

# Outdoor Living





# The Perfect Campfire

Relaxing around a comfortable campfire has been a staple of American camping trips for years. The fire provides campers with light, warmth and the ability to prepare delicious outdoor meals. Building a safe and useful campfire can be obtained with a few easy steps.

Safety is key when building your campsite fire. Before you even begin to prepare your campfire plot, be sure to check on fire conditions. It is important to ask local officials about burn bans due to unfavorable conditions. If camping in a park, check with officials for their rules on campfires as some may not allow them.

## PREPARING THE BURNING AREA

Search for a level spot free from low-hanging tree branches and dry grass. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends building a fire from the base of a hill. Fire can quickly travel uphill, which this can prove disastrous if a flame escapes the burning area.

Dig your own fire pit that is at least 6 inches deep and two feet across in the middle of a cleared circle. The excavated dirt should be piled around the fresh hole to keep the fire contained. It is a good idea to reuse fire pits dug by previous campers to lessen the disturbance to the land.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, you should have some emergency items at the site before you begin burning.

- Buckets of water;
- Accessible sand or dirt;
- Shovel; and



© FOTOLIA

- First-aid kit with burn treatment.

## STARTING THE FIRE

Once you have safely prepped a burning area, you will need to find a source to begin a fire. An effective fire will feature three layers of dif-

ferent materials.

- **Tinder:** The first layer should contain items such as dry leaves, pine needles or wood shavings.
- **Kindling:** On top of tinder, place dry or dead twigs.
- **Wood:** Large sticks or logs thicker than 3 inches make

great material.

Spread tinder along the floor of your fire pit. On top of the tinder, stack kindle upright in the shape of a teepee. Light the tinder and let the kindling begin burning sufficiently before adding the wood to continue to feed the fire.

## EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE

Never leave a site without fully extinguishing a campfire. At least 30 minutes before you will leave the site or fall asleep, drown the fire with water and sand. Mix the ashes with a shovel until the fire is completely extinguished.



# Insect Protection

It may come as a surprise that insects smaller than pennies can cause serious disease to adults and children.

When spending time outdoors, it is important to take proper precautions to ensure your protection from these dangerous bugs.

Ticks and mosquitoes can compromise a person's immune system and blood quality. Diseases such as West Nile, Lyme Disease and even Yellow Fever have all been linked to these tiny insects. Learn how to keep you and your loved ones safe while enjoying the outdoors.

## RISKS OF INSECTS

Blood diseases are a common problem caused by insect and are spread by an infected insect bite. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists a few of the most common problems people face from these bites:

- **Zika:** Zika is known to be caused by the Aedes mosquito. This type of insect is typically found coast to coast in more southern states in the United States. The disease can cause serious birth defects when passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus. It also has been linked to Guillain-Barre Syndrome, which attacks the nervous system.

- **West Nile:** Another disease directly linked to mosquitoes,

the West Nile virus causes high fevers, seizures and neurological problems. About 10 percent of people who experience neurological infection die.

- **Lyme Disease:** This disease is caused by tick bites. Prevention is crucial because ticks' are small and hard to find until the pain begins. Lyme disease can cause severe headaches, irregular heartbeat and nerve damage and affect short-term memory.

## PROTECTION

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, DEET is used by one-third of the United States population for protection against mosquitoes and ticks. You can find this powerful weapon in sprays, lotions and even roll-on bottles.

It works by disguising the scent we produce, making it harder for insects to identify us as hosts for feeding. It was developed in 1946 by the U.S. Army and made its way to the public by 1957.

The EPA reports that DEET is an effective repellent for up to 12 hours against mosquitoes. It is safe for human skin, so be sure to reapply if you notice insects making their way to you.





# Outdoor Kitchen Gadgets

Innovative tools for the kitchen are not required to be kept indoors anymore. Manufacturers are creating breakthrough gadgets that can take your outdoor cooking to the next level.

## PROPANE-LEVEL INDICATORS

Running out of propane for your grill or smoker can halt an outdoor party as quickly as an unexpected rain cloud. Propane-level indicators work by displaying exactly how much gas is left in the tank on an easy-to-read gauge or magnetic strips. Here's how these valuable meters can save your next party:

- **Pressure gauge:** A common solution, a pressure gauge easily connects to existing propane tanks and the gas hose on your appliance. The included gauge displays the amount of gas left in the tank. It works by measuring the amount of pressure available.

