

Charlotte M. Dunn

Picnic Pointers and Frill-Free Ideas for Any Outdoor Meal

There comes a time when the urge for a change of scenery stirs us all. Thoughts of food follow naturally. The lusty aroma of outdoor cooking tempts an appetite at any time. The menu doesn't need a lot of frills. A correctly planned menu is flexible—just switch main courses and you still have a balanced meal to satisfy hearty appetites of fresh air diners.

Planning the outdoor meal comes first. Be it a picnic, a campfire cookout, or a meal on an outdoor grill or a fireplace, the foods must fill the day's nutritional needs with an appealing variety of flavor, texture, and color.

For family and company meals you serve outdoors, consider two important stages in the preparation. The first, vital to the enjoyment of the occasion by host and hostess as well as guests, is the planning and organization of work. Prepare as many foods as possible in your kitchen before carrying to the porch, patio, or backyard. Second, observe the food preparation and the cooking practices necessary for serving quality outdoor meals, both in taste and in nutritive value.

Dewy morning air mixed generously

with the unmistakable aroma of food can only mean breakfast in the open. Cook anything from delicious roasted apples filled with orange marmalade and topped with chopped nuts (prepared, wrapped in foil, and stored in the refrigerator the night before) to crisp brown sausages with eggs and a buttery hot bread.

Hot breads offer a variety of choices. Muffins, baked the day before, can be split and warmed in foil. Bread slices are tasty spread with softened butter and poppy seeds, or sugar and cinnamon. Wrap slices in foil, leaving an opening for steam to escape, and heat for 20 minutes on the grill, turning to heat evenly. A home prepared master mix or ready prepared biscuit mix gives you a chance to surprise the family with a kolochy. Add 1 cup milk to 2 cups biscuit mix, stir to a soft dough, and drop biscuits on a lightly buttered pan. Press a hollow in the center of each, fill with tart jelly, and sprinkle with grated cheese. Bake 10 to 15 minutes in a 400° F. oven, a reflector, or a barbecue grill unit.

A barbecue-brunch on a sunny weekend can be a meal to remember. Start with a platter of assorted melon wedges . . . iced honeydew, cantaloup, and watermelon. Then stir up a skillet of superb scrambled eggs. When the eggs are partially cooked, add grated cheese ($\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup for 8 eggs). Serve on hot buns or rolls, topped with a touch of bacon or ham. For a flavor change, try slices of smoked pork butt capped with broiled pineapple slices. The smoked pork butt can be cooked and chilled ahead of time, ready to be sliced and broiled at the cookout site.

Hamburgers remain a favorite for outdoor cooking and eating. Tasty, nutritious, low in cost, and easy to fix, this popular choice is a natural for new flavor combinations. Turn the tasty patties into delicious blueburgers. Top the browned hamburgers with a

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generous spoonful of blue cheese and continue cooking until cheese melts slightly. Or you can fashion double-burgers. Place blue cheese between two uncooked meat patties, press together, and cook. Use your imagination. Other combinations include grated Cheddar cheese, pickle relish, and peanut butter, and grated cheese and grated onion. Mixtures tucked between two patties require a little longer cooking so the ingredients can melt and mingle with the beef. Be sure to use USDA graded lean beef so there will be a minimum of shrinkage.

The old black cast iron skillet is handy for preparing and serving a fresh air lunch on the porch or patio. Try chili and cheese dumplings. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated cheese to your basic biscuit mix recipe. Drop spoonful on top of simmering chili and cook until dumplings are done.

After the successful fisherman comes home with the day's catch, why not try a fish boil? You'll need a large kettle. For a group, a metal washtub or cast iron kettle is suitable. Use at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ gallons of boiling water and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup salt for 8 to 16 medium unpeeled, scrubbed potatoes. Cook at least 45 minutes. When potatoes are nearly tender, add fish. Use large fish, about 4 pounds each, such as lake trout or whitefish. Cut into good sized chunks (4 pieces per fish). Fish pieces can be placed in a basket for easy removal. Cook only until fish is tender—10 to 15 minutes. Serve fish immediately with potatoes left in the jacket, split and topped with plenty of butter. Coleslaw, relishes, and rolls can complete the meal.

