



Skurka's Backpacking Recipes

12 extensively trail-tested DIY meals



Introduction

On one of my first guided trips, I supplied the clients with cream of wheat and butter for several breakfasts. That was it -- no sugar, berries, nuts, or even salt.

I'd grown fond of this meal the year prior, during a 4,700-mile 6-month loop around Alaska and the Yukon on which hunger proved to be a compelling seasoning. But clients did not share my nostalgia, and this "recipe" proved unsurprisingly not to be a favorite. For the next trip, I committed to do better.

The end result of this effort, which have been ongoing since 2011, are the twelve recipes in this document. Based on feedback from hundreds of clients each year, we tinker with the ingredients, amounts, and ratios until each meal is just right. And if even the best iteration of a recipe is not hitting the mark, we throw it out and try something new.

By design, these recipes generally are:

- Properly portioned, so that you'll be satiated but won't have leftovers;
- Accommodating of allergies and food preferences, including meat, dairy, gluten, and nuts;
- Made of limited and easy-to-find ingredients, from local or online sources;
- Quick to prepare at home and in the field; and,
- Calorically dense, shelf-stable, inexpensive, and of course delicious.

We created twelve recipes so that we can avoid duplicating meals on a 7-day trip. This gives clients a fuller culinary experience and it demonstrates that much better options exist than thru-hiker fare (e.g. Ramen noodles and Lipton sides) or convenient freeze-dried packages (at \$28 per pound).

But for own your trips I recommend utilizing perhaps half or even one-fourth of these options, and also consider omitting some of the less critical ingredients. By keeping it simple, you can purchase fewer ingredients and spend less time preparing meals.

I hope that these recipes help take your breakfasts and dinners to the next level. If you have specific feedback about them, leave a comment on their [dedicated pages](#) or [contact me](#).

Supplemental reading

To round out your kitchen-related knowledge and skills, also read:

- [How to protect your food from bears and mini-bears](#)
- [Five recommended stove systems for soloists and groups](#)

Disclosure

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Breakfast Recipe: Quickstart Cereal



To get out of camp as early as possible, the optimal breakfast consists of individually wrapped bars -- granola bars, energy bars, protein bars, or breakfast bars. They require no prep and they can be eaten on-the-go.

But there are downsides to this approach. First, they're not very satisfying. Second, they probably constitute a large share of your daytime calories as well, possibly leading to culinary boredom. A hot breakfast like [Cheesy Potatoes](#) is at the opposite end of the spectrum. It's more enjoyable, but also more time-consuming, and thus inconsistent with ambitious morning plans.

My happy-medium option is this Quickstart Cereal, which balances efficiency and palatability. It's my go-to breakfast on personal trips, and one of the top-rated meals on my guided trips. We normally reserve it for the last morning of the trip or for summit days.

Stats per serving

- 4.5 ounces
- 617 calories (depends mostly on cereal type)
- 137 calories per ounce

Ingredients

This meal can be very simple, with as few as two ingredients: cereal plus powdered milk or powdered protein. The recipe included below goes 50/50, which is how we do it on the guided trips.

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Cereal	3.5	140	Avoid flakes & puffs	Depends on cereal	Grocery, bulk bins, Costco	Nature's Path Love Crunch
Powdered whole milk	0.5	149	In baking or Hispanic aisle	Dairy	Grocery, online	Nestle Nido
Protein powder	0.5	104	Whey, 22g protein per 1 oz	Eggs	Grocery, Costco	Muscle Milk, 5-lb
Totals	4.5	137	-	-	-	-

For cereal, personally I rotate between granola and grape nuts. They taste good, pack well, and are spatially dense. Many granola varieties are carb-heavy, and I prefer the more calorically dense versions available in bulk at my local natural grocer.

For more variety in your cereal, add crushed walnuts, almond pieces, freeze-dried berries, raisins, Craisins or similar. To keep the portion size in check, subtract an equal amount of cereal. I have served this meal to hundreds of clients, and the 4.5-ounce portion is about right for most.

Powdered milk is the more conventional choice to pair with cereal. I recommend [Nestle Nido](#), which is powdered whole milk and thus more calorically dense than powdered skim milk.

Protein powder is a convenient form of this difficult-to-get-enough-of nutrient. On my personal trips, I skip the milk and add only protein powder. Costco normally has the best prices (if you are prepared to buy 5 pounds of it), but on Amazon it's only about \$1 more per pound (and you don't have to leave your house!).

Portion sizes and ratios

If this meal is too much or too little, change the amounts. Personally, I use 1.5 ounces of protein powder and 3.5 ounces of cereal, because I want the extra protein and because I often need a slightly bigger breakfast.

Hot or cold?

Almost always I consume this meal cold. However, it can be eaten hot. Some cereals — notably grape nuts — will soften and absorb water when cooked. Some protein powders may congeal when heated, which may be unappetizing to some. I'm less bothered by it, and find that stirring well and using a minimal amount of water helps.



Preparation

This meal is very simple to prepare, and is the same for soloists and groups. At home, premix the cereal (with optional fixings) and the protein powder (or powdered milk) in a sandwich-sized storage bag. Each bag is one breakfast for one person.

In the field, simply add water and eat. I'm not going to recommend a specific volume of water — presumably, you have a preference for this ratio already.

Breakfast Recipe: Cheesy Potatoes



This breakfast recipe has been a staple on our guided trips since 2015, when Amanda set out to create a savory dish to help balance sweet options like oatmeal or [Quickstart Cereal](#).