- **Magnetic strips:** These easy-to-apply magnets change colors depending on the temperature of the gas inside the tank. As levels dip, the strip displays where the fuel is lacking, giving you an accurate reading of how much propane is available. Be careful to place the strip away from direct sunlight, as the additional heat may give inaccurate results.



## WIRELESS MEAT THERMOMETER

Thermometers are a necessity anytime you are cooking meat. Guessing whether meat is cooked to the proper temperature is a dangerous gamble and can lead to serious food-borne illness.

Today's meat thermometers provide us with ultimate con-

venience. You are no longer forced to repeatedly stab meat and hope the temperature meets health standards.

Affordable wireless thermometers give you the benefit of knowing your meat is cooked perfectly every time. Simply set the desired internal temperature and these innovative thermometers will alert

you when it is reached.

You can now finish a game of cornhole or converse with your guests while knowing your meat will be cooked to perfection.

## FIRE LIGHTER

If you are a charcoal warrior, getting everything just right for the coals to heat up can be try-

ing. An electric fire-lighting tool can expedite the process and get your meat and veggies cooking quicker.

These tools typically plug into a wall socket and release a hot air stream to ignite the coals. You won't need to rely on lighter fluid (or the chemicals it contains) to get your grill to the perfect temperature.



# Campfire Fun for Kids

**A**fter a long day spent camping or hiking, sitting around a campfire is a great way to unwind. The light from the fire will illuminate the campground enough to set the tone for a relaxed setting in which you and fellow campers can relax.

Before heading to your campsite, check your local camping supply store for special fire crystals that can change the color of your campfire. This will add a new sense of ambiance and entertainment for both adults and children. With your multi-colored fire and group of family and friends, try a few of the following fun activities.

## PLAY GUITAR

With a little practice and an acoustic guitar, you can be the star of campfire entertainment. Take the time to learn a few chord progressions to impress your friends.

If learning guitar doesn't come easily to you, check in with your local instrument store about taking lessons. Instructors can teach you the basics of guitar and show you how to piece chords together to play beautiful campfire songs.

## GHOST STORIES

Children will get great enjoyment from telling spooky stories over a campfire. Be sure to pack a soft-light flashlight for the narrator to shine in their face when it is their turn.

A good rule of thumb is not to make the stories too scary. Younger children might get scared enough to keep them



awake all night.

## S'MORES

S'mores are a traditional campfire food containing graham crackers, marshmallows and chocolate. First, you'll want to roast a marshmallow

to your desired doneness.

Sandwich the marshmallow and chocolate between graham crackers. The heat from the hot marshmallow should soften up the chocolate, making this the perfect campfire desert.

## DANCING AROUND A FIRE

While keeping a safe distance from actual flames, encourage children to dance around the perimeter of the campfire. They will enjoy watching the jumping shadows created from their dance moves.

## SING CAMPFIRE SONGS

Create a playlist of songs your children are familiar with. Lead them in song and welcome the chorus of little voices singing popular campfire songs, creating lifelong memories.



# Tent Camping

Camping in a tent is a good way to get in touch with nature and leave the comforts of home behind. It may not be for everyone, but those who prefer to “rough it” should know how to keep themselves safe.

## CHOOSING A TENT

The first step in preparing for this type of camping trip is choosing the right tent. Decide how much space you will require inside. Keep in mind future camping trips that may include more people. It won't hurt to go a little bigger on this initial purchase.

Determining how you plan to use your tent will impact your next decision. There are a few different tent ratings based on their durability. Here are three common options you will find:

- **Three-season:** These lightweight tents are the most popular for the average camper. They are designed to repel rain or light snow and keep bugs away. They are not proper shelter for heavy rain, winds or heavy snow.

- **Three-plus-season:** A step above the standard three-season tent, this style provides more durability and warmth retention, making it great for camping in colder climates that are exposed to heavy snows.

- **Four-season:** The best option for extreme-camping conditions. It can withstand sheer winds and substantial snowfall. If you are planning a camping trip in the mountains, this one is the best choice to keep you safe.



© FOTOLIA

## CHOOSING A CAMPSITE

If you're camping in an established campground, the sites will likely be chosen for you. When you're truly roughing it, you can set up camp wherever you choose, but there are important things you should look for before you

make it your temporary home.

You will want to find a flat piece of land away from overhanging trees. Sleeping on an incline may result in you waking up against the side of the tent. Avoid overhanging trees and for extra comfort, try and find level land on grass or sand.

