

## Ten ultra-easy camping meals

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It's the prospect of staying in some of Australia's most remote and beautiful locations that attracts most of us to free camping. The freedom to set up camp away from the hustle and bustle of holiday resorts. And the relaxed vibe as we meet and chat with like-minded RVers around a campfire.

So the last thing you want to be faced with as dinner time approaches is a side serving of stress, as you try to decide what to cook. Or worse, the conclusion that your only option is a sausage sizzle for the sixth night running.

We've rustled up our favourite ultra-easy free camping recipes to make your evening meal as stress-free as the rest of your stay. These 10 dishes can be thrown together at the last minute, or prepared with minimum fuss in advance and left to simmer. Either way you can take full advantage of an extended happy hour knowing a hot and satisfying meal will be awaiting your return.

So whether you're scratching your head over the fate of two wilted celery sticks left in your chiller, or have returned from the local farm shop with an armful of seasonal produce, is our top free camping cuisine.

All these recipes will serve two people, and most will leave you a bit left over for the next day. They also allow the flexibility you need when the camp pantry is looking a little bare; with most of these recipes you can omit or substitute many of the ingredients and they'll still taste great.

### **Tips and tricks for ultra-easy free camping cuisine (side box pull-out)**

- Think ahead to what you might cook over the next couple of days, especially when you've bought fresh ingredients. With a little creativity you can produce several completely different meals based on an eggplant and a tin of chickpeas.
- Fresh herbs are great for adding flavour and pizzazz to your dishes, but they're not always accessible when you're camping. The stay-fresh tubes of ginger and garlic are a good alternative, and dried herbs usually work just as well in tomato-based dishes.
- Be creative with your pans. There's a huge variety of one-pot meals you can try to save gas – and the washing up.
- Pre-washed salad and pre-chopped veg don't last as long but can be useful and save using precious water to prepare when you're free camping.
- Keep a good stock of pantry ingredients on hand and think beyond tinned tomatoes and rice. Pulses, pesto, mustard, sweet chilli sauce can liven up many dishes.

## 1. Rump steak with crispy, garlicky potatoes and easy ratatouille

This is a great wintery dish to warm you up by the campfire. If you have any ratatouille left over, it's delicious cold the following day with some sliced meats or cheese. In summer, try a garden salad with radishes and a wholegrain mustard vinaigrette instead of the ratatouille.

### Ingredients

2 rump steaks (or scotch fillet, porterhouse)  
6-8 small potatoes washed and quartered  
2 cloves of garlic finely sliced  
2 sprigs of fresh rosemary finely chopped or 1 tsp mixed dried herbs  
1 onion halved and sliced  
1 medium eggplant diced  
½ red capsicum diced  
1 tin chopped tomatoes  
½ tsp fresh or dried thyme  
Pinch of sugar  
Olive oil  
Handful of torn basil leaves

In a large saucepan, sauté the onion and 1 garlic clove in a little olive oil until they begin to colour. Add the eggplant and capsicum and continue to cook, stirring occasionally until soft. Add the tomatoes, thyme and sugar and season to taste. The ratatouille will be ready in around 15 minutes or will simmer happily for much longer. Sprinkle with basil leaves when ready.

Meanwhile put the potatoes in the bottom of a deep frying pan and cover with water. Parboil for around 5 minutes. Drain the potatoes and return to the pan with a swirl of olive oil, the second garlic clove and herbs. Cook over a high heat until the potatoes are golden and crispy, stirring occasionally. You can cook your steaks in this same pan, or make use of a bbq.

## 2. Sweet potato and chickpea korma

The best thing about this dish is its flexibility. You can make it with practically any vegetables, fresh, frozen or tinned, and it still tastes great. The curry paste provides most of the flavour but you can add some heat with fresh ginger and chilli.

### Ingredients

1 onion halved and sliced  
Thumb of fresh ginger finely chopped (optional)  
1 small red chilli finely chopped (optional)

½ red capsicum chopped  
Handful of sliced mushrooms  
1 small sweet potato chopped into 2cm chunks  
¼ cauliflower cut into small florets  
Half a 400g tin of chickpeas  
3 tbsp Patak's korma paste  
200ml coconut milk  
1 tbsp desiccated coconut (optional)  
2 tbsp ground almonds to thicken (optional)  
1 lemon to serve

Parboil the sweet potato for around 6 minutes then add the cauliflower to the same saucepan. Cook for a further 4 minutes. Meanwhile add your onion with chilli and ginger (if using) to a large frying pan or wok with a splash of olive oil. Leave to cook slowly on a low heat. After around 6 minutes turn the heat up to medium, add the capsicum and mushrooms and sauté for a couple of minutes. Add the korma paste and stir everything briskly for another 2 minutes. Turn the heat right down.

