

Pass The Powdered Beans

When it comes to punching up a bland menu, there's a whole world of flakes, granules,

By [Dorcas Miller](#), July 2000

I have a friend who, while heading out the door for northern Canada, told me he planned to eat Ramen noodles for dinner-every dinner, for two months. No slight against Ramen noodles, but for 60 days straight? I remember thinking how boring his "menu" was and how it didn't have to be. For example, simply adding half a cup of rehydrated mixed vegetables and a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese to Ramen noodles-or rice or spaghetti-makes a world of difference. All it takes is a quick trip to the local food store or a few minutes with a mail-order catalog to find backpackable ingredients that will add new life to traditional backwoods staples or vary your menu with new entrees.

Granted, these ultralight, good-tasting ingredients can cost more than plain ol' noodles, but anything you can do to keep your palate happy and the nutrients coming is worth the extra expense.

"Some people think nothing of putting money into the best equipment for outdoor adventures," says Jean Spangenberg, product development specialist at Adventure Foods in Whittier, North Carolina. "But when it comes to paying for the necessary fuel to keep their most important piece of equipment (their bodies) going, they balk." A change in attitude is in order, she adds.

If you're a smart shopper, you won't overpay for quality fixings. Read on to find the ingredients you want, then contact the companies and ask for their catalogs. That way, you can comparison shop and get the best price. Be sure to figure in shipping when comparing cost of mail order vs. your local store. You can also save money by buying in bulk, then setting up a food co-op with your backpacking buddies.

Sources for the ingredients are abbreviated and in parentheses.

Beans and lentils, freeze-dried: Legumes are a great protein source and add hearty flavor to soups and stews. Dehydrated bean flakes and powdered beans (HFS/S; PFO for organic) are fine for burritos, spreads, and soup thickeners, but if you like to see beans in your bowl, opt for freeze-dried. Options for freeze-dried include kidney, black, pinto, and white beans, plus lentils (AA/AF/BP).

Butter powder: Real butter powder (TBC) tastes better than butter-flavored sprinkles (S). Add to hot cereal, pancakes, soups, and stews. Rehydrated butter powder doesn't spread or taste like the real thing on bagels.

Cheese powder: Add to eggs and one-pot meals (AA/CAS/S/TBC). Try blue cheese powder in macaroni and cheese for a distinctive taste (TBC).

Coconut cream powder: Combine this unique ingredient (AFS) with rice, onion, cilantro, ginger, garlic, and shrimp for a Thai-flavored dinner, or team with fruit and rice for an amazing rice pudding. Powdered coconut (TBC) can be substituted, but because it has less fat, it lacks the same richness.

Eggs, whole powdered: Use in place of fresh eggs when baking, or scramble with herbs or salsa for a breakfast with bite (AA/AF/TBC).

Fruit, dehydrated: Great as a snack and cooked in pancakes or cobblers. Apples, apricots, bananas, cranberries, dates, figs, mangos, peaches, pineapple, prunes, and raisins are widely available (CC/HFS/JT/M/S; WA sells organic varieties). Also consider sweet or sour cherries and blueberries (CC/JT/M/TBC/WA), bananas, guava, nectarines, and strawberries (WA has some organic items). Add variety with raspberries and persimmons (JT/M), jackfruit, kiwi, passion fruit, and star fruit (M).

Fruit, freeze-dried: Cook blueberries and pineapple (AA), peaches and strawberries (AA/BP) in cobblers, pancakes, or hot cereal. They also make a fine snack by themselves.

Ginger, candied: Adds zing to gorp (S/TBC/WA; HFS may sell in bulk, which is less expensive).

Grains, quick-cooking: Quinoa, quick-cooking barley, and instant rice are readily available (S) as the center of any meal. Add lemon juice, oregano, and dried cranberries to leftovers for a tangy cold lunch. If you're not a white rice fan, try freeze-dried (AA) or dehydrated brown rice (AF) in soups and other one-pot meals. Add veggies, seasoning,

and a little meat to wild rice (AA/GWR) for a distinctive and delicious entree.

Maple syrup granules: Add water, and presto-maple syrup (above right) to top pancakes or add to bland oatmeal (AF/BP/HF).

Meat (beef, chicken, and turkey), freeze-dried: Expensive but extremely lightweight, these add protein to one-pot meals. Throw a handful of chunks in a pot with rice to create stuffing for a burrito (AA/AF/BP/R).

Meat (chicken, sausage, bacon), dehydrated: Dehydrated chicken and sausage (CC) require longer rehydration time than freeze-dried meats. Bacon bits (S) are a lightweight way to add meaty flavor to eggs and soups.

Pasta, quick-cooking: Just add boiling water and let stand for 10 minutes. It's the fastest pasta around (AA).

Salsa, dehydrated: Use on burritos, eggs, and anything else that needs spicing up (HFS/PFO).

Shortening, powdered: Expensive but ideal when you don't want to mess with a leaky bottle of oil. Sprinkle into a frying pan-it melts to oil as it heats up-or use in baking, where 1/2 teaspoon of powder equals 1 teaspoon of oil or shortening (HF).

