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**Banish the beans Gourmet campfire cookery adds flavor to the great outdoors**

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Ah the wilderness. The scent of pine upon the breeze. The wake-up call of birds' songs and morning dew. The third hot dog to fall into the fire. The half-charred, half-uncooked hobo dinner. The s'mores with a special layer of ash.

If you've been camping, you've no doubt enjoyed the beauty of nature. Every camper has also undoubtedly sacrificed a week of a sated and happy stomach in exchange for such an experience. For many, the magic of being at one with the woods manages to outweigh the lousy food that goes along with it.

For some would-be campers, however, having to leave good tastes behind simply isn't worth the use of precious, paid-time-off. Robin Donovan spent many years in just that position. She wrote of her disillusionment with the great outdoors in her book, "Campfire Cuisine: Gourmet Recipes for the Great Outdoors": "...I have always subscribed to the 'live to eat' philosophy of life - and vacationing. After all, isn't pleasure the whole point of a vacation? And isn't eating delicious food one of the greatest pleasures of all?"

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Amen, say gourmets everywhere.

But what if no sacrifice had to be made? What if lunchtime at the campsite meant not a soggy grilled cheese but a "Grilled Goat Cheese Sandwich with Shallot, Tomato and Thyme?" What if instead of canned meat on a bun for dinner, camping meant being able to enjoy "Southeast Asian Turkey Burgers?"

"What if each s'more could be exchanged for a "Maple-Caramel Baked Apple?"

It is this heavenly balance of fresh-air and great food that Donovan writes about in her book. It began with the camping trip she was finally persuaded to attend after years of holding out for vacations with finer fares. Her pessimism was quickly snuffed as her friends served her a meal of marinated chicken kebabs and roasted potatoes with herbs and olive oil.

That one meal changed everything. Years later, as a camping and gourmet-camp stove cooking expert, she wrote the cookbook, "Campfire Cuisine" to share her revelation with would-be campers everywhere. The book covers everything from breakfast to dessert and from sauces to snacks.

Do "Bacon-Wrapped Grilled Figs," "Indonesian Peanut Dip," or "Spicy Creole Shrimp," sound tasty, if not slightly complicated for outdoor cuisine? Worry not. Donovan sticks to the rule of thumb that if you're going to do it outside it had better be fairly easy.

"Outdoor cooking doesn't need to be elaborate in order to yield stunning results," Donovan wrote of her recipes. All it takes is a little planning and advance preparation and your camping caravan is ready to go gourmet.

### **The must haves**

Regardless of the menu, there are certain things that are necessary for a cuisine camping trip. These are things such as a cooler, kitchen tools, flatware, cookware, a lantern, cook stove and the proper amount of plates and mugs. Without the proper equipment, a gourmet can only do so much.

Some disposable supplies are also needed for the meals. Among them are aluminum foil, plastic zip bags, firewood, matches, garbage bags and the like. Donovan suggests a list of 27 pantry items that should come along on any outdoor venture.

### **Planning the menu**

The remainder of planning-ahead depends entirely on what one decides to cook during the trip. Donovan suggests planning the meals for each day to ensure no ingredients are left behind. Once meals are planned for each day of the trip, look through the ingredients list to see what needed items remain. Make sure that ample room is allowed in the cooler for the perishable ingredients and any leftovers that might remain. Nonperishables can be stored in crates or carried in bags.

Finally, check to see if any meals include mixes or sauces that can be made at home before you leave. For example, in Donovan's "Grilled Flank Steak With Olive Relish," the relish can be made in advance and the steak can marinate in the cooler for up to 24 hours.

Getting as much done ahead of time makes for a camping trip that can be enjoyed as much for its quiet and relaxation as it is for its delicious food and Donovan's Campfire Cuisine is an excellent guide for doing just that. In addition to more than 100 easy recipes, it includes advice on how to safely store, prepare and cook food, how to pick the best cook stove and many other tips on campsite cooking. As an added bonus, Donovan doesn't require readers to brave the outdoors to enjoy her recipes: each has alternate directions for cooking at home.

With plenty of summer left this year, there's lots of time for food connoisseurs everywhere to turn over a new camping leaf. No longer will city slickers have to suffer the monotony of canned pork and beans with a side of smashed potato chips in order to enjoy some fresh air.

Now as soon as someone figures out how to remove the handful of sand that always appears in the end of your sleeping bag, the world of camping will be a perfect place.



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