

COOKING FOR LARGE GROUPS

Cooking for a team of 15 to 20 people may sound intimidating. But with a little ingenuity, some great recipes and camp cooking know-how, you'll soon be a chef extraordinaire!

The basics

- 1) Keep it simple: It's better to make two or three really good items, than juggle half a dozen dishes. The fewer dishes you make, the more you'll have to make of each dish, and vice versa.
- 2) Use what will spoil first: veggies and other perishables that have been around a while.
- 3) Less is more: The fewer ingredients you put into something, the easier it will be to savour the taste of each ingredient.

Using gas stoves

Gas stoves should only be used outdoors. Ensure the hose is connected securely to the tank and to the side of the stove.

Turn on the gas at the tank. Light a match, hold it over the burner, then turn the stove valve all the way up. The burner should ignite. Then slowly turn the stove down to the desired temperature. If you're heating water, leave it up all the way. If you're heating food, especially thicker soups and stews, you'll want to keep it low so you won't burn the food on the bottom.

To shut off the stove, turn off the valve at the gas tank first and let the flame die out and the gas burn off. Then you can shut off the stove valve.

Warning: if flames come out anywhere other than the burner, shut off the tank valve immediately! Don't mess with propane and an open flame. Ensure all connections are firmly coupled together; undo and reconnect them if necessary. If that doesn't work, assume something is broken, and take it in for replacement or repair before using it again.

Gas stoves cook quicker than most electric stoves so keep tabs on what's happening at all times. Stir often to prevent burning on the bottom.

Planning and preparation

- Make a game plan before you start cooking – estimate how long it will take to wash, chop, and cook each item.
- Co-ordinate who will prepare what.
- Consider how many pots and burners are available, and how many people are cooking.
- Have all the food, spices, knives, and other necessary equipment ready beforehand, rather than scrambling through eight bins to find the potato peeler before the pasta water boils over.
- Clear your space before starting to cook. Keep the compost bucket open and ready to take on new additions. Be ready to wash dishes as you go as you may need that sauce-stained bowl in a hurry.

Cooking tips

Water boils faster if you put salt in it, but that also leaves you with salty water. This is a good for making grains (since they need a pinch of salt to "taste right" anyways), boiling potatoes, and cooking pasta. But not so good for making coffee or tea!

Stir big pots a lot, especially when using gas stoves, and really get down to the bottom of the pot and stir it all up to the top. Otherwise, the food closest to the bottom will burn and spread that not-so-welcome "burned" taste throughout the rest of the food.

It's better to under-season and let folks add their own spices to taste than to over-season (some folks won't eat it because it's too spicy).

Things cook more quickly when cut into smaller pieces.

Spices have more flavour when added near the end of cooking rather than the beginning.

Steaming, sautee-ing and blanching cook out less of the nutrients compared to boiling and frying.

A note about cooking times

Always factor in the time it takes to boil a pot of water before you actually start cooking. Otherwise, you could be in for a long wait.

The old standby meal

This is the most versatile meal on the road. You can make a million variations.

Ingredients:

Grains – rice, quinoa, spelt, kamut, pasta

Veggies (spinach, chard, carrots, potatoes, yams, broccoli)

Nuts and seeds (almonds, sunflower seeds, etc.)

Beans (lentils, black-eyed peas, navy beans, chick peas, etc.)

Cooking instructions:

- 1) Cook a bunch of a grain or pasta.
- 2) Chop up some veggies, nuts, tofu, cooked beans etc and sauté, steam, or boil them or simmer them in a sauce or bake them....Add spices and herbs and flavouring agents to taste. Perhaps create a sauce to go with it.
- 3) Put cooked veggies, etc. on top of cooked grains or pasta.
- 4) Eat.

Cooking grains

You will need water, grains and salt (grains cooked in unsalted water taste funny).