The ingredients and ratios have been tweaked multiple times based on feedback, and I believe we now have a real winner. Among 100+ clients polled during the 2019 season, it was their top-rated breakfast, with an average score of 2.60/3.0.

Key stats

- 4.5 ounces per serving (128 grams)
- 537 calories
- 119 calories/ounce

To increase the caloric density, use more butter and less potato, and substitute the canned green chilies for dried. To increase the net calories, add more of the goodies, specifically bacon, cheese, or butter.

The finished product, plus a little bit of green onion that I happened to have on-hand.

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Mashed potatoes	1.20	97	Instant, deceptively filling	-	Grocery, Costco, online	Idahoan Honest Earth
Nutritional Yeast	0.15	105	Cheesy & savory flavor	-	Online, natural grocer	Anthony's
Dried Onion	0.05	95	Adds flavor	-	Spice aisle	365 Organic
Crumbled bacon	1.00	120	Alt: cured salami, pepperoni	Pork, unless soy	Costco, online	Hormel Crumbled
Green chiles	0.30	23	Adds flavor. Or dried.	-		Ortega Green Chiles
Cheese	1.00	110	Rec'd extra sharp cheddar	Dairy	Grocery	Buy locally
Butter	0.80	203	Adds flavor and caloric density	Dairy	Grocery	Buy locally
Universal spice kit	0.00	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	4.5	119	-	-	-	-

This is a deceptively large meal because the potatoes absorb a lot of water per their dry weight. If your breakfast appetite is suppressed, reduce the potato flakes by a half-ounce. Alternatively, save it for later in the trip when you have a thinner meal and/or you are hungrier.

The nutritional yeast adds a savory, Parmesan-like characteristic. It can also be substituted for real Parmesan if you'd like — add it at the end of the cooking process with the cheddar.

Find real crumbled bacon at your grocery store, or in 20-ounce packages at Costco. You can also cook bacon at home prior to your trip. Definitely pack the bacon fat, too, for extra flavor and calories. For vegetarians, there are many non-meat bacon products.

For our guided groups we pack a can of green chilies. For soloists and smaller groups, a smaller amount of dried green chilies would more calorically dense and perhaps less wasteful. You can also consider taco seasoning, paprika, or similar.

The original recipe used whole milk powder (Nido) and powdered cheese, but last year we swapped these ingredients for butter and real cheese. The response from clients was very positive, so we'll be sticking with these substitutions. This updated version is creamier, more calorically dense, and more flavorful.



At-home preparation

Package the potato flakes, nutritional yeast, and dried onion in a sandwich bag. For shorter trips, soloists can add the crumbed bacon, too — I've had no ill effects after it was repackaged and sat in a hot car for 10 days. The canned green chilies are more perishable, so find a replacement or skip them.

On group trips, we package the bacon separately so that vegetarians and vegans can forgo their share.

Put the cheese in another sandwich bag, or keep it in its original packaging.

Unless it's a cold trip, the butter is best stored in a plastic food container so that it doesn't make a mess if/when it gets soft. On group trips, we divide these items in the field.

Cooking instructions

Per usual, preparing this recipe is very straightforward.

1. Bring 10 ounces (300 ml) of water to a boil. This meal does not need to be "cooked," and you shouldn't need to reheat it.
2. Add half of the bag of potato flakes, then stir.
3. Add the rest of the bag, and stir again. This two-step method will help prevent spills and clumps.

4. Remove from the flame, and mix in the butter and bacon. The cheese and chilies can be mixed in, too, or sprinkled on top.

If you want a soupier consistency, use 12+ ounces of water.

Breakfast Recipe: Southwest Egg Burrito



Occasionally I appreciate a blueberry pancake or a bowl of Captain Crunch. But my standard breakfast at home entails eggs, cheese, toast or a tortilla, with some hot sauce or salsa.

When I delegated the meal preparation this year to David, a local ultra runner who has worked at Boulder's best restaurants (currently, at Flagstaff House), I tasked him with developing a recipe along these lines.

David came back with this Southwest Egg Burrito. Admittedly, it's fussier than other [backpacking recipes](#), but it's still my personal favorite.

Meal stats

- 4.6 ounces (130 grams)
- 474 calories
- 103 calories per ounce

Ingredients

This breakfast could be made with as few as two ingredients: dehydrated eggs and a tortilla. But it'd be tasteless, and I'd encourage you to at least add cheese and salt. The other ingredients are optional, but they take this meal to another level and give it some geographical affiliation.

The 4.5-ounce serving size is field-tested and is appropriate for most backpacker appetites. But if

you'd like to add calories (and flavor), consider **crumbled bacon**.

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Scrambled egg mix	1.1	153	Dried whole eggs + powdered milk	Eggs + milk	Online	Augason Farms
Instant beans	0.4	112	Whole or refried, vegetarian or not	Soy	Online, some bulk sections	Santa Fe Bean Co
Powdered cheese	0.5	126	More field-friendly than blocks	Dairy	Online, or use fresh cheese	Medley Hills Farm
Nutritional yeast	0.1	105	Cheesy & savory flavor	-	Online, natural grocer	Anthony's
Dried onion	0.1	95	Adds flavor	-	Spice aisle	365 Organic
Taco seasoning	0.1	93	Mix of chili, garlic, cumin & more	Maybe gluten	Grocery, Costco, online	McCormick
Green chilies	0.3	9	Mild spice, great flavor	-	Grocery	Hatch Diced Green Chiles
Tortilla	2.0	85	Burrito sized	Gluten	Grocery	Buy local
Universal spice kit	0.0	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	4.6	103	-	-	-	-

For those with a milk/lactose sensitivity, Augason Farms and other vendors offer **whole dried eggs** (sans milk).

