



An outdoor adventure with only basic food prep facilities and limited food storage doesn't mean you should go without tasty meals. I'm not suggesting you serve up 3-course gourmet dinners every night, but there are plenty of ways to enjoy wholesome, tasty food at camp! My trips usually take me to beautiful but isolated areas - the sort of place where, at the very best, you may manage to pick up some fruit or vegetables... in a can.

To avoid bland gruel in a pot each night, I've consolidated some tips for preparing quick, easy, and tasty camp meals. In my meal plan, I attempt to ensure every meal meets at least two of the following:

- Tasty
- Nutritious
- Easy to cook
- Uses limited ingredients from the fridge
- Quick to prepare

The following considerations are important to note for long camping and 4WDing trips.



*An easy dish with plenty of colour. Pilbara, Western Australia.*

## Flavour and Nutrition

A flavoursome meal is a great way to finish a day of adventure, and nutritious food prepares your body for the next. The trick is to find meals that combine both taste and nutrition with ease of preparation, preferably using ingredients that require minimal cold storage. We've made *everything* on our adventures - from chicken pesto pasta, sushi, and teriyaki chicken,



to roast meals and BBQs.

### Variety

If two-minute noodles are all you've packed for your trip, you won't be looking forward to a bowl after a few days (not to mention how average they are for your health). Having variety will mean you look forward to each meal, rather than approaching them as just a means to an end.

Switching up what is eaten at what time is also worth considering. If you don't plan on leaving the campsite for the day, it may be easier to prepare a big roast lunch during sunlight hours and keep dinner simple. This way, there's minimal pack-up before departure the next day.

### Easy Cooking

I try to keep meal preparation under 30 minutes. Space for preparing food is likely to be limited at the campsite; if the meal requires more than two pots or pans, it's too complicated! You'll find food tastes better when camping anyway, so leave the five-course degustation menu for an evening meal at home.

### Keeping Perishables Cold

A 12V fridge/freezer in the back of your 4WD makes a world of difference. If your budget doesn't allow for this, an Esky with ice will work for up to a week. This can be quite effective if you apply a few tricks of the trade, and can allow for more fresh meat, cold drinks, and perishable items in your kitchen kit. That said, fridge and freezer space becomes a premium, and it takes a lot of effort to fit everything in.

Last year, we travelled for five weeks in the Kimberley and split our 55-litre EvaKool fridge into half freezer, and half fridge. We managed to take five weeks' worth of meat in the freezer, and picked up fresh produce wherever it was available.

Rather than fresh milk, we took about 35 litres of long life. As one bottle began to run out, we would pop another one in the fridge to cool down.

### What Can I Do at Home?

Preparation of your food at home will save you a massive amount of time and effort on the road.

#### Re-package and Marinate

One of the first things we do when preparing for a long 4WD trip is remove the packaging and divide food into the portions required for each meal. This saves on fridge space, and eradicates the excess rubbish.

If freezing food isn't an option, vacuum sealing your meat has it lasting substantially longer in a fridge. Most butchers should do this for free - otherwise, vacuum sealers are worth their



weight in gold and easy to pack. They're great for fresh seafood, meat, fruit, veg, and other local produce you may purchase during your trip. Store your sealed packs in your fridge or freezer to further extend the food life, prevent freezer burn, and save on bulky plastic containers. Another idea is sealing coffee beans from your favourite supplier, and storing in a cool place.

Any meat to be marinated can also be done at home, prior to freezing or vacuum sealing. The marinade takes longer to be absorbed – plus, it's one less messy job for the campsite.

### **Premix Dry Ingredients**

Where a meal requires a mix of spices or dried vegetables, combine them in a zip lock bag and label it. For spices alone, a great alternative to packing a huge variety is premixing your own in a bag, before labelling and vacuum-sealing it.

It's so much easier to do this at home than out bush. Plus, it's effortless to grab from your food tub come time to prepare your meal.

### **Cook in Advance**

We always cook a few meals prior to departure. Soup, or a Bolognese mince and sauce are easy to prepare at home and even easier to re-heat on the campfire.



