

Camping In A Fridge

That's essentially what the outdoors is, so use those cold temps to carry tasty foods that wouldn't stand a chance in summer.

By [Paul Cleveland](#), February 2000

The luster of the waxing moon illuminated our winter playground like a baseball diamond under the lights. Dinner, which had been in the works since we pitched camp, could wait while we had fun. We poured the hot chocolate into a Thermos, wrapped the pot of cooked rice in fleece and stuffed it into a sleeping bag to stay warm, then grabbed our skis. As we showed off our best telemark turns, the main course defrosted in my pocket.

We returned to camp exhilarated and downright starving. Sips of the still-steaming hot chocolate melted the ice off my handlebar mustache while I finished making dinner. From the "oven"-my coat pocket-came a beautiful chunk of sushi-grade ahi tuna. I sliced it quickly and whipped up sushi rolls and instant hot-and-sour soup. A sushi bar in the middle of Washington's Mt. Baker Wilderness-who'd have thought?

That's what I love about winter camping. You can eat food, lots of food, that would spoil in summer. Think about it: You're hiking in a big freezer, so take advantage of it. Pack in zesty ground beef to spice up bean burritos. Breakfast comes complete with sausage links. You can even carry along a smoked turkey breast, instant stuffing, and gravy that tastes as good as Thanksgiving dinner.

Actually, you need this variety so you'll consume enough calories to power you through days of carrying a heavy pack in cold conditions. Here are some menu suggestions.

Breakfast: Egg Beaters (found in the refrigerated section of the grocery store) are ideal for snowshoeing trips. They're packaged in a milk-carton-like container (no broken shells to mess with) and, if they freeze on the trail, defrost quickly when you dunk the whole container in boiling water for a few minutes. Fry the eggs in a pan with chopped sausage links, rehydrated peppers, and sun-dried tomatoes, then top with a specialty cheese like gorgonzola. Add a side of bacon and hash browns (check your grocer's freezer section for all sorts of options).

A quick start option: At home, make a sandwich of Nutella, a delicious hazelnut-cocoa spread found near the peanut butter in the grocery store, spread between two shortbread cookies. Each chocolate sandwich packs about 170 calories. Three or four with morning coffee is an excellent start.

Morning snacks: Keep crackers, dried fruit, gorp, or other finger food in a handy location. Suck on hard candies, made with sugar rather than artificial sweetener, when you want a quick pick-me-up.

Lunch: When midday rolls around, a warm meal will ward off chills and motivate you through an afternoon of breaking trail. The quick option: Make instant soup while eating breakfast and put it in a Thermos (to save pack space, bring a small Thermos instead of an insulated cup) for lunch. Put dehydrated hash browns and warm water in a plastic bag and stick it inside your cook kit. The potatoes will rehydrate during your morning hike. At lunch, fry up the hash browns in a nonstick pan, top with cheese and salsa or hot sauce, and serve with the soup.

Afternoon snacks: More dried fruit, granola bars, and jerky. If you're a fan of energy bars, do a "freezer test" at home first and avoid those that get rock hard in cold weather.

Dinner: Once you're in camp and have changed into warm, dry clothes, start with an appetizer. Hot drinks, soup, and snacks like gorp or dried fruit maintain the warmth you generated while hiking and bring on a second wind you'll need for the long evening of stove tending. Salty snacks like cheese and crackers, sardines, jerky, or jazzed up popcorn (see *Moveable Feast*, December 1999) replace electrolytes (salt,

potassium, magnesium) and stimulate thirst.

End the day with the same carbo-packed dinner entrées you love in summer: pasta, rice, dehydrated potatoes, grains, and bagels. Your frozen environment lets you add some life to these old favorites in the way of meats and poultry (steak, boneless chicken, or turkey breast), seafood (frozen tuna, salmon, shrimp, or scallops), and softer cheeses (goat cheese and mozzarella). It'll all stay cold until you cook it. The freezer section of your grocery store has limitless ideas. If you really hate to cook and don't mind the extra weight, consider packing frozen prepared meals such as Create-a-Meal! from Green Giant and Chicken Viola from Birds Eye.