Conveniently, the dried beans are the cornerstone of another recipe, my world famous **Beans & Rice with Fritos & Cheese**. Odds are that you already have some around, or should.

The powdered cheese is more user-friendly than fresh cheese, since it can be prepared beforehand and since it's not temperature sensitive. However, fresh cheese is a perfectly acceptable substitute; I recommend sharp cheddar.

Our 10- and 12-person groups will easily use up a 4-ounce can of green chilies. But for smaller groups and soloists, dried green chilies or hot sauce may be a better option.



Ingredients for the Southwest Egg Burrito

At-home preparation

Combine all of the dry ingredients for a single serving, and pack them in a plastic snack bag.

Do NOT combine dry ingredients for multiple meals, like on a multi-day trip or on a group trip. You will be unable to divide the ingredients precisely in the field, and this recipe calls for a very specific ratio of water to egg mix.



Pack the dried ingredients together in a snack bag.

Field preparation

With most of my meals, the instructions are simple: boil water and add the ingredients (to paraphrase). This meal is an exception. Follow these instructions closely:

1. Combine all dry ingredients and spices with exactly 4 ounces (a half cup, or 120 ml) of cold water.
2. Bring to a simmer, scraping the eggs regularly to avoid scorching them to the bottom of your pot. At times, you may want to remove your pot from the flame.
3. Once fully cooked, remove from heat. Add chilies and possibly cheese, and transfer to the tortilla.



I want to emphasize three points, because this meal can be easily ruined by glossing over the cooking instructions:

- 4 ounces of water. If you use too much, you'll get egg soup.
- Cold water. If you add the dry ingredients to hot water, the eggs will harden into nuggets, leaving you with egg nugget soup.
- Scrape regularly. Act as if you're cooking scrambled eggs at home without a non-stick pan or cooking spray. But don't stir them so vigorously that they become whipped either.

Breakfast Recipe: Coconut Chia Oatmeal



A classic oatmeal breakfast (or worse, an instant packet) consists of simple grains and sugar, and not much else. I find that it gives a quick sugar rush, but I'm often hungry within an hour or two.

For last season, David developed a recipe that sticks better to my ribs, combining an oatmeal base with longer-burning chia and coconut, a modest amount of sugar, and some yummy toppings. With over 600 calories, it will almost power me to lunch.

Meal Stats

- 4.5 ounces (107 grams)
- 622 calories
- 138 calories per ounce

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Rolled Oats	1.0	105	aka Quaker Oats	Gluten	Grocery, bulk bins, Costco	Bob's Red Mill Gluten-Free
Chia Seeds	0.5	138	Filling, nutritionally dense		Costco, online, natural grocer	Nutiva
Coconut Milk powder	0.5	191	Adds creaminess, subtle flavor	Coconut	Natural foods, online	Z Natural Foods
Turbinado Sugar	0.3	105	Less processed form of sugar	-	Ubiquitous	Anthony's Organic
Coconut Flakes	0.5	204	Adds texture, flavor, calories	Coconut	Natural foods, online	Anthony's Organic
Sliced Almonds	1.0	160	Nutritionally dense and flavorful	Tree Nuts	Costco, Amazon, Grocery stores	365 Everyday
Raisins	0.7	84	Adds sweetness and carbohydrates		Grocery, Costco	Sun Maid Organic
Salt	to taste	0	Critical, don't forget it	-	Ubiquitous	-
Cinnamon	to taste	69	Very strong, don't need much	-	In spice aisle	McCormick
Totals	4.5	138	-	-	-	-

Think of this recipe as a template — it can be changed in any manner of ways. However, don't stray too far from the 4.5-ounce serving weight, and don't skip the sugar or salt.

For example, use:

- Dried blueberries, dried apple pieces, or dried strawberries instead of raisins.
- Macadamia nuts instead of almonds, if you prefer an extra rich flavor and higher caloric density.
- Protein powder instead of coconut milk powder, though a vanilla flavored brand is recommended.

You can also employ the overnight oats method, and soak the cereal in water the night before. The oats and chia seeds will be soft enough to eat for a quick start.



At Home Preparation

For solo trips, all ingredients can be combined into a small, ziplock bag. If you backpack a lot, mixing together a large batch that you can individually portion throughout the season will save you time.

For groups, it can be easier to accommodate everyone's preferences by combining all the oats, chia seeds, and coconut milk powder in one bag. Keep the sugar and toppings separate, and let people mix them in to their taste.

Field Preparation

Preparing this meal is very easy.

1. Bring 8-10 ounces of water to a boil.
2. Take your pot off the flame. Add the bag of ingredients to the water and stir
3. Let the mixture sit for 3-5 minutes. If you put it back on the heat, stir constantly to avoid burning the meal.

Using extra water, about 12 ounces, will give you a looser consistency. This makes cleanup easier. Watch from splatters if you put the mix back over the flame.



Breakfast Recipe: Fruit and Cream Porridge



The term “porridge” may not sound particularly appetizing, but we think this breakfast is pretty decent. It’s slightly nutty and not too sweet, and another great template that can be adjusted to your personal preferences.

The most unique element of this recipe is the streusel topping, which bumps up its craveability factor.