Shrimp, cooked freeze-dried: Pricy but so good. Rehydrate in water, and then cook with rice or other grain (AA).

Sour cream powder: Stir a teaspoon of powder into hot cereal, pancakes, and biscuits. To make a garnish for Mexican food or one-pot meals, just add water (AA/TBC).

Tomato powder: Indispensable for making spaghetti sauce even your Italian aunt would be proud of. Add herbs like basil, oregano, and garlic plus dehydrated veggies like onions, green peppers, and thinly sliced mushrooms to water. Stir in tomato powder and let simmer until the veggies are rehydrated (AA/AF/TBC).

Tuna, freeze-dried: Canned tuna is a staple for backpackers, but to go really light, try freeze-dried (AA).

Vegetables, dehydrated: Add veggies and seasonings to beef or chicken broth for a warm soup. Try cabbage, carrots, celery, mushrooms, onions, sweet peppers, and tomatoes (AF/CC/HFS/JT/S/TBC; AA has greatest selection).

Vegetables, freeze-dried: Peas and corn (AA/AF/BP/JT/MH/R; M has only corn) and green beans (BP/MH/R) rehydrate in about 10 minutes. Asparagus and broccoli are better as soup add-ins than as side dishes (AA/AF).

Resources

AA/AlpineAire Foods. For a list of retailers, contact P.O. Box 926, Nevada City, CA 95959; (800) 322-6325; www.alpineairefoods.com

AF/Adventure Foods, 481 Banjo Ln., Whittier, NC 28789; (828) 497-4113; www.adventurefoods.com; adfoods@dnet.net

AFS/Asian food stores-bigger cities usually have one or two Asian groceries

BP/Backpacker's Pantry, 6350 Gunpark Dr., Boulder, CO 80301; (800) 641-0500

CAS/Cabot Annex Store, Rt. 100, Box 332, Waterbury, VT 05676; (802) 244-6334

CC/Chamy Co., 3131 Western Ave., Ste. 329, Seattle, WA 98121; (800) 322-7010

GWR/Gibbs Wild Rice, P.O. Box 277, Deer River, MN 56636; (800) 344-6378

HF/Harvest Foodworks, RR 1, Toledo, ON, Canada, K0E 1Y0; (800) 268-4268; www.harvest.on.ca; thefolks@harvest.on.ca

JT/Just Tomatoes, Etc., P.O. Box 807, Westley, CA 95387; (800) 537-1985; tomatoes@evansinet.com

M/Melissa's, P.O. Box 21127, Los Angeles, CA 90021; (800) 588-0151; www.melissas.com; hotline@melissas.com

MH/Mountain House. For a list of local suppliers, contact P.O. Box 1048, Albany, OR 97321; (800) 547-0244; www.ofd.com/mh; mtnhouse@ofd.com

PFO/Paradise Farm Organics, 1000 Wild Iris Ln., Moscow, ID 83843; (800) 758-2418; paradise@moscow.com

R/Richmor. For a list of local suppliers, contact P.O. Box 8092, Van Nuys, CA 91406; (800) 423-3170; www.richmor.com; mail@richmor.com

S/Supermarkets

TBC/The Baker's Catalogue, P.O. Box 876, Norwich, VT 05055-0876; (800) 827-6836; www.kingarthurfLOUR.com

WA/Walnut Acres Organic Farms, Penns Creek, PA 17862-0800; (800) 433-3998; www.walnutacres.com

Dorcas S. Miller stalks trail-food ingredients in Chelsea, Maine. She is the author of Backpacker's Backcountry Cooking:

From Pack to Plate in 10 Minutes (\$16.95, The Mountaineers Books, 800-553-4453) and Good Food for Camp and Trail:

All-Natural Recipes For Delicious Meals Outdoors (\$14.95, Pruett Publishing, 800-247-8224).

Recipes

**Afternoon Snack
Lunch Entree
Snack**

Cheesy Couscous

Recipe Ingredients

- 1/2 Cup couscous
- 6 pieces dried tomato
- 2 Tablespoons cheese powder

Serves: 1

At Home: Combine all ingredients in a zipper-lock bag.

In Camp: Place ingredients in a bowl and add 1 cup boiling water. Let stand 10 minutes. Serves one.

**Afternoon Snack
Desert
Dinner Entree
Dinner Side Dish
Lunch Entree**

Coconut Mango Rice Pudding

Recipe Ingredients

- 1/2 Teaspoon potato starch
- 2 Tablespoons powdered milk
- 1 1/2 Tablespoons coconut cream powder
- 1/2 Teaspoon sugar
- 1/2 Cup instant rice
- 1 Tablespoon dried mango, chopped

Serves: 48

At Home: Combine first four ingredients in a zipper-lock bag. Mix well, then add dried mango and rice.

In Camp: Pour ingredients into an insulated mug and add 1/2 cup boiling water. Stir well. Cover and let stand 5 minutes.

Dinner Entree

Phil's Ultralite Potatoes With Gravy

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 Ounce freeze-dried beef
- 1 Ounce freeze-dried green beans
- 1 envelope gravy mix

Serves: 2