Drain the veggies (try to reserve some of the cooking water) and add them to the frying pan along with the chickpeas, making sure everything is coated in sauce. Add the coconut milk along with the ground almonds, desiccated coconut (if using) and stir. If the consistency looks too thick, add a little of the reserved cooking water.

Simmer for 15 minutes or an hour – depending how long happy hour lasts! Serve with rice or toasted naan breads if you're feeling hungry and squeeze some lemon juice over before serving.

### **3. Grilled fish, French tomato couscous and lemony avocado salad**

This French couscous recipe was passed down through generations before making its way to Australia. It's one of the easiest and tastiest ways to enjoy couscous, and you don't even need boiling water because the couscous cooks in the tomato juice. It's worth using fresh mint if you can get some, but dried would also work. These quantities will make enough for the following day as well.

#### Ingredients

2 fish fillets (your latest catch!)  
Bag mixed salad – spinach, watercress and rocket work well  
1 avocado peeled and sliced  
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil mixed with the juice from half a lemon

#### For the couscous:

1 mug of couscous  
1 tin of chopped tomatoes  
2 tbsp olive oil  
Juice from 1 lemon  
1 spring onion finely chopped

Handful of fresh mint

Prepare the couscous at least an hour before serving (any longer is fine). Add all ingredients to a bowl, season and mix.

Cook the fish on the grill or baked in foil on the campfire. Once the fish is almost ready, slice the avocado, mix with the green leaves and dress in the lemony vinaigrette. Serve with the tomato couscous.

#### **4. Herbed lamb cutlets with Greek salad on a bed of baby spinach**

What could be better than some tender Aussie lamb served with a fresh Greek salad? You can make it quicker by buying pre-cubed (even marinated) feta cheese. Serve this with some crusty bread.

##### Ingredients

Lamb cutlets (or chops or steaks) for 2

2 sprigs fresh rosemary or thyme finely chopped (or ½ tsp dried herbs)

##### For the Greek salad:

Half a block of feta cheese cubed

Handful of Kalamata olives (fresh or jarred) halved

1 small Spanish onion sliced thinly

1 Lebanese cucumber cubed

2 large vine-ripened tomatoes diced (or a handful of cherry tomatoes halved)

½ red capsicum diced / 2-3 mini vine capsicums sliced (optional)

½ tsp dried oregano

Extra virgin olive oil

Half a bag of pre-washed baby spinach leaves

Rub the herbs into the lamb and season to taste. Grill or bbq the lamb to your liking, turning once. Mix all the salad ingredients in a bowl. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with oregano. Serve on a bed of spinach alongside the herby lamb cutlets.

#### **5. Smoky bacon minestrone**

This is a great one-pot recipe to use up the vegetables wilting at the back of your chiller box. It'll also work fine with tinned or frozen vegetables.

##### Ingredients

1 onion diced

1 clove garlic finely chopped

1 stick celery

1 carrot peeled and diced

Handful of peas

Tin mixed beans or cannellini beans

1 cup pasta (small shells work well)

1 tin chopped tomatoes

1 litre vegetable stock

4 rashers smoky bacon chopped

1 tsp mixed dried herbs

1 tbsp olive oil

Add the olive oil to a heavy bottom saucepan and fry the bacon for a couple of minutes. Add the onion, garlic, celery and carrot and cook until they start to soften. Add the stock, beans, peas and tomatoes, sprinkle in the herbs and bring to the boil. Season to taste. Turn down and simmer for 15 minutes before adding the pasta. Continue until the pasta is cooked, around 10-15 minutes. Serve with crusty bread.

## 6. Best camping chilli

The beauty of this dish is it will be happy simmering for a couple of hours or will be ready in half an hour if you're really hungry now. Don't be put off by the list of herbs and spices, the dish will still work just with a bit of chilli. Vegetarians can swap the mince for a larger tin of mixed beans.