Try to avoid camping too close to water. This exposes you to a flooding risk and can invite dangerous animals looking for a drink.

## MINDING THE TEMPERATURE

Be sure you pack proper

clothing and accessories when sleeping outdoors.

For colder temperatures, prepare to dress in layers and sleep inside a sleeping bag with a suitable temperature rating. Warmer weather requires fewer layers but accessible water to keep yourself hydrated.



# Respecting Wildlife

When spending time in the wilderness, you are entering the local wildlife's home. It is important to be courteous to their habitats and learn to hunt responsibly.

## HUNTING ETIQUETTE

Harvesting our own meat has been in practice since the beginning of time. Americans can gain a great sense of pride and accomplishment from hunting. However, it is imperative to respect the animals who are providing you with food.

Taking the life of an animal comes with the responsibility of using the entire body for food or other products. You may be surprised at some of the useful items an animal contains that commonly go to waste.

- **Bones:** Bones are one of the most common waste items yielded by hunted animals. You can use an animal's bones to make soup stock and can even grind them down to be used for a rich fertilizer.

- **Offal:** This category includes an animal's organ meat and entrails. Animal organs are typically packed with nutrients. The intestines make great casings for home-made sausages.

- **Feathers:** When hunting



feathered animals, save the feathers to create home-made-down pillows.

## RESPECTING THEIR HOME

When traveling in the wilderness, people are visitors to animals' homes. It is important to treat nature like you would a guest's house.

Never leave behind a mess. Dispose of any trash you produce responsibly, and never leave food on the ground.

Try not to startle animals for picture opportunities or other reasons. They are likely expending their energy looking for food. Spending extra time avoiding humans takes away from the amount of food they can secure for themselves and their young.

## WILD ANIMAL SAFETY

Spending time outdoors can create unexpected confrontations with dangerous preda-

tors. Learn how to keep you and your family safe with these tips from the United States National Park Service:

- **Snakes:** When walking through an area with snakes, wear thick gloves and 10-inch-tall boots. Never reach into brush piles or rock crevices into which you cannot see.

- **Bears:** Bears should be treated with extreme caution. Your first instinct might be to run if you meet one, but the bears

can consider this a sign of aggression. Experts recommend carrying a commercial grade bear repellent, which is a strong pepper spray, in case of emergencies.

- **Young animals:** Never attempt to rescue a young animal who appears to have been abandoned. They may have parents watching over them from a distance, and those parents could see you as a threat and become aggressive.



# Grilling Breakfast

**B**reakfast: the most important meal of the day. It becomes even more important when spending time outdoors, especially during camping or hiking trips, when finding time to eat can be difficult.

Start your day off right over a campfire or grill to gain a boost of energy for enjoying the outdoors.

While space might be limited when packing for a camping trip, there are a few items you must make room for. To easily grill breakfast, you should have a lightweight pot, pan, plenty of aluminum foil and a portable grate to place over the fire source. Don't forget tool such as a spatula and a set of tongs.

## STARTING A CHARCOAL GRILL

If you don't have time to restart last night's campfire to make a quick breakfast, you can get the same results from a portable grill. Charcoal is less time consuming to get going and can be extinguished much faster than an entire campfire. With the help of a tool called a chimney starter, you can have your grill going without needing the harmful chemicals found in lighter fluid.



Here's how.

- Place four or five crumpled pieces of newspaper in the center of a clean grill grate.
- Place the chimney on top of the crumpled papers, providing them proper housing to burn.
- Fill your chimney with your chosen charcoal to the top.
- Safely light the crumpled papers using the openings at

the bottom.

- Once the top charcoal briquettes turn gray, you can dump the contents and begin grilling. This is typically achieved in only 10 minutes.

## EASY FOODS TO GRILL

With your pot and pan in tow, you can cook on a grill the same way you would on your kitchen stovetop.

Eggs are great candidates for easy-grilling foods.

Whether you choose to fry or scramble, eggs will surely be welcomed by hungry campers.

Bacon is another easy food to bring along on camping trips. Be sure to dump grease periodically while cooking to avoid a grease fire. These can be devastating in an outdoor setting.

## COOKING SAFETY

When preparing your per-

fectly grilled breakfast, make sure your meats are reaching safe internal temperatures. A digital thermometer takes away any guesswork and keeps your meat safe.

According to the USDA, bacteria will rapidly multiply in foods at 40-140 degrees Fahrenheit. It is a good idea to only cook what you will eat, as packing leftovers can be dangerous without proper refrigeration.