuel anything from

a good old fashioned barbecue grill to a camp stove to a full-sized Amish oven. If you happen to own any of those, you're in great shape.

If not, you can find affordable camp stoves and kerosene at most outdoor or sporting goods stores. The easiest ones to use either look like a single burner on a kitchen stove or a hot plate. You can use them to cook your foods the exact same way you'd cook anything on a stovetop inside.



### Mini-Grill

An even smaller, simpler option can be found in truck stops. For under \$20, you can usually find a George Foreman-style personal mini grill which you can plug into your car's cigarette lighter. If you find a personal grill with reversible plates, it's worth the extra money. That way, you can use one side for making meat and the other side for pancakes, tortillas, fried eggs, or anything else that requires a flat surface. As long as your car has power, these are a great, portable cooking investment.

While you're shopping for a mini grill to plug into your cigarette lighter, take a peek at the other items marketed at truckers. These days, you can find coffee pots, toaster ovens,

and popcorn poppers all designed to run on 12-volt power.

## Wood Flame

The most obvious method of cooking outdoors is to build a simple campfire. If you weren't in the Boy or Girl Scouts, your first few attempts can be tricky.

One of the best techniques for making a slow, steady fire is to pretend you're building a log cabin. First, gather up the driest kindling you can find. If the twig or branch snaps in your hand, that's great. If it still bends, it has too much moisture to be useful for a fire. You want to gather a variety of sizes of sticks.

When you get back to your campsite, put the tiniest twigs in the middle. Think of them as the furniture inside your house. Now, you're

going to build a log cabin around them.

Put down two parallel sticks. Now, turn 90 degrees and brace two more parallel sticks on top of them. You should be gradually building a box with nice gaps between each row. That's a good thing. You need those spaces so your fire will get plenty of air.

Build your walls as high as is practical with your supplies. Now, set fire to the kindling in the middle. If you don't have long-stemmed matches, you can set some newspaper on fire and slide it between the slats. It's much easier to set the loose kindling on fire than it is to get a roaring log going. Once the kindling lights, it will set your log cabin on fire. Keeping it in a neat shape helps channel and direct the heat, which is useful for cooking. Once it's roaring well enough to



collapse, you can add some larger sticks and eventually a log to keep it going.

You have a lot of choices with how to cook over an open flame. If you have a large hunk of meat, you can always put it on a spit and rotate it. This is a slow, labor intensive, boring way to cook, but if you don't have any modern tools available, it'll get the job done. If you do happen to have any metal around, you can create an impromptu grill out of anything from old metal fencing to ventilation shaft covers pulled off your walls. If you're using an open weave (an old grill basket or metal fencing) you want to keep your food pieces relatively thin but very wide and long so they won't fall through. They'll cook a lot faster than they would over a spit.

If you happen to have any cast iron around, once the flame dies down to bright embers you can put a cast iron skillet or pot directly onto that. You'll want something very well insulated to keep from burning your hands. Honestly, you might end up having to bundle your entire shirt around the handle in order to pull it off the embers. Cast iron is very good at retaining heat.



## Smoking

If you have access to an old barbecue smoker, you're in for a real treat. You can use this to easily, safely transform leftover game meats into jerky. If you don't have one, you can build an extremely primitive smoke tent. The results won't be anywhere near as good as what you'd get in a smoke house or a metal smoker, but they also require relatively little in the way of supplies.

Fish are the best meat for a smoke tent. You can also make jerky from wafer thin, long strips of game, but if you don't have ample salt around, the game might turn before it ends up preserved.

Start with the ashes of last night's fire. Add a few more twigs to it so it's smoldering at a nice, steady level but isn't turning into roaring flames. Thread a clothesline over it. Try to weave the line back and forth a few times, so you have multiple horizontal rows of line about six to ten inches apart.

Gut, scale, and filet your fish or cut your game into the thinnest possible sheets you can manage. Hang them up on a clothesline at least six feet off the ground. You can use whatever rope, twine or cord you have available for the line. If you have some way to hook the fish or game (threading a few bent paperclips through one end will do) so it hangs in a single layer, that's best. If you don't, go ahead and drape each piece over the line.

Build a leather or cloth tent around your fire and clothes line. You want a little air to escape from the top in order to create proper circulation, so this is best done with two

blankets as the base. Lean them inwards, so the part of the blanket touching the ground is far from the fire and the part above the meat is very close together. Drape more blankets or sheets at the back and one blanket or sheet at the front that only extends halfway down. This will let fresh air in so the fire will still have oxygen.

Now you want to feed it plenty of green wood as well as a few nice, steady logs. The logs will keep the fire going for a good long while. The green wood has moisture. It's hard to burn and will create more smoke. You'll need to replenish the green wood every few hours.

It will take around 3 days for your meat to fully cure. The goal here is total dehydration. Smoke actually changes the structure of the meat in ways that help preserve it. However, it doesn't add as much flavor as people think. If you have salt available, heavily salt your meat before hanging it up to dry. If you have pepper, that's even better. Herbs (which are the leafy part of plants) don't mix well

because they add too much moisture. Spices (which are the ground seeds of plants) work better when it comes to adding flavor. Use whatever spices you normally eat with. After all, once the jerky is dry, it should be good for months to come. Try to make it taste as good as possible.

