

# Backwoods Cook Book

# Backwoods cooking

The secret to successful backwoods cooking is to build a good fire that will provide hot embers, for it is on embers that we cook - not flames. One of the problems with embers is that they tend to become cool after a short while. The keyhole fire solves this problem. Build the fire in a large circle area and pull the hot ashes through into the smaller circle where the cooking takes place, as they are needed. A two inch bed of ashes is required for successful backwoods cooking, use beech or oak logs, as these will give longer lasting embers. Charcoal can also be used and it will hold the heat longer than wood embers.

Aluminium foil can be used if you want to take the easy way out. With it, it is possible to construct pots and pans for cooking food or you can place your food in an aluminium foil envelope.

The pioneers and backwoodsman of the past used only those materials that could be found locally for creating cooking utensils. They often used leaves and clay as well as ingenious cooking spits and holders made from green twigs and branches (green twigs and branches are less likely to go on fire and are pliable so they can be worked).

## Hygiene

Although backwoods cooking is considered to be primitive in approach your food hygiene methods should not be. Wash all food before use and keep covered until you intend to use it. Take care not to burn food and avoid cooking the food quickly in a flame. Make sure all the food is properly cooked, thus the need for slow cooking over embers. Quick cooking will cause the food to cook on the outside and be raw inside.

Clean up the area used after you are finished and dispose of all food scraps carefully. Don't forget to clean your hands also after you have finished eating as it is likely that it will be your hands that you use to hold and eat the food with.

## Cooking methods



### Roasting

For this method you will require a good bed of embers. For large animals and birds you will need a spit construction over the fire. For smaller animals and fish, the best way, is to peg

them out on a board or a flat piece of wood and stand this next to the fire to form a kind of reflector.



## **Baking**

This method is useful if you want to cook a meal while you are away - a bit like a hay box oven. Dig a pit around 60cm (2 feet) deep and 60cm (2 feet) across. Now light a fire in the bottom of the pit. Place a thin layer of soil on top of the embers then place a number of leaves (cabbage leaves are best) on top of the soil. Now place your food on top of the leaves covering it with more leaves. Cover this with more soil and then light a fire on top of it. It will take an hour or more to cook this food depending on how big the food is you are cooking.

Another way of baking food is to wrap your food in leaves or grass and then in mud. Then bury it in, or surround it with, a fire, and leave it for an hour or more. When you break open the cast of clay, you will find that the grass has kept the food moist



## **Grilling**

For this method, you will need some kind of grill which can be made from green sticks, and a hot bed of embers. The disadvantage of grilling food is that it tends to dry out.

## **Frying**

You will need some form of pan or grill base, usually a flat stone which is placed in the fire to heat it up. The stone is then cleaned off and food fried on it. It may be necessary to place small pieces of twig around such things as eggs to stop them rolling off the stone.

## **Boiling**

You will need some form of container. It is possible to use a paper bag to boil up water the trick is to ensure that the heat only touches that part of the bag that has liquid behind it to absorb the heat. In Stone Age times a water hole was created. Into this hole were placed hot stones, heated on a fire nearby. This resulted in heating the water and thus boiling the food.

## Container cooking

It is possible to use food as containers for other foodstuffs, such as, orange skins in which eggs can be cooked. Onion 'shell' created by cutting an onion in half and scooping out the core of the onion and leaving three or four shins in place to form a container. You can also use potatoes or pineapples in the same manner.

## Simple recipes



### Orange eggs

Cut an orange in half and eat out the contents without breaking the skin. Break an egg into the orange shell and place on embers and allow to cook. When done, eat from container.

### Onion eggs

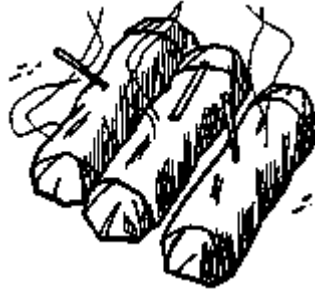
Cut the onion in half after removing the outer skin. Remove internal contents except for the remaining three outer layers. Break egg into shell and place on embers. When cooked eat the onion container as well as the contents after removing the outer scorched layer.

### Spud egg

Halve a large potato. Hollow one half. Break egg into hollow. Pin two halves of potato together with small sticks and roast in hot embers.

### Twists

Mix flour, water and a pinch of salt together to form a thick dough, adding raisins and sultanas if you like. Make a snake like roll of the dough and twist this snake like fashion on a thick green stick (with bark removed). Support it over glowing embers turning occasionally until the outside turns golden brown.