*Not a bad set up for dinner with family and friends. Holland Track in Western Australia.*



## Meal Planning

I hate the thought of being locked into cooking something that won't satisfy my culinary cravings – so it's important to allow for some flexibility in your meal plan. Each morning, we consult our taste buds and make sure the ingredients for the chosen meal will be defrosted and made accessible for that night.

It may take some time, but the planning stage will simplify your food shopping and preparation. Start by either creating a list of everything you need each day, or even just a rough menu that can be broken down into staple items.

For a 3-week trip, we plan for 21 days of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, plus a few extra meals and some emergency tinned rations.

### Breakfast

For breakfast, we try to keep it fast and simple, usually with cereal or oats. If we have more time, we will do:

- Pancakes
- Bacon and eggs
- Fruit and custard, or
- Omelettes

### Lunch

Our midday meal is often bread or wraps with:

- Salad (cucumber, tomato, alfalfa sprouts, and mayonnaise)
- Cheese, and
- Meat (ham, beef, salami, or tuna)

Other options are :

- A cup of noodles or soup
- Mee Goreng
- Hamburgers or toasties, and
- Crackers

### Dinner

For dinner, there's a huge range of options:

- Soft tacos
- Roast beef
- Sushi



- Fish and chips (get a chip cutter!)
- Stir-fry
- Nachos
- Steak
- Chicken Katsu curry
- Chops and vegetables
- Hamburgers
- Satay chicken
- A BBQ
- Spaghetti Bolognese, or
- Anything else that tickles your fancy

We will have dessert a couple of times a week, which is usually:

- Fruit and custard
- Golden syrup dumplings
- Damper, or
- Scones

## Food Preparation and Management

The types of food you can take with you on a trip will depend on how long you're away for.

### Staple Foods and Longevity

On a long 4WD trip, food with a long shelf life is your friend... and food with a long shelf life that doesn't require refrigeration is your *best* friend! Think UHT milk, tinned tuna, canned lentils and beans, and pretty much anything that is dehydrated – or, preferably, freeze-dried. Staples (or 'go-to' ingredients for meals) play a huge part in travelling; when exploring, there isn't always time to try a range of new gourmet recipes. Stick to food you can prepare quickly, with your eyes closed.

Rice can be used in many ways: as a side dish, savoury meals like fried rice, or deserts like rice pudding. It's also gluten-free, so complements most dietary requirements.

Bread makes food preparation easy too; there's not much you can't slap between a few slices for a sandwich! That said, it just doesn't last – especially in warmer regions – and may not be available to purchase in more remote areas. Any bread we take is consumed during the first few days for lunch. Wraps are fantastic alternatives; they last for ages, taste good, and can be used with a myriad of fillings. Turkish bread and pizza bases last well too. If we ultimately want more bread than we've brought, we make it on the go (bread baked in a camp oven is pretty special).

On that note, flour is great for basics like bread. Baker's flour is best for making into pizza



dough or fresh bread rolls, while self-raising flour is better for damper or pancakes.

### Fresh Food

Avocados can last a couple of weeks if purchased at various stages of ripeness, and the same goes for tomatoes, apples, oranges, bananas, and pears. These fruits, as well as root vegetables, are best kept in the dark. Selecting pieces that are still green will also ensure they can be enjoyed ripe after some time.

To keep cos lettuce fresh, a suggestion is to wrap a damp kitchen towel around the sliced end, store in a plastic bag, and loosely wrap another around the top. Celery can also hold out for weeks if stored in a similar way; once a celery heart is opened, leave it in a bag with another wrapped around the top (to prevent it from losing its turgidity or crunch).

Berries can be transferred into a flat container lined with kitchen towel. It's recommended not to wash the berries until needed, as moisture can remain in the pores and quickly produce mould.

Unless consumed immediately, watermelon isn't recommended for on-the-road adventuring. Given its size, it tends to occupy valuable fridge space.