### **Wood-Fired Oven**

If you have access to bricks and cement, you're halfway to a wood fired oven. This has a lot of advantages over a campfire. For one thing, you can bake bread. For another, while they take more time to build, once you're done, they don't require the constant attention and care of a campfire.

You're basically going to build a dome out of bricks with a chimney on one end and an arch on the other.

First, build a flat brick and cement surface to be the base of your oven. This will be your cooking surface, so try to make it as smooth as possible.



Next, it's easiest to start with the chimney.

Build three sides of a rectangle, going straight up, until it's about three feet high.

Once that's complete, use whatever sort of strong, flexible metal you have around to build the frame of a dome. The open side of the chimney should butt up right against it.

Old car antennas or hammered slices of metal bumper can be used in a pinch if you don't have any sturdy, flexible metal around. You can use strong, green, flexible wood as well. However, the wood will burn away the first time you use your oven and therefore won't provide extra structural support.

Once you finish the frame of your dome, you can build the real brick structure around it. Remember, you need a wide arch at the front for access. This is how you'll get the food in and out of your oven, so it needs to be wide enough for a pot or a flat, wooden pizza shovel.

After the cement cures, build a fire in the corner of your oven nearest the chimney. You'll get airflow from the front door circulating around the middle of the dome and going up the chimney. This is a great way to produce a strong, steady heat. Put your food at the other end of the oven, or close to the door. It's not uncommon for an oven to be too hot to use for the first hour (temperatures can reach near 500 degrees in some well-built ovens).

You can now bake pizzas, bread, rolls, and other things that need time to rise. You can also put in metal pots (or even metal coffee cans) to bake your foods. Over time, you'll

get the hang of how long things take to bake in your specific oven. It varies a lot based on the size and fuel you use, so start with small things (rolls rather than loaves of bread) and experiment until you have it down.

Don't forget, each night you'll need to sweep out all the ash before building a new fire in the morning. Otherwise, your oven will eventually fill with ash. It not only tastes bad, it also makes your oven a lot less effective with each passing day.



### Solar Cooker

If you have access to some mirrors and either a wood or cardboard box, you're well on your way to building a primitive but effective solar cooker. These are incredibly slow, easy to build, and surprisingly effective devices.

Basically, you want to create a reflective surface to gather the sun's light and transform it into heat. You need a shiny, lined interior made from either highly reflective aluminum foil or mirrors, a sturdy base that won't fall apart in the elements, one open



side to catch the light, and enough space for a solid metal cooking pot.

The easiest one to build requires a sturdy box (heavy cardboard will do) and three rectangular mirrors. You're basically building a reflective triangle in a box. Cut the top off the box. Now detach the front so it lays flat, extending out from the bottom. You should have a hollow box with no top, no front, and a very long base. Put one of your rectangular mirrors on the bottom. Angle the other two in back to form a mirror triangle. You should have an empty space behind each upright mirror and a nice reflective surface in front with no gaps in the light. Anchor everything down however you like – duct tape works best, but if you're out, you can always prop rocks in the empty spaces behind the mirrors.

If you don't have any mirrors available, you can use aluminum foil covered cardboard. Since it's not as reflective, it will be a little slower and may not heat quite as high, but it'll do in a pinch.

Now for the hard part. Put your pot in the middle of the cooker, as close to the back as possible so it's at the middle of all that acquired light. Aim your solar cooker's opening at the sun. Then go away. A covered pot in a solar cooker takes about four hours to boil.

This may seem like a bad investment, but keep in mind you're preparing food with zero effort and no fire. That means no risk

of accidental sparks setting your camp on fire, no risk of attracting predators, and no smoke giving you away to other people. Solar cookers are also useful if you're in an environment with no kindling. A desert is a great environments for solar cookers, but you'll still do surprisingly well using one during a snowy winter.

Think of your solar cooker as you would a crockpot.

Put your food into it at the crack of dawn. Keep everything sealed until dark, then open it up and enjoy a meal. It's no fuss, no maintenance cooking. Your best choices of dishes are soups or small roasts.



### Citrus

If you live in Florida, California, or somewhere else with abundant citrus, you can chemically cook your food. The technique is called “seviche,” and it has been a staple of Mediterranean cooking since the Spaniards first colonized South America.

They learned the technique from the newly conquered Incans and brought it home with them. Since the sailors knew citrus would prevent scurvy and they happened to be spending months at a time on boats, it was quickly adopted and eventually became popular on the mainland.

Debone your raw fish or poultry and cut the meat into small pieces with lots of surface area. (Don't try this with game. The flavors don't blend well at all.) You want about

2 large lemons or limes for each pound of meat. Oranges aren't acidic enough for cooking, though they can add a nice sweetness to the overall flavor if you happen to have any around.

Juice your lemons or limes. Add in about 1 tsp of sugar for every 2 pounds of meat. This will keep it from being too bitter and tangy. You can also add any herbs you happen to have available, such as basil leaves, thyme or rosemary. (Just pick one. You don't want to overwhelm the flavors.) If it's available, ½ tsp of salt for every 2-4 pounds of meat also enhances the flavor.