### **Instant hot dogs**

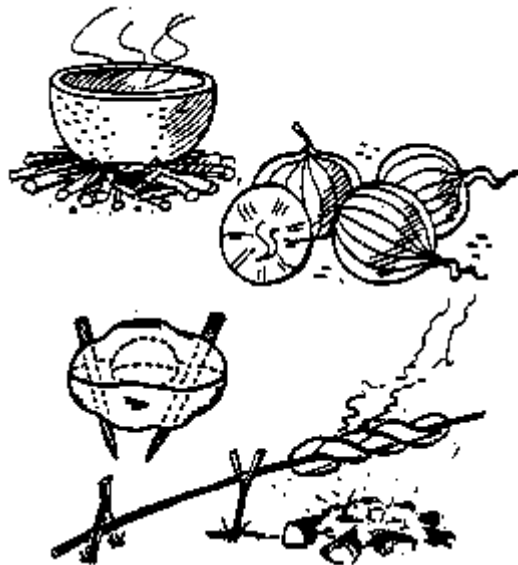
Lay sliced onion on a cabbage leaf add a sausage or two and place more onions on top. Wrap up the cabbage leaf tightly and secure with a number of small green sticks. Place in embers for about 7 - 10 mins turning occasionally.

### **Boiling**

You will need some form of container. It is possible to use a paper bag to boil up water. The trick is to ensure that the heat only touches that part of the bag that the liquid is in contact with so it can absorb the heat. In Stone Age times a water hole was created, into this were placed red hot stones, heated on a fire nearby.

### **Container cooking**

It is possible to use food as containers for other foodstuffs such as orange skins in which eggs can be cooked. Onion Skins 'shell' created by cutting an onion in half and scooping out the centre leaving 3 or 4 skins to form a container. You can also use potatoes or pineapples in the same manner.



## **Baked potato**

Perhaps the easiest to cook backwoods. Take a potato and place it in the embers of the fire. When it is cooked, after about 25 - 30 mins slice open the skin and place a piece of cheese or butter on top.

## **Simple Kebab**

Remove the bark from a green stick and onto it spear slices of bacon, mushrooms, sausage, carrot, tomato, peppers, and pieces of pork. Support the skewer over glowing embers turning occasionally. Eat when the meat is crisp and golden brown.

## **Fish**

It will be necessary for you to clean and gut any fish before you cook it. The fish should be cleaned thus:

**Wash the fish thoroughly in clean water**

**Remove the scales by scraping with the back of a knife (that is not the sharp edge), working from the tail towards the head.**

**Cut the spine at a point just behind the gills and tear the head off with a steady, slow.**

**Slow, forward motion. If you are careful, the fish innards will come out with it. (Dispose of carefully)**

**Slice the belly open from tail to gills and thoroughly clean the inside.**

**Finally, cut off the fins and tail and cook as desired.**

## **Cooking methods for fish**

Wrap method - wrap fish in grass and cover in mud and place on fire. Or wrap fish in cabbage leaf and pin together with small twigs and place on fire.

**Planked method** - Pin the fish flesh side forward on a plank or piece of flat board and cook by reflected heat, place a knob of butter on the fish when it is cooking and later a splash of lemon – delicious

**Broiling method** - Construct a broiler as shown and place your fish in it cook over hot embers turning regularly.

Fish cook very quickly so be careful you do not burn them.

## **Meat and burgers**

Meat and burgers can be cooked by a number of methods some of which are described above such as the Kabob method or the wrap method whereby the meat is wrapped in cabbage leaves. Meat may also be cooked using a broiler or by frying on a hot stone.

### **Burgers in leaves**

Place three layers of cabbage leaves directly onto the hot embers and put the burgers or mince patties on top of them. After approx. 10 minutes, turn the meat over, putting it onto three new cabbage leaves. Repeat this process until the meat is cooked.

*Note: Cabbage leaves can replace foil in most instances when using backwoods cooking recipes. It is important that at no time should rhubarb leaves be used, as they contain a highly poisonous resin.*

## Instant oven

You will need about 1.5 meters of foil and a number of green sticks.

Fold the sheet of foil in half and peg one end to the ground with the bottom of a stick in each corner at the end.

Fold the foil in half and bring the free end up, attaching it to the top of the two sticks as shown.

Place the food on the bottom half of the foil and light your fire by the open end of the reflector oven.

Backwoods cooking is all about cooking different things with different and odd methods!  
Have a look at the ideas below!