Outdoor entertaining is a natural for young people. Let them experience the adventure of planning. The less preparation the better. For an oldtime favorite, use the cast iron skillet to heat chili. Grill frankfurters. Spoon heated chili over buttered-toasted buns, cover with grated Cheddar cheese or slice and top with a frankfurter.

Slash a weiner almost through lengthwise; fill opening with a bit of cheese and grill. Or wrap the cheese-

filled weiner with a bacon strip and then grill it.

Doughboys are great fun in camp, at the beach, or right in your own backyard. Prepare a stick about 1 inch in diameter; green wood is preferred. Strip the bark off of 6 inches on one end. Pour several cups of biscuit mix into a plastic bag; turn top of bag down to make cuff. Take the peeled stick and form a well in the center of the biscuit mix. Pour in enough milk or water to form a sticky dough. Stir gently with stick until liquid picks up enough biscuit mix to form soft ball around the stick end. Secure dough ball on stick by pressing gently with hand. Hold over coals, turning slowly to bake ball through and brown evenly (about 7 minutes). Doughboy is done when it slips easily from the stick. Eat piping hot with butter, jam, or jelly—or fill with "wimpy" mixture or roasted weiner.

To make a wimpy filling, melt 1 tablespoon fat, add 1 medium chopped onion, and cook until golden colored. Add 1 pound of ground lean beef and cook until gray in color. Salt and pepper to taste, then add 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups shredded cheese and stir until melted. Serve mixture in doughboys or buns.

Safety Tips. With warm weather and the exodus outdoors, the potential danger of food poisoning accompanies each outdoor meal—be it a backyard cookout or a family reunion potluck. Precaution and commonsense can prevent a disaster. Germs capable of causing severe gastrointestinal upsets thrive in picnic foods which have not been adequately refrigerated. Food is safest at temperatures above 140° F. and below 45° F. If possible, food should be served immediately after cooking. Careful handling and preparation of food are important.

Foods to be served cold should be kept cold, and hot foods should be kept hot. Food taken on picnics often stays just warm, not cold or hot, for several hours. This moderate temperature is ideal for the rapid reproduction of micro-organisms which produce harmful toxins.



Cooking over a fire (left) in a precast concrete ring, at a Minnesota recreational development. (Right) Barbecuing chicken and other meat.

Bacteria grow best in nonacidic foods like meats, fish, poultry items, eggs, dairy products, and foods made from them. Particularly susceptible are recipes of finely chopped foods such as chicken salad, other meat or egg sandwich fillings, and casseroles. These foods have more surface area where bacteria can grow. Also, in preparation these foods are often handled more. Most sandwich fillings and salads are not reheated after preparation. If this is the case they must be kept cold until serving time.

There are inexpensive ways to keep foods cold—properly packed in an ice chest or in dry ice packs. Empty coffee cans or other containers with tight fitting lids can be filled with water and frozen for use in the ice chest; a plastic bag filled with ice cubes placed in a sturdy container will cool foods and the cubes can be used at campsite. When using ice, food should be placed to touch the container. Cubes, loose or in plastic bags, and ice in cartons should be distributed evenly throughout the cooler.

An easy-to-make cooler-carrier requires two cardboard boxes, with one

smaller than the other. Put at least a half inch thickness of newspapers on the bottom of the larger box, and set the smaller one inside. Line newspapers between the sides of the two boxes, put in chilled food and ice, then close the small box lid. Place another layer of newspapers and fasten down the outside box lid. Keep cooler out of direct sunlight.

Picnics. A "picnic" has a special meaning for most people. Sometimes the entire meal is prepared in the kitchen, often some foods are cooked ahead while others are prepared at the cookout site. A fun meal for the entire family, including mother, is one prepared entirely at the picnic area.

Picnic meals prepared partially or completely at the site require some type of cooking apparatus, such as a temporary firebox of bricks or stones piled on each other, or a permanent fireplace, or a portable grill. Menu ideas for this type of meal include cranberry juice, broiled ham, potatoes baked in hot ashes, a combination vegetable salad, whole wheat rolls and milk, or chops or steaks, buns, green salad, sponge cake, and berries.

