



# ULTIMATE BACKCOUNTRY KITCHEN

*THE BACKPACKERS COMPLETE GUIDE TO MEAL PLANNING AND OUTDOOR EATING*

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This e-book is meant to help you make decisions while preparing for your trip and while you are in the backcountry. The information provided here has been learned from trial, error and with the help and direction of others. The techniques suggested are not meant to be set in stone and are certainly not the only way to do things. I am not a nutritional expert or a perfect backcountry cook. You are about to embark on an adventure. Part of that adventure is the process of trying new techniques and ideas, failing here and there, and ultimately succeeding and relishing your new skills.





## Introduction



Every year I go on a backpacking trip with some girlfriends. In order to plan such a trip, we are usually only able to get away for a few days. We have a habit of making vague plans about food then maybe a couple of us will talk about who should bring what. Somehow we pass on the message that most of us are responsible for at least one meal and everyone brings their own snacks and lunch food. Without fail, each one of us heads off onto the trail with enough food to feed an army of Amazon women. We get to camp and the food comes out almost immediately. Whole bags of grapes, avocados, mountains of chocolate, bottles of wine and homemade baked treats emerge from our packs. We already know, going into these trips that the food will be plentiful and the backpacks will be heavy. Most of us realize that this is not always the ideal method for planning meals in the backcountry. This technique can work for a bunch of disorganized gals on a short trip, but probably wouldn't work so well for a trip that was longer than a few days.

If you have ever been backcountry camping, then you know how much planning it can take to decide on, shop for and organize your meals. If you want to make decent meals with flavor and nutrition, then the list gets longer and the pack gets heavier. If your trip goes longer than a few days, the food planning can get even more complicated. Trying to find a balance between weight, calories, flavor, and nutrition can be overwhelming for anyone.

You may have already figured out some meal planning techniques that work for you (and some that don't). You may even be familiar with bulk ration planning.

My goal in writing this book is to give the reader enough direction and information to get excited, interested and informed about cooking in the backcountry. The focus of the book is on the use of bulk rations, but there is plenty of general information that you may find helpful for any type of meal planning in the backcountry.



## The Ration Planning Process Explained



Welcome to the world of backcountry rations! With the help of this booklet and a little creativity, you will be able to use all of the ingredients in your ration to prepare a wide variety of meals, from cinnamon buns to cheesy fried pasta.

If you have already planned your ration with the help of the [Food Planning Wizard](#), then you are well on your way to a successful culinary camping trip.

If you are curious about what went into the planning process for your ration, or you would like to try to plan your own ration without the help of the Food Planning Wizard, read on.

Here are some considerations that go into a bulk ration plan.

- How many people in your group?
- How many days will you be out?
- What type of weather/temperatures are you expecting?
- What activities and level of exertion are you planning?
- Are there any dietary considerations for your group?

The first step is to determine how many pounds of food each person will be consuming each day. Here is a guide that will help.

Exertion Level	Weather & Temperature	Pounds per Person per Day	Large Appetites
Normal exertion, regular activity levels	Warm days, warm nights above freezing	1.5 - 1.75	1.75
Normal exertion	Warm days, cold nights	1.75 - 2.0	2
Normal exertion	Cold days, cold nights	2.0 - 2.25	2.25
Heavy exertion, long travel days	Warm days, warm nights above freezing	1.75 - 2.0	2
Heavy exertion	Warm days, cold nights	2.0 - 2.25	2.25
Heavy exertion	Cold days, cold nights	2.25 - 2.5	2.5



It is important to keep in mind that everyone has different appetites and metabolic levels. The previous table is meant to be a guide. Once you have been out on a trip, you will be able to tweak the ration plan for your next trip by keeping track of how many pounds of left-overs you had and what foods you used a lot of or didn't use at all. This is an on-going learning process.

Once you have determined how many pounds per person you will be taking out for each day, you will need to multiply this number by the number of days you will be out. For example, if your group will be taking 1.75 lbs/person/day, and you will be out for 12 days, the weight each person will be taking should equal 21 lbs (1.75 lb x 12 days).

Next you need to take this number (21 lbs) and multiply by the number of people in your group. Therefore, if you have a group of 3, then the total number of pounds of food your group will be taking is 63 (21 lbs x 3 people).

Okay, so what do you do with this total number of pounds of food? You now need to divide the pounds into different categories. You don't want to only eat 63 lbs of pasta, right? So in order to divide this up, you need to consider two things, nutrition and meal distribution.