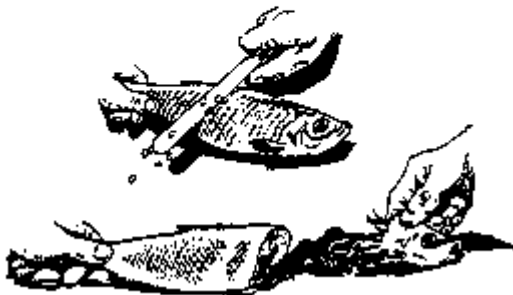
## Egg in an Orange

Cut an orange in half. Scoop out the flesh inside and eat it – be careful not to cut through the skin! Now crack an egg into the skin and place on the embers of the fire until the egg is cooked.



## Spud Egg / Egg in a potato

Cut the top off a potato and scoop a hole in the middle. Crack the egg into the hole; put the top back in place and secure with small wooden pegs. Bake until the potato is cooked.



## Backwoods Mince

You can cook mince meat inside all sorts of vegetable containers: orange peels, hollowed-out potatoes, onions, gem squash, butternut, or even cabbage leaves.

## Kebab

Use a green stick to spear slices of bacon, mushrooms, sausage, carrot, tomato, peppers, and pieces of pork. Support the skewer over glowing embers turning occasionally. Eat when the meat is crisp and golden brown.



## Cabbage hot dogs

Lay sliced onion on a cabbage leaf, add a sausage or two and place more onions on top. Wrap up the cabbage leaf tightly and secure with a number of small green sticks. Place in embers for about 7 to 10 minutes, turning occasionally.



## Banana hot dogs

Take a banana and cut a slit in the peel down the inside of the curve, and open it outwards. Remove the banana and feed it to a passing baboon or a nearby Scout. Now put a sausage inside the banana peel and cook it directly on the coals.

### **Preparing fish**

You will need to clean and gut any fish before you cook it. The fish should be cleaned as follows:

Wash the fish thoroughly in clean water

Remove the scales by scraping with the back of a knife (not the sharp edge), working from the tail towards the head.

Cut the spine at a point just behind the gills and tear the head off with a steady, slow, forward motion. If you are careful, the fish innards will come out with it.

Slice the belly open from tail to gills and thoroughly clean the inside. ! Finally, cut off the fins and tail and cook as desired.

### **Steamed Fish**

Make a fire that is long enough for the length of the fish and more than wide enough. Let this burn down to a good bed of embers. Meanwhile prepare the fish and clean it thoroughly. Cut a lot of grass to use for the steaming. (If you cut it instead of pulling it up, the grass can grow back.) Place a good layer on top of the coals. Put the fish on top of the grass and place more grass on top. Then cover the fire and grass with earth and pack it down. Wait for 30 minutes and uncover. You really need to ensure you have a good bed of embers to be successful. If you are by the sea shore, then the same method can be used with seaweed instead of grass.

### **Other methods for fish**

Wrapped in a cabbage leaf, or grilled on a grid made from twigs. Or pin the fish flesh side forward on a plank or piece of flat board and cook by reflected heat from the fire. For real style, place a knob of butter on the fish when it is cooking and later a splash of lemon – delicious.

### **Pit Oven / Fiji Oven**

Dig a pit, or use a natural depression in the ground. Light a fire in this and build it up, including as many rocks as you can find. DO NOT use flint or rocks from a river bed, as the heat can cause them to explode from the water expanding inside them.

When you have a good bed of embers, wrap your food in leaves, or on a bed of grass (see above) and cover the top of the hole over with sticks. Over this lay sacking or mats and then cover this over with earth. Make sure you seal in around the edges. Leave for 2 hours and then uncover and enjoy. One tip though, if you are cooking for a larger number of people, then put more embers over the top of the food to ensure it cooks.

### **Boiling in a paper bag**

It is possible to use a paper bag to boil water. The water inside will prevent the bag from burning. The trick is to ensure that the heat only touches that part of the bag that the liquid is in contact with so it can absorb the heat.



### **Frying**

You will need some form of pan or grill base, usually a flat stone which is placed in the fire to heat it up. The stone is then cleaned off and food fried on it. It may be necessary to place small pieces of twig around such things as eggs to stop them rolling off the stone.

### **Grilling**

For this method, you will need to make a grid or mesh out of green sticks, and grill your food over a hot bed of embers. Remember that some types of wood are poisonous and should not be used.

### **Twists**

Mix flour, water and a pinch of salt together to form a thick dough, adding raisins and sultanas if you like. Make a snake-like roll of the dough and twist this snake like fashion on a thick green stick. Support it over glowing embers turning occasionally until the outside turns golden brown.

### **Damper Breads**

Dough can be cooked on a flat rock in the fire. With some imagination you can make chapattis, or mix in some baking powder or bicarbonate of soda to make soda bread.

### **Chocolate banana**

Cut a slit lengthways in the banana and insert some pieces of chocolate. Wrap the whole lot in foil and place in the embers. Eat once the chocolate melts.