For bigger families planning to eat watermelon early on in their travels (i.e. within a couple of days), it's suggested to purchase a whole one and store it in an cooler bag with an ice pack.

### Frozen Food

Frozen vegetables and fruit can be a great supplement to fresh varieties. They stack neatly into freezers, and are great for a quick side dish. If you have a Thermomix or blender in your camp kit, they're great for making fresh smoothies or even ice-cream (from blended frozen fruit, like banana).

### Our Selection

Some of the more common items found in our fridge and camp pantry are:

- Tinned food: beetroot, sweet corn, baby corn, pineapple, mixed fruit, tuna, spaghetti, tomatoes, baked beans, and corn.
- Fresh produce: cucumber, alfalfa sprouts, tomatoes, apples, oranges, onions, potatoes, carrots, pumpkin, snow peas, and baby corn.
- Snacks: Nuts, dried fruit, muesli bars, BBQ noodles, and fruit.

## Shopping

After preparing your meal plan, considering the food types, and assessing your storage space, it's a good idea to first shop from your own pantry (there's no point in duplicating items). If you plan to remain in the same location for an extended period, it may also be best to purchase your perishables from the closest town. For example, buying from a local butcher often mean both fresher and cheaper cuts.

If you can catch it, we're in! From delicious blue manna crabs, to fish and crayfish, we eat a



lot of seafood when travelling. This reduces the need to transport as much meat, meanwhile providing delicious, fresh seafood.

An alternative to shopping instore is doing so online. This saves a lot of time, and helps to avoid those impulse buys! Check use-by or best-before dates (particularly fridge items), and consider both the size of your fridge and the shape of the item.

### **Quantities**

If you're a 'just-in-case' shopper - be careful not to exceed the weight limit of your vehicle! Carrying too much food could also see you bringing a lot of it back home.

Not only is supporting the smaller local towns recommended, but shopping as you travel will allow more space in your vehicle. Unless you're heading deep into the outback, there will more than likely be shops either on the way or within the vicinity of your destination.

### **Packing and Storing**

Our Land Cruiser has a full drawer system in the rear, along with a decent-sized tub for food and a smaller tub for snacks. As things tend to bounce around in the back of a 4WD, any storage solution you use (food packaging included) needs to be of decent quality.

Sometimes, glass containers can't be avoided - so pad them out with rubber, tea towels, or anything that may help to absorb the shock. When selecting storage containers, it's recommended they have prominent corners and edges; rounded containers tend to take up more room and waste space.

It can be a task to ensure everything fits snug and slots in with one another perfectly. Once you use an item, you leave a hole; this can result in greater movement while travelling. One way to fill space is to turn larger items sideways, or stuff a tea towel within the crevices. Alternatively, if it's only a small gap, wedge in some small pieces of cork.

### **Food With a Family**

Travelling with children can add a layer of complexity to mealtimes on holiday. Meal planning also becomes more necessary, as some children can be selective about what they eat. Some children prefer vegetables raw, while others like them mixed into a cooked meal.

While boxed breakfast cereal is great in the morning, it can take up a lot of space (and often only last one or two sittings)! On the other hand, Weet-Bix and porridge are both filling and provide enough energy to carry over to the next meal.

Often, the easiest campsite snacks are those with ingredients that store well and boast a long shelf life (such as rice cakes or crackers, with various spreads). These also require limited prior preparation, and are simple enough for the kids to assemble themselves.

Lastly, it's recommended to involve the whole family in both the planning of and shopping for camp meals. This helps to avoid complaints later on!



## Take the Time

Food preparation can be daunting at first - but the more you do it, the easier it gets and the more adventurous you become!

The smell and taste of a roast lamb or chicken curry cooked over an open fire is incredibly satisfying, especially when you've planned and prepared it yourself.

Take the time to get it right, and you'll have a fantastic holiday!

**Everyone seems to have their own camping food hack - what's your secret to easy food preparation in the bush?**

*This original article by Aaron Schubert was updated in 2022 by Snowys Outdoors.*