Food for a plan-ahead picnic can be frozen, then prepared at the cook-out site. Try a barbecued chicken, vegetable bundle, rolls, and no-bake brownies or spiced bananas. Marinate chicken in your favorite sauce, bake for 30 minutes, cool in refrigerator, wrap in foil and freeze. At the picnic, place chicken on slow fire and cook for 30 minutes, basting and turning occasionally, until meat is tender. For the vegetable bundle, break up a 10-ounce package of frozen peas and corn. Mound on a large square of heavy-duty foil. Add tiny pickled onions, drained, or 1 tablespoon instant minced onion, butter, salt, and pepper. Twist foil corners together tightly and freeze until picnic time. Place bundle on hot grill. Cook 25 minutes, remove from grill, and open gently to allow steam to escape. Stir before serving.

Spiced bananas are good cooked on the spot. Allow $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ banana per person, peel and place on a square of heavy foil. Brush with lemon juice; sprinkle with or roll in brown sugar, dust with cinnamon and nutmeg, and dot with butter. Put bananas on the grate when you sit down to eat since they must only heat through. Or combine the ingredients, split banana lengthwise, and spread mixture between the halves. Wrap foil securely around bananas, twisting ends. Barbecue on grill 7 to 9 minutes, or on coals 4 to 5 minutes. Turn 2 or 3 times to heat evenly.

Frozen fish fillets and vegetables can be safely transported to picnic grounds. Spread fish with tartar sauce, then wrap in foil ready to cook on the grill. Cook foil-wrapped, seasoned, and cheese-topped broccoli spears at the same time. Pronto picnic salad can be made of canned peas or carrots, hard-cooked eggs, finely cut crisp raw vegetables, broken nut meats, and a savory salad dressing. Toasted frankfurter rolls can be the bread choice. Fresh fruits eaten out of hand and a beverage complete the meal.

Food-in-foil individual servings or whole meals are easy and convenient.

The foil "dishes" are simply tossed into a litter basket. When using foil for outdoor cookery be sure it's the heavy-duty kind.

Hamburgers and vegetables in foil make a quick meal-in-one. Place a hamburger patty, onion slice, $\frac{1}{2}$ medium potato, and $\frac{1}{2}$ carrot (slice vegetables very thin) on large foil square. Season to taste and place $\frac{1}{4}$ slice of bacon on top. Seal with drugstore wrap, and roll ends to make a drip-proof package. Place over hot coals and cook 15 to 20 minutes or until done. Fold back foil to serve.

Another package meal features slices of canned ham spread with marmalade, canned sweet potatoes, and orange slices, arranged on a double thickness of heavy-duty foil. Sprinkle with slivered almonds. Seal package, heat on grill over medium hot coals for about 30 minutes.

Frankfurters, onion slices, canned white potatoes, and a tomato half sprinkled with grated cheese in foil package will only take 15 to 20 minutes to grill.

Potato salad, if made ahead, must be kept well chilled. Try taking cold ingredients in separate containers in the cooler and prepare the salad just before serving.

Salad greens should be prepared at home and stored in plastic wrap, or in a plastic bag ready-to-serve, or in the bowl you plan to serve from. Cover tightly and keep cold. Add tomatoes, cucumbers and other salad items when it's eating time.

Picnic desserts are no problem. Cake, cookies, fresh fruits such as watermelon, peaches, fresh plums, grapes, and pears are alltime favorites. Wash fruits at home and use as a picnic centerpiece until dessert time.

Barbecues. The term "barbecue" originally referred to a whole animal roasted or broiled in its entirety for a feast, or the feast at which such meat is served. The origin is obscure, but it probably derives from the French *barbe-a-gueue*, meaning "from snout to tail." The institution of the barbecue is probably of southern origin.

It is known that the word was used in Virginia before 1700.

In recent years, the outdoor preparation of meals has become increasingly popular, and the principle of the elegant barbecue feast has been simplified to fit the smallest suburban yard. The home barbecue varies from a hooded or open portable charcoal grill to an elaborately constructed fireplace with ovens and flues.