### **Stewed Fruit Puddings**

Autumn provides a lot of fruits available for use; in the UK for example there are Apples, Blackberries, and many others. Crab apples are more predominant in the wild, but make the most of what you can find. Get the all together, peel the apples and stew them up. This can then be used in tarts, pies or just eaten on its own.

### **Toasties**

To cook the toasties then butter 2 slices of bread, spread marmalade on the opposite side to the buttered side, sprinkle currants in the marmalade, put the 2 slices of bread together with the butter side out, wrap in tin foil and place on the embers for a couple of minutes.

### **Onion eggs**

Cut the onion in half after removing the outer skin. Remove internal contents except for the remaining three outer layers. Break egg into shell and place on embers. When cooked eat the onion container as well as its contents after removing the outer scorched layer.

### **Container cooking**

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Repeat this process until the meat is cooked. Note: Cabbage leaves can replace foil in most instances when using backwoods cooking recipes. It is important that at no time should rhubarb leaves be used, as they contain a highly poisonous resin.

### **Baked apples in clay or tinfoil**

Core apple and stuff centre with currants or dates or sultanas, butter. Wrap in greased tinfoil and place on the embers. Cook for 10-15 minutes. If clay is used, cook longer.

### **Chicken on a string**

You may know that you can roast a chicken on a spear over a fire, but the French have an idea here you don't even have to turn the chicken! You hang it on a string over the fire and the chicken will turn itself. (It's a good idea if you bind your chicken here and there to stop it crumbling off the carcass. Here is the method: Rub the whole chicken with margarine, sprinkle with salt inside and out. Now tie the chicken around the neck with a piece of string 0.5 m long and suspend from a tripod so it hangs 20-25 cm above the embers. If you can collect the drips of fat in a tinfoil 'saucer' this should be used for basting.

### **Bindu-Mielie**

Open husks and remove silk. Close husks round mealie and soak in water for 30 minutes. Cook on hot embers in husk on each side. Remove husks and eat.

## **BACKWOODS AND INDIVIDUAL COOKING**

Backwoods cooking has strong appeal and is an excellent Patrol activity, working in pairs. Need not be wasteful if done properly, but is generally a slow process--more time needed to prepare meal than by orthodox methods. Not more than one meal should be attempted by this method in any one day.

Firing is of vented importance. Scouts should be trained to differentiate between hard and soft wood fires (this ties up with woodcraft and tree recognition).

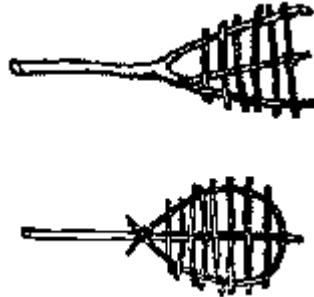
### **Bread making**

Mix flour, salt, and water to thick dough without handling too much. To make twist, peel green stick not less than 1" diameter, bake in fire, then twist spiral of dough about 1/2"

diameter? Round it and bake slowly over red embers. Greenstick should not be of bitter or poisonous wood (avoid poplar, elder, etc.).

### **Australian Damper**

Wrap in green leaves, scrape away red embers and place on ground, and then build fire over it. Dampers in aluminium foil are made in the same way and are excellent!



Greenstick Broiler

### **Greenstick Broiler**

Green twigs are woven across a three pronged stick to make a grill. Meat is seared in the flame, then placed on the grill and broiled slowly over red coals. Add salt to bring out the juices.

### **Oat Cakes**

Mix oats with flour and make into a dry paste with milk. Bake as for Australian Damper.

### **Potatoes**

Bake in wet leaves or paper, or very thin shell of clay or in aluminium foil.

### **Kabobs**

Alternate thin slices of apple, bacon, potato, spiked on a thin green stick and roasted slowly over hardwoods. (Potato generally takes longest to cook).

### **Flab**

Wash and pin out on a flat board. Bake slowly on reflector principle.

### **Eggs**

Crack egg and put in shell of clay about 1/2 inch thick, bake in red embers. To make spud-eggs, cut potato across short axis, hollow out both halves, break egg into it, replace top and spike in place with sharpened match stick, bake in embers for about 15 minutes.

### **Foil Cooking**

Excellent results can be obtained. American Explorer Scouts prepare their "pressure packs" before leaving for hike and after cooking open the foil and use as dinner plate.

*Method:* Make envelope of foil sealed with a double fold down three edges, cut meat, vegetables, etc., into cubes, and put in envelope with seasoning and teaspoon of water or fat (this is essential). Seal top of envelope and place in fire, clear of flames (which will cause foil to granulate). Potatoes, apples, and bread can also be cooked by the same method.