Meal Statistics:

- Meal Weight: 4.5 ounces
- Calories per ounce: 118
- Total Calories: 531

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Farina (Cream of wheat)	1.5	93	Nutty flavor. Sub w/Cream of Rice.	Gluten	Grocery, Amazon	Cream of Wheat
Seeds	0.7	150	Fewer allergies than nuts		Grocery, amazon, costco	Gerbs Raw Super 5
Dried apple pieces	1.0	68	Can buy rings, just cut up first		Natural Grocer, Amazon, Costco	Gerbs Apple Slices
Streusel Crumbs	0.5	112	Adds texture, and very calorie dense	Maybe nuts	Amazon, Baking aisles	Aunt Bessie's
Butter	0.8	203	Adds flavor and caloric density	Dairy	Grocery	Buy locally
Cinnamon	0.0	69	Very strong, don't need much	-	In spice aisle	McCormick
Salt	0.0	0	Critical, don't forget it	-	Ubiquitous	-
Totals	4.5	118	-	-	-	-

Most everything you need for this meal can be found at a standard super market or grocery store.

The exception is the streusel crumbs. If you can't easily find them online, you can make your own using an online recipe. Or, crumble a cookie atop the meal to achieve a similar flavor and texture.

If you're gluten free, substitute cream of rice for the cream of wheat, and either use a gluten-free cookie make the streusel with gluten free flour.

To make the meal fully vegan, use a vegan cookie for the streusel and replace the butter with coconut oil.

The dried apples and seeds can be substituted for any number of variations. For clients, we use pumpkin seeds and dried apples. Some other recommendations include

- Almond slices
- Dried strawberries
- Crumbled walnuts
- Raisins



Home Preparation

For solo trips, you can combine everything except the streusel crumbs into one small snack bag. Keep the streusel separate to help keep it crunchy. On hot trips, double bag the mixture to prevent the butter from leaking into your pack, or keep the butter in a sealable food storage container.

For multi-day trips, I bring a larger portion of butter for multiple meals. I keep it in a small Tupperware container, believing that the extra packaging is worth the reliability.

For groups, you have several prep options. We bag separately the apple slices, streusel, and butter, and divide these ingredients in the field. Everything else is bagged together, in either individual or group sizes. If you substitute the apples for raisins or another dried fruit that mixes well, you can store them with the cream of wheat and seeds.

Cooking instructions

1. Bring 10 ounces of water to a boil.
2. Add in all the contents except the streusel. Cover and let re-hydrate.
3. After five minutes, remove the lid. Add in the streusel now.

As with most of these recipes, you can make clean-up easier by using more water. For this recipe, you can use up to 12 ounces.



Breakfast Recipe: Banana Chocolate Chip Oatmeal



This spin-off on the classic oatmeal breakfast is rich and decadent. Combined with our [Coconut Chia](#) version, we've taken oatmeal up a notch or two.

Meal Stats:

- Recipe Weight: 4.5 ounces
- Calories per Ounce: 136
- Total Calories: 612

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Rolled Oats	1.5	105	aka Quaker Oats	Gluten	Grocery, bulk bins, Costco	Bob's Red Mill Gluten-Free
Powdered Whole Milk	0.5	149	In baking or Hispanic aisle	Dairy	Grocery, online	Nestle Nido
Banana Chips	0.5	140	Adds texture and flavor.	-	Grocery, bulk bins	365 Everyday Value
Craisins	0.5	91	Adds sweetness. Can sub for raisins.	-	Grocery, Costco	Ocean Spray
Chopped Walnuts	0.5	190	Adds crunch & fat	Tree Nuts	Baking aisles, Costco, Amazon	Nature's Eats
Chocolate Chips	0.5	140	Milk, dark, or semi-sweet	Dairy, soy	Grocery, Costco, or online	Nestle Milk
Butter	0.5	203	Adds flavor and caloric density	Dairy	Grocery	Buy locally
Salt	0.0	0	Critical, don't forget it	-	Ubiquitous	-
Cinnamon	0.0	69	Very strong, don't need much	-	In spice aisle	McCormick
Totals	4.5	136	-	-	-	-

The chief benefit of this recipe is that the ingredients are widely available and easy to assemble. You can find everything in a standard supermarket, and probably even small-town grocery stores.

The recipe assumes that your banana chips are sweetened. If they're not, it's recommended that you add a sweetener like sugar or honey.

The meal is very fat- and calorie-heavy, due to the combination of whole milk powder, butter, chocolate, and walnuts. These will help balance the sugar content to give you a "slow burn" effect.

If you're vegan, have a small appetite, or want a healthier version, consider these substitutions:

- Use cacao nibs instead of chocolate chips;
- Substitute coconut milk powder for the whole milk powder;
- Use dried blueberries or no-sugar-added dried cranberries; or,
- Omit the butter and use coconut oil if you want to make it fully vegan.

While you can cold-soak this recipe, its full glory comes only when it's cooked, because the chocolate chips melt into the oats.



At Home Preparation

For solo trips, combine all the ingredients in a sandwich bag, except for the chocolate chips and maybe the butter. To prevent the butter from leaking in hot conditions, double-bag it, or keep it in a secure food storage container (e.g. Tupperware). The chocolate chips are best added at the end.

For groups, combine the oats, banana chips, Craisins, and maybe the milk powder (depending on group allergies). This mix can be individually portioned, or divided in the field.

Keep the nuts separate, so you can accommodate allergies. Store the butter in a secure food storage container. Keep the chocolate chips separate, so they can be added at the end after the meal has cooked.