If you are a beginner, it is safe to try hamburgers, frankfurters, or steaks and chops. They are easily prepared on the grill and the cooking technique is the same as indoors. Steaming servings of string beans or sweet corn, together with a bowl of mixed green salad, can complete the menu.

Chicken is easily barbecued. Split a broiler down the back and cook on the grill, broiling the bony side first and then the skin side. Experiment with various basting sauces. If the grill or fireplace has a spit, a whole chicken may be broiled and the sauce swabbed on during cooking.

Shake hands with a whole chicken or turkey to tell when it's done: About 20 minutes before roasting period is up, snip the cord that holds drumsticks to the spit rod so heat can reach all parts of the bird. Grasp end of drumstick with paper towels; when leg moves easily, the bird is done.

Marinating less tender beef cuts such as blade or arm chuck, round or flank steak, will tenderize meat and improve the flavor. A marinade is a mixture of oil, vinegar and/or lemon juice, and seasonings, salt, herbs, garlic, onions, or seasoned salt may be used. Marinate meat in refrigerator for 24 hours or at room temperature for 2 hours before cooking. Cutting narrow grooves or gashes part way through the food's surface (scoring) permits marinade to penetrate meat. Seasoned and nonseasoned commercial tenderizers are available. Follow directions on label. Marinade can also be used to baste meats. Basting, usually done to increase the moisture of foods while cooking, will add a distinctive flavor to meat.

The array of meat available for outdoor cooking goes beyond steaks and chicken to include chops, kabobs, hamburgers, rotisserie roasts, and frankfurters. Meat selection is easier if you look for the U.S. Government inspection stamp for wholesomeness and take advantage of grades for quality guidance.

It is necessary to know meat cuts to guide you in methods of outdoor cookery. When the choice is steak, decide whether you'd like individual ones like club, strip, top loin, T-bone, porterhouse, delmonico, tenderloin (filet mignon), or a steak to serve several, such as a thick sirloin. These come in boneless styles as well as wedge, pin, or flat bone types.

For a lazy way of cooking, choose a cut for your rotisserie. A rack of spareribs "threaded" accordion fashion on the rod, a boneless ham roll, pork rolled Boston shoulder, a rolled pork loin, and boneless rolled lamb shoulder are suggestions.

The delmonico (rib eye) roast is the most elegant beef cut for the rotisserie. Other high quality beef cuts which respond to rotisserie roasting include rolled rump, sirloin tip, or a rolled chuck, often called the English or Boston cut.

Many stores feature rolled, boned lamb roasts. Although lamb supplies are usually low in the summer, ideas for outdoor cooking abound. Experts report there are 30 lamb cuts for backyard banquets.

Kabob your dinner. It's a gay sight to see the colorful food chunks strung on skewers sizzling on the grill. You can skewer anything that you can broil.

For uniform cooking, give each kind of food its own skewer. String cubes of beef or lamb on one. Season and brush with oil, melted butter, or french dressing. Thread scrubbed potatoes on another, whole onions on a third. Leave jackets on vegetables and you won't have to baste them. For quick kabobs simmer a sweet-sour sauce while you thread skewer with chunks of canned luncheon meat,

green pepper, and pineapple. Cherry tomatoes can be used to finish off skewer. Brush with sauce, broil or grill just until foods are heated through.

Lamb, canned meat, precooked sausages, beef cubes are all kabob naturals. Combine with olives, pickles, mushroom caps, tomatoes, pineapple chunks, orange segments, green pepper, and onions.

For smoke cookery, use a charcoal fire in barbecue grill with a hood or a lid that closes to make smoke. Soak hickory chips in water or dampen hickory sawdust. Let charcoal fire burn down to low-even heat. Then add damp hickory or fruit woods. Place food on grill or spit. Cover barbecue tightly and finish cooking. This is a slow process. Liquid smoke can be brushed on the meat. Smoked salt can be sprinkled on before cooking or added to the barbecue sauce.