GRAIN (1 cup dry)	WATER (Cups)	COOK TIME	CUPS YIELD
Amaranth	2 1/2	20-25 min	2 1/2
Barley, pearled	3	50 - 60 min	3 1/2
Barley, hulled	3	1 hr, 15 min	3 1/2
Barley, flakes	2	30-40 min	2 1/2
Buckwheat groats ¹	2	15 min	2 1/2
Cornmeal (fine grind)	4 - 4 1/2	8-10 min	2 1/2
Cornmeal (polenta, coarse)	4 - 4 1/2	20-25 min	2 1/2
Millet, hulled	3 - 4	20-25 min	3 1/2
Oat Groats	3	30-40 min	3 1/2
Oat, bran	2 1/2	5 min	2
Quinoa ²	2	15-20 min	2 3/4
Rice, brown basmati	2 1/2	35-40 min	3

Rice, brown, long grain	2 1/2	45-55 min	3
Rice, brown, short grain ³	2 - 2 1/2	45-55 min	3
Rice, brown, quick	1 1/4	10 min	2
Rice, wild	3	50-60 min	4
Rye, berries	3 - 4	1 hr	3
Rye, flakes	2	10-15 min	3
Spelt	3 - 4	40-50 min	2 1/2
Teff ⁴	3	5-20 min	3 1/2
Triticale	3	1 hr. 45 min	2 1/2
Wheat, whole berries	3	2 hrs	2 1/2
Wheat, couscous	1	5 min	2
Wheat, cracked	2	20-25 min	2 1/4
Wheat, bulgur ⁵	2	15 min	2 1/2

Measure the grains and water into a saucepan. If you are cooking 1 cup (240 ml) of grains, use a 2-quart (2 liter) saucepan. Add 1/2 to 1 teaspoon salt if desired.

Cover the saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Turn the heat down to low, and steam for the recommended cooking time. Lift the lid and test the grains for tenderness. If the grains need more time, cover the saucepan and steam 5 to 10 minutes longer. If the grains need more cooking time and all the water has been absorbed, add up to 1/4 cup (60 ml) of water, cover, and continue steaming.

If tender, turn off the heat and allow the grains to rest 5 to 10 minutes before serving to fluff.

Buckwheat is the exception. Because the grain is so porous and absorbs water quickly, it's best to bring the water to a boil first. Then, add the buckwheat. When the water returns to a boil, cover the saucepan, turn the heat to low, and time the steaming process.

¹ Buckwheat groats are available toasted and untoasted. Cooking times are the same.

² Quinoa should be well rinsed in a fine strainer for 1 to 2 minutes to remove the saponens, a natural, protective coating which will give a bitter flavor if not rinsed off.

³ Short grain brown rice is sometimes labeled sweet, glutinous, or sticky brown rice.

⁴ Teff can be enjoyed raw as well as cooked. Sprinkle it on salads or over cooked cereals to increase fiber and nutrition.

⁵ Bulgur wheat can be covered with 1-inch of warm water and soaked for 1 hour to soften. It is then ready to use in raw salads such as tabbouli.

Cooking beans

Beans should be soaked overnight in a cool spot, the night before the day you plan to use them; dispose of the soaking water and use fresh water for cooking. You can soak some beans with half a teaspoon of baking soda to help get rid of any bitter taste. You don't need to soak red lentils or split peas the night before. If you can't soak beans overnight, you can bring the beans to boil, turn off the heat and let them sit for an hour before changing the water and cooking them.

BEAN (1 cup dry)	WATER (Cups)	COOK TIME	CUPS YIELD
Adzuki (Aduki)	4	45-55 min	3
Anasazi	2 1/2 - 3	45-55 min	2 1/4
Black Beans	4	1 hr - 1 1/2 hrs	2 1/4
Black-eyed Peas	3	1 hr	2
Cannellini (White Kidney Beans)	3	45 min	2 1/2
Cranberry Bean	3	40-45 min	3
Fava Beans, skins removed	3	40-50 min	1 2/3
Garbanzos (Chick Peas)	4	1-3 hrs	2
Great Northern Beans	3 1/2	1 1/2 hrs	2 2/3
Green Split Peas	4	45 min	2
Yellow Split Peas	4	1 - 1 1/2 hrs	2
Green Peas, whole	6	1-2 hrs	2
Kidney Beans	3	1 hr	2 1/4
Lentils, brown	2 1/4	45 min – 1 hr	2 1/4
Lentils, green	2	30-45 min	2
Lentils, red	3	20-30 min	2-2 1/2
Lima Beans, large	4	45 min - 1 hr	2
Lima Beans, small	4	50–60 min	3
Lima Beans, Christmas	4	1 hr	2
Mung Beans	2 1/2	1 hr	2
Navy Beans	3	45-60 min	2 2/3
Pink Beans	3	50-60 min	2 3/4
Pinto Beans	3	1 - 1/2 hrs	2 2/3
Soybeans	4	3-4 hrs	3