Field Preparation

1. Bring 10 ounces of water to a boil.
2. Add all the contents into the water.
3. Cover, and wait 5-10 minutes. Add cinnamon to taste.
4. A few minutes before eating, add the chocolate chips so that they melt into the oats some.

Using up to 12 ounces of water will help with cleanup, but the melted chocolate in the pot will inevitably need a little extra attention.

Dinner Recipe: Beans and Rice



This meal is my favorite. It goes on every single backpacking trip. I never get tired of it. Clients love this recipe. Need more convincing to try it?

Key Stats

- Recommended meal weight: 5.7 oz
- Total calories: 668
- Calories per ounce: 117

It's rare that someone struggles to finish this meal. But if you have a smaller appetite, use less beans and rice (but keep the ratio). To increase calorie count or caloric density, add more Fritos.

Ingredients

The four main ingredients are essential. The rice, Fritos, and cheese are widely available. The beans are best found online; in a pinch, I have used a seasoned bean dip from the Whole Foods bulk section.

Assuming the beans are plain, the Taco seasoning is critical. Most people skip salt and pepper, but may add red pepper flakes to inject some heat.

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Instant beans	2.0	112	Whole or refried, vegetarian or not	Soy	Online, some bulk sections	Santa Fe Bean Co
Instant rice	1.5	103	Common brand, Minute	-	Grocery, Costco, online	Minute White Rice
Cheese	1.0	110	Rec'd extra sharp cheddar	Dairy	Grocery	Buy locally
Fritos	1.0	160	Unflavored has just 3 ingredients	Corn	Grocery, online	Fritos Scoops
Taco seasoning	0.2	93	Mix of chili, garlic, cumin & more	Maybe gluten	Grocery, Costco, online	McCormick
Universal spice kit	0.0	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	5.7	117	-	-	-	-





Meal ingredients

At-home preparation

For groups, I do the following:

- Each group member is given one 2.5-oz snack bag of beans and rice mixture
- Fritos and cheese are kept together, and divided proportionally in the field
- Meals are individually seasoned with the taco seasoning and group spice kit

When solo, I vary between two approaches. If I plan to have this meal several times on the same trip (or the same leg of a thru-hike), I have a pre-spiced snack bag of beans and rice for each meal, and my supply of Fritos and cheese is kept together but preferably somehow delineated so that I don't steal tomorrow's calories for tonight's dinner, e.g. divide the block of cheese equally but keep it all together. Alternatively, if I plan to have this meal just once, I will use up to three bags (beans/rice, cheese, Fritos) but I've also combined everything into one bag before. It works out okay since the ingredients are fairly easy to separate in the field.

Cooking instructions

For many reasons, [I make all of my meals soupy](#). This simplifies some the cooking:

1. Add at least 12 oz of water to my stove pot.
2. Pour in beans, rice, taco seasoning, and any other spices at anytime.
3. Cook, ideally to a simmer for about 60 seconds, stirring to avoid boil-over.
4. Cut cheese into dice-sized pieces and add to meal.
5. Add Fritos just before consumption. If added too early, they will soften.

For perfect at-home consistency, use 10 oz (300 ml) of water. To prevent burning, do not add beans, rice, and taco seasoning until water is boiling.

Dinner Recipe: Peanut Noodle



For years Peanut Noodles has been a crowd favorite, usually ranking just below the world famous [Beans & Rice](#). This backpacking dinner recipe goes on every single guided trip and on most personal trips, especially if I have a prepared batch of sauce already in the fridge.

The sauce has gone through several iterations, getting better each time. It's worthy of at-home use — we keep a bottle of it in the fridge as a quick-dinner option, usually pairing it with a blackened chicken breast.

This video is helpful, but note that the recipe has been updated.

Meal stats

- Recommended meal weight: 5.7 oz
- Total calories: 796
- Caloric density: 141 calories/ounce

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Ramen noodles	3.0	127	Do not use seasoning packet	Wheat + more	Grocery, Costco	Maruchan Ramen
Cashews	0.7	150	Adds crunch and calories	Tree nut	Grocery, Costco, or online	Sincerely Nuts
Peanut butter	1.1	175	Add honey wt if sugar-added	Peanuts	Grocery, Costco	Justin's Peanut Butter, Classic
Olive oil	0.1	240	Boosts caloric density	-	Grocery, Costco	Bertolli Extra Virgin
Toasted sesame oil	0.2	240	Strong & distinct flavor	Sesame	Grocery, online	La Tourangelle
Soy sauce	0.2	30	Not calorically dense, adds flavor	Soy, G/F available	Grocery, Costco	Kikkoman Soy Sauce 1L
Honey	0.2	88	Do not use if PB has added sugar	-	Grocery, Costco	L.R. Rice Raw Honey
Coconut milk powder	0.1	191	Adds creaminess, subtle flavor	Coconut	Natural foods, online	Z Natural Foods
Garlic	0.0	93	A little bit goes a long way	-	Ubiquitous	Kirkland Granulated
Ginger Powder	0.0	111	Very Strong, a little goes far	-	Spice aisle, Amazon	Simply Organic
Universal spice kit	0.0	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	5.7	141	-	-	-	-

If you have a gluten sensitivity, swap the Top Ramen for **Millet and Brown Rice Ramen** from Lotus Foods.

Cashews are not critical, but they improve flavor and texture. They can be substituted for raisins or crushed peanuts. Or, use more than one.