Because steak, hamburgers, chicken, spareribs, the sausage products, and hot dogs are today's most popular headliners for barbecue menus, the outdoor chef strives to make his specialty unique. Palate-teasing flavor combinations in the barbecue sauce or marinade can establish a gourmet reputation. Apply sauce lavishly while the meat is cooking, and prepare extra sauce to serve with the meat.

A tasty sauce for hamburgers is prepared from a package of onion soup mix, 1 cup of russian dressing, $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, and dry mustard to taste. Simmer 10 minutes before using sauce.

Another quick barbecue sauce can be made with 1 can condensed tomato soup, and sweet pickle relish, chopped onion, brown sugar, vinegar, and Worcestershire sauce to taste. Simmer 10 minutes or until onion is cooked. An effective marinade that can also be used to baste meat contains 1 cup of Burgundy wine, 1 small garlic clove (minced), 1 tablespoon apiece of Worcestershire sauce and sugar, 2 tablespoons each of prepared horseradish, minced parsley, prepared mustard, and margarine or butter, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon each of oregano and pepper,

1 teaspoon salt, 1 small onion (minced). Combine ingredients and heat until table fat melts. Cool. Pour sauce over steak. Chill in refrigerator for at least 8 hours, turning steak several times. Remove steak and strain sauce, keeping solid material as well as liquid. Broil steak on one side, basting occasionally with liquid. Turn, spread top surface with solids from sauce.

Although leaping flames may be picturesque, the secret of successful barbecuing is a solid bed of glowing coals. Whether charcoal, wood, or other fuel is used, light the fire at least 30 minutes ahead of time so it will burn down to ash-gray coals before cooking starts.

With modern grills, you can adjust the cooking rack or grid to control heat. The center of the rack is hotter than the outside, so overbrowning can be avoided by moving food to the grill edges. This is necessary for small pieces like legs, wings, and thighs of chicken.

On nonadjustable grills or with outdoor fires, you can reduce heat by spreading the coals or by occasionally sprinkling them with water. To tame any fat-fed flames, keep a water-filled clothes sprinkler container or clean whiskbroom and water container close at hand.

The amount of charcoal differs with your equipment and the food you plan to barbecue. Large roasts will require more charcoal than broiled foods such as steaks or burgers. A shallow fire is simple to control, fine for broiling.

Often the fireboxes, fireplaces, and grills can be lined with a sheet of foil which will give off more heat and simplifies ash disposal.

There are several ways to keep your grill from burning out. A 1-inch layer of vermiculite can be placed on the foil. This absorbs fat drippings and eliminates flareup. When using a rotisserie, shape an aluminum foil drip catching pan to fit under the meat, or you can use gravel or insulating pellets layered around 1 inch deep on the bottom of the grill to help prevent burning out the firebox. After half a dozen barbecues, clean the grill in

hot water to remove fat drippings, and spread out to dry thoroughly. If your firebox is perforated on the bottom, there will be no need for gravel.

You will add to the life of your grill top if you wait until cooking time to place hood or cover down. Remove it (with asbestos gloves) right after use. For easy cleaning, the grate can be swathed with wet paper towels or newspaper while you eat. Later a few swipes will clean the entire grill; use a scouring pad for stubborn spots. After each use the grate and frame should be cleaned carefully so fat and food particles don't become baked on.

Camping. Well planned meals are essential to a successful camping trip. Itemize foods, equipment, and supplies needed. Avoid planning meals using bulky or heavy foods. Pack with imagination—bulky food in kettles and pans, liquids in small bottles with screw-on caps, plastic bags to carry and store vegetables, baked goods, etc. Don't forget a first aid kit and heavy cotton gloves that will serve as potholders.

Written lists are a camper's best friend. Be sure you have included equipment such as unbreakable plates, cups and bowls, knives, forks, spoons, cooking spoons and cooking knives or forks, tongs, turner, can and bottle opener, pans, kettles, frying pans, containers for dishwashing and scalding, matches in a metal container, pot scrubber, detergent (liquid serves a multipurpose), and a portable grate. This miscellaneous equipment can be kept in a picnic kit. Revise the list to meet your family's needs.