Here is an example of how the [Food Planning Wizard](#) breaks up the ration.

Breakfast Foods	17%
Dinner Foods	19%
Cheese	12%
Trail Food	20%
Flour & Baking	8%
Sugar & Fruit Drinks	5%
Soups, Bases & Desserts	6%
Milk, Eggs, Margarine & Cocoa	13%





## What To Bring For Your Kitchen

Ever gone camping and forgotten a key item? Sometimes it is a pocket knife or lighter, other times the tent poles or your stove...oops! There is nothing more humbling than asking your neighbors (if you are lucky to have any) to borrow their stove so you can cook your dinner.

This checklist will help you remember some of the essential kitchen items to pack. Print this list and photocopy for multiple uses.

- **One - burner stove.** On winter trips it is a good idea to bring two stoves so you can be melting snow for water and cooking at the same time.
- A **wind screen** for your stove. Some stoves come with them and others don't.
- A **stove repair kit.** At least bring spare parts, or better yet, two stoves.
- **Stove Fuel.** This is one thing you really don't want to run out of. A good estimate for a summer trip is one third of a liter/quart per stove, per day. Up to one half of a liter/quart per day for colder trips, especially if you are melting snow for water.
- A **ration of food** or a menu plan, depending on your length of trip. Extra power bars and snacks are always a good idea.
- A **fry-bake** (with lid). This handy, all-purpose pan is sturdy, fits into your pack, and you can use it to fry or bake your backcountry meals ([www.frybake.com](http://www.frybake.com)). An [Outback Oven](#) will also work for frying and baking.
- A **pot for boiling water** (with lid). The size will depend on how many people are in your cooking group. A three or four quart /liter pot should be sufficient for most groups.
- **Pot grips.** So handy! If you use gloves you will likely melt them and/or burn yourself.
- **A Dromedary Bag.** A 'Drom' is a bag sold by MSR (Mountain Safety Research) that you can fill with water when you are in camp ([www.msrcorp.com](http://www.msrcorp.com)). Having two for a group of four or larger is recommended. When you get to camp, you can walk to the nearest water source and fill them. You can then keep them in your kitchen area and have lots of accessible water. This will cut down on the amount of trips you will need to take to the creek, which is both convenient and less of an environmental impact. If you are traveling in the desert, a Drom can also be used for hauling water longer distances. They are also great for washing hands, or even taking a shower. They are black and can warm up if left in the sun for a while.



- A **spatula**. You can use a small, metal spatula for cutting foods, stirring and flipping. You don't even really need a stirring spoon if you have one.
- A personal **bowl with a lid**, and a sturdy plastic camping spoon. I never bring a fork. I prefer a bowl with a screw-top lid. That way, I can put left-overs or my lunch in it, screw on the lid and keep it in the top of my pack. I also cut my spoon so it fits inside the bowl.
- A **bear-safe storage device**. There are a few options depending on where you are going. If you are going to be traveling in the trees, you can do a 'bear-hang'. If you are going to be in an alpine area, you may want to consider a bear-proof container or a bear-proof fence (usually electrical). Some established campgrounds have bear poles or other hanging devices. A small carabiner and a stuff sack can be used for these. If you are not going to be in bear country, you should still consider the possibilities of other critters getting into your food.
- **Zip bags** (duffel bags) for putting your food into when you get to camp. Zip bags really help keep you organized when you get to camp. You can put all of your kitchen items and food into it and carry it all over to the kitchen area in one trip. Making less trips helps minimize your impact on the land.
- At least two **lighters** (one per person is recommended).
- Waterproof **matches**.
- A **knife**. A Leather-man or Swiss Army knife will do fine.
- A **Water purification system**. There are several varieties of water filters available. You can also opt for iodine in liquid or tablets.
- **Hand sanitizer**. Just bring it (and use it).
- **Biodegradable soap**. A small container will go a long way.
- A **coffee press** or other coffee filtering device such as a coffee sock, filter or mug with a built – in press. Obviously this is only important for coffee drinkers, but if you have any, you'd better not forget the coffee or the filter.
- **Lexan Scoop/cup**. Good for dipping in your pot of boiling water and measuring ingredients. Could be replaced with a small titanium mug that could also be your mug for hot drinks.
- A **Hot Drink Container**. I use a small Nalgene bottle. You can close it and keep it in your jacket, or on your body wherever it needs warming up. You can also use a small titanium camping mug for hot drinks, a water scoop and for steam baking.
- **One-burner cookbook**. Bring the book or photocopy some recipes to try.