Since we first developed this recipe, the sauce has become more involved, now with eight ingredients. The effort is more easily justified by making a large batch, like for a group, a long solo hike, or mixed

field/home use. If you need to simplify it (at the expense of flavor), the most critical ingredients are:

- Peanut butter
- Toasted sesame oil (or olive oil, with a big hit to flavor)
- Soy sauce
- Garlic

Per each two-ounce serving of the sauce, use about 0.04 ounces garlic and 0.01 ounces of ginger. A normal postal scale will not register these trace amounts; you need to buy a drug scale or to make a 10-serving batch.

For our guided groups, we don't add Sriracha chili sauce because some clients object to the spiciness. But we love it. For each 2-ounce serving, add about 0.04 ounces. A field-friendly alternative are red pepper flakes, which are part of the universal spice kit.

While I haven't personally tried it, an alternative butter (e.g. cashew, almond, or sunflower) would avoid peanut allergy concerns.



At-home preparation

Ramen noodles have their own packaging, and I normally leave them that way. The exception is a

short solo trip, when at home I may crush up the noodles and re-bag them with the raisins or crushed cashews.

The raisins or crushed cashews are bagged separately and divided in the field.

The sauce should be made at home. Mix all of the listed ingredients, minus the noodles and cashews. I recommend making big batches with a kitchen mixer, unless you want an arm workout.

Carry the sauce into the field in a 4- or 8-oz [Nalgene HDPE Container](#) or a 16- or 32-oz [Nalgene Wide-Mouth Bottle](#). Even if you only need one serving, do not attempt to use a 2-oz bottle to save a few grams over the 4-oz or 8-oz size — you will struggle to pour the sauce into it and to clean it later.



The sauce is relatively involved — there are several ingredients, and it's difficult to mix large batches without a mechanical mixer. So I make big batches that I can send out on group trips or that I can pull from for short solo trips.

Cooking instructions

1. If you prefer smaller noodle pieces to long, stringy ones, crush the noodles before opening the

package. But be careful — the package can rip open.

2. Remove the MSG-filled “flavor” packet.
3. Bring to a boil at least 1.25 cups (10 oz, 300ml) of water.
4. Add the Ramen and the cashews, turn off the stove or let it burn out, and let the noodles sit for 5 minutes.
5. Add the sauce.

If you use more than the minimum 1.25 cups of water, everything can be added at the very beginning, since the extra water will prevent scorching the ingredients.

To get the sauce out of the bottle, we add water and shake vigorously. A 32-ounce bottle becomes very clean after two or three rounds.

Dinner Recipe: Backcountry Chili



A near weekly dinner at home for Amanda and me during the colder months is chili. It's particularly gratifying to make with DIY elk meat and homegrown peppers and tomatoes.

It seemed like my chili recipe could be converted for backcountry use, and I asked David last spring to develop a recipe. On its maiden trip, the reactions were excellent: "If it had Fritos, I'd score it higher than **Beans & Rice**," said one multi-time alumnus. If you've tried that dish, you know that's high praise!

Based on 84 client evaluations in 2019, this chili recipe scored a 2.55/3.0, putting it in a close fourth-place behind **Beans & Rice** (2.79), **Peanut Noodles** (2.58), and **Pesto Noodles** (2.57).

Meal Stats:

- Recipe weight: 5.5 ounces
- Total calories: 512
- Calories/ounce: 93

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Instant beans	1.8	112	Whole or refried, vegetarian or not	Soy	Online, some bulk sections	Santa Fe Bean Co
TVP	0.8	101	Textured vegetable protein	Soy	Online, natural grocer	Bob's Red Mill
Dried Bell Peppers	0.7	63	Red + green	Nightshade	Online	It's Delish
Tomato Powder	0.5	85	Concentrated savory flavor	Nightshade	Online, Natural Grocer	Naturevibe Botanicals
Vegetable Bouillon	0.3	0	Powders easier to prep		grocery, amazon	Casa de Santa
Dried Onion	0.3	95	Adds flavor	-	Spice aisle	365 Organic
Taco Seasoning	0.1	93	Mix of chili, garlic, cumin & more	Maybe gluten	Grocery, Costco, online	McCormick
Garlic	0.1	93	A little bit goes a long way	-	Ubiquitous	Kirkland Granulated
Chili Powder	0.1	0	Improves taste & flavor depth	Nightshade	Grocery, Costco, online	McCormick Gourmet
Cheese	1.0	110	Rec'd extra sharp cheddar	Dairy	Grocery	Buy locally
Universal spice kit	0.0	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	5.5	93	-	-	-	-

This recipe relies on several ingredients that are difficult to find locally. But they're worth it.

Refried beans can be found in some grocery stores. In Boulder, for example, Natural Grocers carries them in the bulk. Buy more than you need and use the leftovers for [Beans and Rice](#). Some brands contain gluten, so read the ingredients label if you're sensitive.

Tomato powder is a vital base ingredient. A little goes a long way. It's convenient to have in the pantry for home use.

The most common complaint about this dish is the textured vegetable protein (TVP). If you're unaccustomed to it, it can be difficult to digest, making even a palatial tent too claustrophobic. So consider using more beans and less TVP.

Alternatively, substitute dried beef crumbles for the TVP. This would significantly increase the cost, but would be easier on sensitive systems. Be aware that beef crumbles are not particularly shelf-stable. Once the package is opened, refrigerate it and use it within a week; in the field, use it within a day or two, depending on ambient temperatures.