The day has come when campers can "rough it" in nature's backyard, near home, or in a remote mountain area, yet still enjoy the convenience of a variety of foods. No matter where you camp, the food needs to be kept clean and cold.

When refrigeration or cooling facilities are lacking, depend on canned, packaged, and freeze-dried foods. For a long camping trip, plan some meals that come out of the package. Have others that can be cooked over an

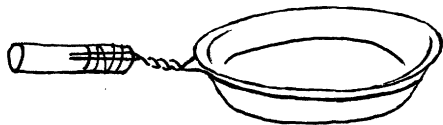
open fire. Dispose of leftovers if there isn't a way to keep them cold until another meal. The veteran camper stores all fresh or opened food in foil, in a safe place out of temptation from wildlife.

When time permits setting up the camp stove or cooking unit, the menu can be more elaborate.

Campers can be prepared for any activity or change of plans with a variety of foods and menu plans. Serve about four items for most camp meals, whether it's an out-of-hand lunch or a fully cooked meal.

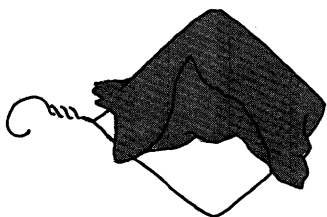
Nonrefrigerated dairy milk products—canned, evaporated milk, condensed milk, nonfat dry milk—can be diluted with cold or warm water for a hot beverage as nutritious as fresh whole milk. Make use of packaged flavorings. These products are satisfactory for "coffee with," over dry cereal, or in a classic white sauce served over canned vegetables and fish. Evaporated milk makes a good base for coating fish fillets to be breaded for frying.

Utensils for camp cooking need not be elaborate or costly. Family members, with imagination and simple materials, can make easy inexpensive equipment and utensils. Heavy-duty aluminum foil should be a staple in the camp kitchen.



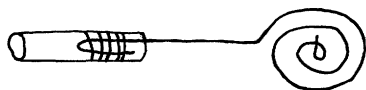
Before leaving for the family camping trip, each member can enjoy concocting outdoor cooking gear. To make a frying pan, straighten a coat hanger; bend in center to form a loop; form around a tin pan. Bring wire ends together; twist several turns; fasten ends to a stick handle or dowel pin with wire or masking tape.

A hanger can be pulled into a square and covered with a double sheet of foil to make a serviceable

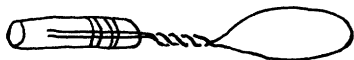
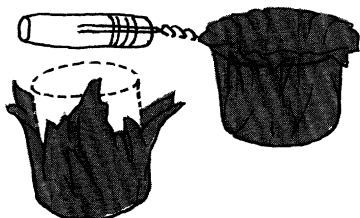


frying pan. Bend the hook downward to provide a handle. When bacon and eggs or other foods are cooked on this pan, the foil depresses slightly to hold fats and juices. These pans can be put to use as individual cook-and-serve plates.

Make skewer for weiners, kabobs, or marshmallows by straightening a coat hanger, and bend one end into a loop to form a handle. Remove the black lacquer from straight end with sandpaper or by burning.



A hamburger broiler is fashioned by curving one half of a coat hanger into a flat coil. Bend up end in coil center to form a prong. For a handle, attach the straight end to a stick or dowel pin with wire or masking tape. Place broiler coil in fire to remove the black lacquer.

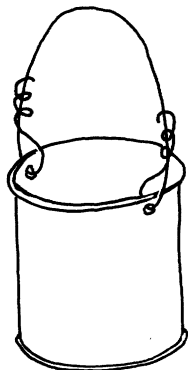


Another handy camp gadget made from a hanger is a frame for a foil cup or individual frying pan. Cut and straighten a wire hanger. Bend the middle part of the long wire around a

can of desired size, form a hoop. Twist wire to make hoop secure. Bend remaining wire into a handle. This "hoop rim and handle" is light and easy to carry and store. To use, form a piece of foil around a can of the same size, and insert this foil cup in the wire rim. Roll the foil edges down evenly over the rim to make a very serviceable cup or saucepan.