### Ingredients

250g minced lean beef  
1 small onion diced  
1 stick celery finely chopped  
½ green capsicum  
Tin chopped tomatoes  
2 tbsp tomato paste  
1 tsp dried oregano  
1 tsp ground cumin  
1 tsp ground coriander  
½ tsp ground chilli (or to taste)  
100ml beef (or vegetable) stock

Brown the beef in a large frying pan then add the onion and celery. Cook for 5-6 minutes then add the capsicum and cook for another 3 minutes. Turn the heat down and add the tomatoes, tomato paste and spices. Season to taste. If you're planning to leave the dish simmering for an hour, add 100ml of stock, otherwise simmer for 15 minutes et voila! Best enjoyed with a dollop of sour cream and a serving of rice or a potato baked in the fire.

## 7. Easiest prawn stir-fry

This is one of the tastiest and easiest ways to enjoy fresh prawns and crispy vegetables. If you have some fresh ginger it will give the dish a fantastic zing.

### Ingredients

250g raw prawns peeled  
2 heads bok choy leaves stripped off and rinsed  
Bunch broccolini, large stems chopped  
Thumb of ginger finely chopped (optional)  
4-5 spring onions diagonally sliced  
2 servings of Soba noodles  
2 tbsp soy sauce  
1 tbsp hoisin sauce

1 tbsp olive oil

Put the noodles in a pan of boiling water and cook according to instructions on packet. Drain when ready. Drizzle some olive oil into a large frying pan or wok and when the oil is sizzling, add the prawns. Stir-fry until the prawns turn pink, around 3 minutes. Remove the prawns and set aside. Add the broccolini to the pan with the ginger (if using) and stir-fry for 3 minutes. Add the spring onions and the bok choy and cook until the leaves start to wilt. Return the prawns to the pan along with the noodles and the sauce and heat through.

## 8. Faux mushroom risotto

I know what you're thinking – how does a risotto make it into a list of ultra-easy meals? Well this version uses risoni pasta (sometimes known as 'orzo') rather than Arborio rice, so you don't have to stir for hours over a hot pan. If you are happy foraging for your own mushrooms this is a great recipe to bring out all the fresh flavours. If not, supermarket-foraged mushrooms will work just as well. You can also add diced cooked pumpkin or grated zucchini, and for a more carnivorous dish, some cooked chicken or ham.

### Ingredients

¾ cup (around 125g) of risoni

1 small onion finely diced

1 clove of garlic crushed

A large handful (around 100g) mixed mushrooms, larger ones sliced

Olive oil and/or butter for frying

Pinch grated nutmeg (optional)

100ml cream or crème fraîche

A handful (around 25g) of shaved parmesan

Small bunch of parsley finely chopped

Cook the risoni according to the directions on the packet. Add the oil and / or butter to a large frying pan or wok and slowly sauté the onion and garlic for 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and continue cooking for 5 minutes. Add nutmeg (if using) and seasoning. Pour in the cream and reduce for a couple of minutes. Strain the risoni and add to the pan along with the parmesan cheese. Mix well and serve with a sprinkling of fresh parsley.

## 9. Grilled honey soy chicken with quick mango salsa and rice

Grilled, griddled or barbecued, the chicken will turn dark and sticky on the outside and goes beautifully with the fresh, juicy salsa.

2 chicken breasts sliced in half lengthways (give them a quick bash with a tin of tomatoes to make sure they're of similar thickness)

2 tbsp runny honey

1 tbsp soy sauce

Juice of half a lemon

1 tsp sesame seeds (optional)  
1 cup of rice

For the salsa

1 mango peeled and diced  
1 tbsp sweet chill sauce  
Small bunch of fresh coriander leaves finely chopped (optional)  
Squeeze of lime juice

Add the rice to a pan of boiling water and cook according to directions on the packet. Mix the honey, soy sauce and lemon juice together and brush over both sides of the chicken. Pop the chicken onto the barbecue or into a pan and cook until the juices run clear, keeping an eye that the marinade only blackens and doesn't burn. Mix the salsa ingredients in a bowl and serve alongside the rice and the chicken, with some sesame seeds sprinkled over the top.

**10. DIY campfire cones**

The best way to finish off an evening by the campfire is with a delicious cone baked in the embers. Fill your waffle cones with any sweet treats you have – the perfect antidote to all the vegetable-laden recipes you've just read!

Ingredients

Waffle cones – enough for everyone sitting around the campfire  
Your choice of chunks of chocolate, mini marshmallows, broken biscuit, chopped banana, dried fruit and nuts – or a combination of all!

**Method**

Add your chosen ingredients to your waffle cone, taking care not to overfill. Wrap with foil and seal tightly. Place in the campfire embers for around 10 minutes. Enjoy!