Begin by washing beans and discarding any which are discolored or badly formed. Check for debris in the package such as small rocks or twigs and discard them. Beans cook more quickly and their digestibility benefits with soaking in water to cover by about 3 inches (7.5 cm) for 8 hours or overnight. Discard the soak water and cook the beans in fresh water.

Some bean cookery aficionados feel that salt and seasonings added during the cooking tends to make beans cook more slowly. Since beans require lengthy cooking, we recommend adding salt and seasonings during the last few minutes and find they absorb flavor quite readily.

There are other factors which contribute to the length of cooking, such as: hard water and beans that have been dried for a long period of time. For some of the longer cooking beans we have found that soaking 24 hours and changing the soak water 2 or 3 times hastens the cooking time.

Many people are concerned with the reputation that beans have for causing flatulence. Starting your bean adventures with small amounts helps to increase your body's enzyme production

gradually. Soaking and cooking the beans thoroughly helps to break down the complex sugars (oligosaccharides) which challenge our digestive systems.

Some herbs that help the digestion of beans can be added during the cooking process. These include bay leaf, cumin, and winter or summer savory, fresh epazote (available in Hispanic markets). Many people from India maintain the tradition of chewing on dried fennel seeds or drinking a cup of fennel tea at the end of a legume meal to aid the digestion.

QUICK-SOAK METHOD: When time is limited, you can wash and pick over beans and put them into a stock pot with water to cover by 3 inches (7.5 cm). Bring to a boil and boil for 10 minutes to remove toxins. Then cover and soak for 1 hour. Discard soak water, add fresh water, and cook until tender.

As a general rule of thumb, 1 cup of dried beans will yield about 2 1/2 - 3 cups (.5 to .75 liters) of cooked beans.

Cooking Pasta

Bite-sized pasta, like elbows, spirals and so on are a little easier to cook and eat than the long stranded variety, and are suitable for fluid AND chunky sauces/toppings. It's really easy to overcook them (which is not disastrous...they just get a little softer...unless you really overcook them in which case you have a large mass of dough on your hands) in large quantities, and even when you drain them, the mass of pasta continues to cook from its own heat. You can add oil to them after draining to keep them from sticking together in a big ol' starchy lump.

Bring water to a boil. Put in the pasta. Bring to a boil again, and then turn down heat to a simmer. Stir occasionally, especially at the bottom, to make sure that food doesn't stick and burn. Generally, it takes about 10 minutes to cook pasta, but the best way to tell is to fish out a piece and chew it. When it's firm but soft, it's ready. Drain immediately. Note that pasta will continue to cook a bit even after you've taken it off the stove and drained it.

What quantities should you cook?

The general estimate for a regular meal is 2-5 cups of cooked/prepared food per person per meal. Folks who have been exercising outdoors a lot will be hungrier than folks who have just been sitting around camp for a day. A rough estimate for bike teams would be 3-6 cups of cooked/prepared food per person per meal, depending on how heavy the food is (a cup of green salad is not going to be as filling as a cup of cooked pasta).

The Magic of IRIFOY (paraphrased from the Fear of Cooking):

IRIFOY stands for: "It's Right In Front Of You". You know what properly cooked oatmeal looks, tastes and feels like. Look at what's in front of you, taste it and chew it. If it doesn't seem like it's cooked properly, figure out what you can do to fix it...cook it more? Add spices or salt or oil, or make a sauce to add over it?