This same frame can serve as an egg poacher. Lay a small sheet of foil over the cup rim; depress the center only half an inch or so, and fold the foil edges securely underneath the rim. Put a small amount of water in this little pan and when it is boiling, drop an egg into it. When the egg is cooked, pour off remaining water and add a bit of fat, salt, and pepper. Slide egg onto toast, and enjoy poached egg on toast out-of-doors. For a quickie tear a hole in a bread slice, place in lightly buttered frying pan, and break an egg in the hole. Fry until egg solidifies, and then turn.



If you do not have enough cooking utensils, you can easily make an extra kettle. Using a rock and nail or can opener, punch 2 holes on opposite sides of a can at the top. Straighten a hanger; cut to handle length; shape wire into a half circle. Insert wire ends through holes; twist to secure.

Aluminum foil can make a pan do double duty. For less tender cuts of meat and game, cut two double strips of foil and form a crisscross sling in the pan. Let foil ends hang at least 4 inches over outside rim. Place meat or cut-up game in the sling and cover with water. Place lid on the pan and simmer over a bed of coals. Forty to fifty minutes later, test meat with a fork to check for doneness. Remove sling of meat, place vegetables (carrot and onion pieces about the same size) in water; replace sling of meat and finish cooking. To steam fish, cook the vegetables first. During the last 20 minutes place fish in foil sling over boiling water and vegetables; replace lid and cook until tender. Season.

The right kind of fire is essential for successful outdoor cooking. A flaming fire is used only for a few methods, such as planking fish and cooking in a reflector oven. Most outdoor cooking is done over coals. Be patient, it takes about 30 to 45 minutes after lighting a fire to get good cooking coals. If necessary, maintain a fire on the side so you can pull over good coals as needed. Keep the wind at your back.

Be practical in building fires. Large fires waste fuel, are hard to control, and difficult to work over. To build a fire, first scrape ground litter from a 6- to 8-foot circle. Before lighting the fire, assemble everything you need—tinder, kindling and fuel. For tinder, use dry weed tops, pine needles, twigs, or bark from a dead tree. Then add kindling such as pencil-sized branches broken into small pieces, pine cones, fuzz sticks, or trench candles. Dead branches still on the tree are usually drier than those on the ground.

You can quickly whittle “fuzz sticks.” Cut pieces of dry, soft wood, pointed at one end. Whittle so that long thin shavings are left attached, cutting toward blunt end. For quick kindling, push pointed ends of “fuzz sticks” into the ground, teepee fashion, over tinder.

The best woods for cooking include dry sugar maple, white oak, hickory, apple, white ash, and ironwood, which

provide steady, intense heat and long-lived coals. Birch, poplar, elm, basswood give quick, clean heat, but do not last long. Most evergreens burn quickly, with smoky flames.

An easy way to lay a fire is to prop 2 or 3 pieces of kindling to form air angle under which to place a large handful of tinder. Construct a “teepee” or a “log cabin” about 6 inches around center of tinder, leaving plenty of air space between the sticks. Strike match and place flame under center of the tinder pile. Blow gently at base, if necessary. Feed kindling gradually, until the fire is burning well. Avoid smothering it as you add heavier fuel. Let the fire burn to good coals before beginning to cook.

On your next camping, fishing, or hunting trip, experiment with different types of cooking fires. A trench fire serves a larger group and is relatively safe from burning out of control. Dig the trench running in the same direction with the wind, sloping from ground level at the windward end to a foot deep. Trench may be lined with stones to hold heat. Build several small fires along trench, adding larger sticks gradually and letting them burn down to a continuous bed of red hot coals.

The hunter’s or trapper’s fire is based on two green logs placed to form a “V” (around 3 inches apart widening to 10 to 15 inches at the windward end). Build fire between the logs, spreading coals the full length. Hottest part will be at the narrow end. The logs confine the fire, shield the cook from its heat, and support utensils.

Whether you serve your outdoor meals in a national campground or with elegance on your private patio, don’t get trapped in a rut or become restricted by habit. Be creative. Experiment with menus, foods, and equipment. Plan each meal to be an experience you will relish in solitude or with friends and family. As you savor the special flavors of food in the fresh air, you’ll find experience is the best teacher.