Bring fresh garlic and a well-stocked spice kit-the spicier the better. Red pepper and salsa picante hot sauce warm you from the inside. Keep the recipes simple so there's less chopping, which means less exposure of tender fingers to the cold.

End the meal in style with everyone's favorite, cheesecake. Today's no-bake versions are a divine treat and a welcome boost in the dead of winter.

Midnight snack: Winter is the time to have a nightcap. Drink hot tea or coffee and munch on a chocolate bar with nuts right before bed. Make hot herbal tea in your water bottle, tighten the lid, and stash it inside your sleeping bag for a dual purpose-to keep you warm and to keep the water bottle from freezing. The warm bottle will keep you warm on the outside, and you can sip its contents to warm your insides. Snack throughout the night, too, if you get cold or hungry.

By The Numbers

This all-day smorgasbord should add up to 2 pounds of food per person per day and 5,000 calories. Don't go overboard with too many fancy backcountry dishes or you'll feel like you're carrying the refrigerator on your back. Find a balance by mixing a few luxury dinners with traditional backpacking fare. On weekend getaways, basecamping trips, or when you're hauling gear on a sled (see Gear Works, December 1998), bring a precooked steak or chicken, seafood, a frozen carrot cake or cream pie, and maybe even a bottle of wine.

Also, remember you're going to use up another type of fuel-the kind you cook with. Water is essential for the body and hard to come by during the frozen season, so melting snow is top priority (see Know-How, December 1999). Bring at least 2 quarts of white gas for a weeklong, two-person trip where you'll be melting snow and having a hot lunch or two. White gas stoves are best for cold conditions, since compressed gas doesn't vaporize as well at low temperatures, and you have to warm the canister with body heat before starting to cook. Take along an extra stove so one stove can melt snow for tomorrow's drinking water while the other cooks dinner. Plus you won't be out of luck if one seizes up in the freeze.

Recipes

Breakfast Entree

Blazin' Breakfast Burritos

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 chorizo (Mexican sausage)
- 1 Ounce-package Lipton garlic noodles
- 1 egg beaters
- 1/2 Cup freeze-dried peas
- 4 tortillas
- 10 Ounces chicken

Serves: 2

Slice and cook the sausage, then remove it from the pan. Pour Egg Beaters into the pan and cook until they're no longer runny. Spoon eggs and sausage into tortillas and eat.

Garlic Chicken Supreme

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Serves: 2

Cook the noodles according to the package directions. As the noodles are cooking, rehydrate the peas. Once the noodles are done, add the peas and chicken and cook for 1 more minute until heated through.

Lunch Entree

Kanpai Salad

Recipe Ingredients

- 1/2 Pound raw ahi tuna
- 1 1/2 Tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/2 Teaspoon wasabi
- 1/2 Teaspoon sesame seeds
- 1 nori
- 1 Ounce-package instant rice, cooked
- 1 1/2 Tablespoons pickled ginger

Serves: 2

Mix the tuna, soy sauce, wasabi, sesame seeds, and nori squares together. Be conservative with the wasabi until you taste the mixture. Wasabi is very hot horseradish paste and you can always add more later. Serve over rice, and add pickled ginger on the side for an authentic twist.

Dinner Entree

Spicy Stir-Fry

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 green peppers, chopped
- 1/2 Teaspoon hot pepper flakes
- 1 1/2 Teaspoons onion flakes
- 1/2 Cup dried carrots
- 1 1/2 Teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 Tablespoons vegetable or olive oil
- 3 Tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 Teaspoon Thai spice
- 1/2 Tablespoon powdered ginger
- 1/2 Pound raw tofu, diced

Serves: 2 or 3

Rehydrate dried ingredients. Cook the pepper, hot pepper flakes, onion, carrot, and garlic with oil and soy sauce. Add the Thai spice, ginger, and tofu, cooking until the tofu is lightly browned. Serve with rice or yakisobba noodles.