To increase the calorie count and caloric density, add more cheese, Fritos, or olive oil.



At-Home Preparation

For solo trips, you can mix everything together in a small bag, except the cheese — keep that in it's own bag. Cheese makes most meals better, and on longer trips I often pack a big block of it.

For groups, you can carry all the ingredients in a single bag and divide it in the field, or you can give each group member an individual ration (as we normally do). Again, hold out the cheese. The spices tend to settle towards the bottom of a bag, and shaking the bag helps to redistribute them

Cooking Instructions

1. Bring about 12 ounces of water to a boil
2. Take the pot off the flame. Add in the chili mixture
3. You can let it sit, covered, to re-hydrate. It will take about 10 minutes. You can let it simmer too, stirring so as not to burn it.
4. Mix in the cheese
5. You can add a few extra ounces of water to the cooking process though to make things even easier.

As noted in my [Argument for Soups and Gruels](#) post, I tend to make meals for watery in the backcountry. Using up to 16 ounces of water will help make cleanup easier.

Dinner Recipe: Coconut Cashew Curry



This was another new dinner for 2019, and it quickly became one of my favorite dinners. Here's why:

- Completely unique flavor profile among our 12-recipe repertoire;
- Great variety of textures;
- A hearty and filling portion; and,
- Easy to increase the calorie count and density, like by adding olive oil or chunks of protein.

The original recipe used Green Cardamom, an aromatic spice that proved divisive. So it's not included in this version, and it will be omitted on our 2020 trips.

Meal Stats

- Weight per serving: 5.7 ounces
- Calories per ounce: 113
- Calories per serving: 644

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Instant rice	2.0	103	Common brand, Minute	-	Grocery, Costco, online	Minute White Rice
Dried vegetables	1.0	80	Onions, carrots, peppers, corn		Online, Natural Grocer	It's Delish
Dried chickpeas	0.5	120	Adds Crunch and protein		Online, natural Grocer	The Good Bean
Cashews	1.0	150	Adds crunch and calories	Tree nut	Grocery, Costco, or online	Sincerely Nuts
Coconut milk powder	0.7	191	Adds creaminess, subtle flavor	Coconut	Natural foods, online	Z Natural Foods
Ginger powder	0.0	0	Very Strong, a little goes far	-	Spice aisle, Amazon	Simply Organic
Curry paste (green)	0.4	19	Paste better than powder.	Maybe peanut	Grocery, online	Thai Kitchen
Tamarind paste	0.2	50	Strong sweet/sour flavor. Stores well.		Grocery, online	Tamicon Organic
Universal spice kit	0.0	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	5.7	113	-	-	-	-

The curry sauce calls for several tricky-to-find ingredients. Thankfully, like our Peanut Noodle sauce, the curry is so good that it's worth making a big batch and keeping some in the fridge for easy at-home dinners.

Tamarind paste has a sweet-and-sour flavor and is derived from cooking down taramind pods. It's easy to find online, and is often stocked in Latin American and Asian grocery markets. It's not crucial, so if you can't find it, skip it. But to make up for its absence, add a pinch of rice wine vinegar and sugar to the sauce.

Green curry paste is different from curry powder. The blend of ingredients varies by brand, but it's generally a mixture of pulverized kaffir lime leaf, lemongrass, and galangal root (related closely to ginger). Some brands have fish sauce or shrimp paste — if you're vegetarian, check the label.

Dried chickpeas are becoming a popular snack in natural grocery stores. We purchase plain ones in bulk, but flavored varieties will work just fine. Buy only what you'll need, because they'll last only a few weeks after the package has been opened.

Other types of protein can be added to this dish. Consider:

- Chicken (Dried, Pouch)
- Tuna (Pouch)
- Beef (Dehydrated, Freeze Dried)

The weight of ginger powder per serving 0.01 ounces, which won't register on a postal or kitchen scale. It's just a pinch.



At Home Preparation

For both soloists and groups, mix together all the dry ingredients, except:

- On longer trips, separate the chickpeas so that they stay crunchy;
- On group trips, separate the cashews, so that tree nut allergies can be accommodated.

Combine the curry paste and tamarind paste, and store it in a small 1- to 8-ounce HDPE bottle, depending on the amount. To retrieve all the sauce, which is marginally viscous, add purified water (hot, if it's available) to the bottle and shake vigorously. We've also used 8-ounce plastic "take-out" containers, which were easier to access but less leak-proof.



The curry sauce. It's packed with flavor.

Cooking Instructions

1. Bring about 12 ounces of water to a boil
2. Add the dry ingredients, curry sauce, and cashews (so everything but the chickpeas).
3. Return to boil, then remove from heat and let soak for about 10 minutes, until the vegetables are soft.
4. Once everything is re-hydrated, add the chickpeas.

Dinner Recipe: Pesto Noodles



This dinner recipe is a sleeper. It's much simpler than [Peanut Noodles](#), and it lacks the obvious cheese and Frito goodness of the [Beans & Rice](#), yet it's rated as highly as both by our clients.

Meal stats

- Recommended meal weight: 5.6 oz
- Total calories: 700
- Caloric density: 125 calories/ounce

To increase the caloric density, which is already very high, add more olive oil, more noodles, or more Parmesan.