Mix your juices, sugar, salt and optional herbs in a sealable container. Anything from a cooking pot to gallon sized plastic ziplock-style bags will do fine. Add your meat chunks and shake vigorously until they're saturated with the citrus. Now let it sit for 12 hours. You'll be able to witness the chemical transformation of the meat as it changes

color and texture. With modern food safety consciousness, it takes some time to get used to cooking with ceviche, but this is a perfectly safe, heat-free cooking technique for any fish or birds which were not raised in a factory farm setting.

## SCAVENGING

So far we've been assuming you're outside a city. However, if you're in an urban disaster situation, it might take some time and effort to get to a safe place where you can be more self-sufficient. Meanwhile, you have yourself and your family to feed.

Your best bet is to start with the homes of people who have just left. They will have taken everything they can fit in their vehicle or on their backs. That means you're going to be left with a miscellaneous collection of things they couldn't fit and found a low priority – but you won't have to fight for them and you'll be able to rest easy knowing you're not taking anything the owners deemed necessary for survival.

Treat the house like you hope others would treat yours. Hopefully, the owners will be able to come back some day. Unplug the fridge and leave both the refrigerator and freezer open. That way, if the power does come back they won't suddenly be chilling rotten food, which would leave their refrigerator unusable in the future. It also clearly demonstrates to other looters that there's nothing to eat. Likewise, leave all the barren cabinets wide open so people who come after you can see there isn't

any food. This reduces the likelihood that looters will destroy the place as they search.

Go ahead and take whatever food you can find, even if it seems completely useless to your needs. Someone is likely to want it, and when you meet them, you can negotiate a trade.

## BARTER ECONOMY

In a disaster situation, money can easily end up devalued. Dollars won't fill your belly, but that bag of beans will.

You'll probably have a few odd food items that are incredibly valuable to someone else but not much interest to you. Let those trades happen naturally. You don't want to waste a tremendous amount of energy on finding the best high value trades while your stomach is rumbling from hunger. Instead, you're better off trading services for food. If you have a reliable way to cook without power, you have a reliable way to fill your belly. This allows you to trade cooking services for a portion of the finished food.

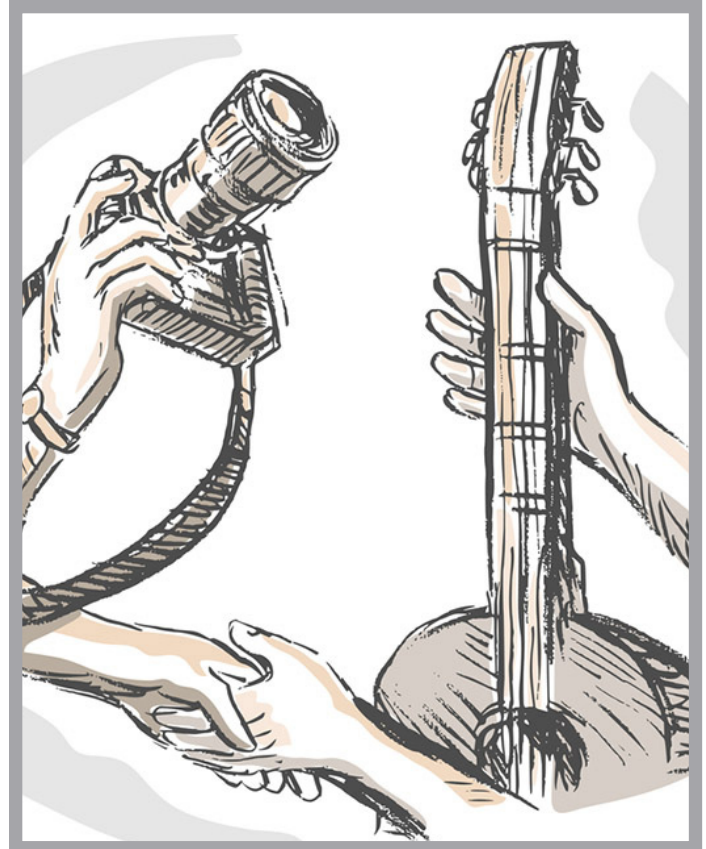
If you've built a brick oven, you can bake someone's bread in exchange for one breaking off enough to leave yourself one roll for every loaf.

On a simpler level, if you have enough raw materials for a collection of solar cookers, you can feed yourself all day. One meal for you is a good exchange for cooking one pot of someone else's food. Three of these equal a solid day of hot meals. Six is enough for you and a spouse.

Even if all you have is a simple wood fire, you put the effort into gathering and building it.

Sharing it in exchange for a small, reasonable portion of food helps preserve your valuable stockpile longer while allowing someone else to have a hot meal, and possibly helping you nurture an ally.

That said, if you're stationary, you run the risk of people taking what they want. Don't try to enter into a service-based barter economy unless you are well armed and prepared to do whatever it takes to defend your resources. Never let the people you're bartering with think they can simply take what they want. A well armed, polite, competent person will be well equipped to survive and thrive.



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