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Ramen noodles	3.00	127	Do not use seasoning packet	Wheat + more	Grocery, Costco	Maruchan Ramen
Olive oil	1.00	240	Boosts caloric density	-	Grocery, Costco	Bertolli Extra Virgin
Parmesan	0.75	93	Pre-grated is most convenient	Dairy	Grocery, Costco, online	Kraft Grated
Sun-dried tomatoes	0.75	0	Julienne cut = less field prep	-	Grocery, Costco, online	Bella Sun Luci Julienne Cut
Garlic	0.05	93	A little bit goes a long way	-	Ubiquitous	Kirkland Granulated
Dried basil	0.05	100	Alt: fresh basil	-	Grocery, online	McCormick 5 oz
Universal spice kit	0.00	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	5.60	125	-	-	-	-

The spices can be altered to change the profile of the dish. For example, add some dried oregano or rosemary.

For extra goodness, drop in some chunks of salami or beef jerky. Pine nuts or cashews are also a good addition.

This dish can be made vegan by substituting the Parmesan. Vegan Parmesan products are available online and at local natural grocers. Or, easily make your own using cashews, nutritional yeast, and a pinch of salt.

At-home preparation

Discard the MSG-loaded seasoning packet in the bag of noodles, either at home or in the field.

For single-servings, all ingredients should be bagged together, except for the Parmesan — keep that separate. I store the olive oil in a Nalgene bottle made of HDPE, which are available in 4-, 8-, 16-, and 32-ounce sizes. The screw-lids are very secure, and I haven't had one leak oil.

In a group setting, each group member receives their own ration of noodles, and all of the other



Cooking instructions

For perfect at-home consistency:

1. Use 10 ounces of water. Add the leathery sun-dried tomatoes at the start, to give them time to soften up.
2. Bring the water to a boil, or a near-boil.
3. Add all ingredients, save for the Parmesan. The ramen seasoning packet should be discarded.
4. Stir and let reconstitute. No simmer is needed.
5. Once the ingredients have cooked and the pot has been removed from the stove, add the Parmesan. Unless you want a gooey cheese mess in your pot, do not jump the gun on the Parmesan.
6. Add salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes to taste.



Dinner Recipe: Polenta & Peppers



This Italian-themed dinner recipe is very filling, making it ideal for long days and late in a trip, when appetites are big. It's unique and flavorful.

Meal stats

- Recommended serving weight: 5.6 oz
- Total calories: 595
- Caloric density: 105 cal/oz

Like instant potatoes, polenta absorbs a significant amount of water, at a 4:1 volume ratio. So this meal cooks bigger than the two-ounce serving would suggest. Those wanting more calories or a higher caloric density should increase the quantity of olive oil, Parmesan, or nuts

Ingredients

Ingredient	Ounces	Calories per oz	Comments	Allergy info	Where to buy	Buy online now
Polenta	2.00	104	Similar to grits, but more flavor		Grocery, Costco, online	Colavita Polenta
Dried bell peppers	0.50	63	Red + green	Nightshade	Online	It's Delish
Tomato powder	0.20	85	Concentrated savory flavor	Nightshade	Online, Natural Grocer	Naturevibe Botanicals
Garlic	0.05	93	A little bit goes a long way	-	Ubiquitous	Kirkland Granulated
Dried onion	0.10	95	Adds flavor	-	Spice aisle	365 Organic
Vegetable bouillon	0.30	0	Powders easier to prep		grocery, amazon	Casa de Santa
Olive oil	0.75	240	Boosts caloric density	-	Grocery, Costco	Bertolli Extra Virgin
Parmesan	0.75	93	Pre-grated is most convenient	Dairy	Grocery, Costco, online	Kraft Grated
Sun-dried tomatoes	0.50	0	Julienne cut = less field prep	-	Grocery, Costco, online	Bella Sun Luci Julienne Cut
Cashews	0.50	150	Adds crunch and calories	Tree nut	Grocery, Costco, or online	Sincerely Nuts
Universal Spice Kit	0.00	0	Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes	-	Grocery, Costco, online	1-oz HDPE bottles
Totals	5.65	105	-	-	-	-

Chunks of dry salami are a wonderful addition to this meal, for both flavor and protein.

Tomato powder can be tricky to find in stores. It adds vital flavor, however, so don't skip it. It's most easily found online, is very shelf-stable, and can be used at home for pastas and risottos.

If you're feeling fancy, you can substitute the cashews for pine nuts. They'll change the flavor a bit, and make it more authentic. Cashews or almonds work just fine though if you don't want to spend the extra money.

One word of caution, make sure you're buying quick-cook grits. More traditional varieties can take upwards of 40 minutes to cook, and they're inedible if underdone.

At-home preparation



When solo, I bag all of the ingredients together save for the olive oil.

In a group, each member is given their own bag of polenta, peppers, and tomato powder. The remaining ingredients are communally carried, and distributed in the field.

To carry the olive oil, I recommend a Nalgene bottle (4 to 32 oz), which has a reliably tight screw-lid



Individual serving, left: one bag of ingredients + bottle of olive oil. Group serving, all other bags and

containers.

Cooking instructions

For perfect consistency:

1. Add the olive oil at any time.
2. Bring 12 ounces of water to a boil.
3. Add polenta, peppers, and tomato powder, and return to a simmer for 30 or 60 seconds.
4. Remove from the heat and let sit for 5 to 10 minutes until the polenta has fully cooked.
5. Add the olive oil (if you have not already) and Parmesan, and enjoy.

By adding more than the recommended volume of water, like 16 ounces, all ingredients can be added at the start, then brought to a boil. Be careful of splatter as the polenta cooks, and stir regularly to avoid burning the polenta.