

Getting Started with SCA Camp Cooking

by Lady Eulalia de Ravenfeld

If you're getting ready for your first tourney season in the SCA, you may find the prospect of cooking in the wild a little daunting, especially if you don't camp mundanely, or cook mediievally. But fear not! With a little preparation, you too can dine authentically and stylishly without making yourself crazy.

Questions to ask yourself:

First:

- How much time do you want to spend cooking?
- How much money do you want to spend?
- How authentic do you want to be?

Then:

- What is your camp cooking comfort level and set up? (Propane stove, fire, just a cooler)
- Who are you cooking for? Just yourself? Your whole household? Feeding fighters requires lots of planning. Kids are also a big consideration.
- What is your schedule like for the event? Are you volunteering for lots of things, are you fighting, will there be an evening Court on Saturday? Try to plan around your activities – for example, Court often runs late, so I have something I can stash in my chair like dried fruit.
- What will the weather be like? Will this affect what you want to eat?
- How much time do you want to spend washing up, and what kind of cleaning set-up do you have?

Other things to keep in mind:

- Make a plan! Sit down in advance and decide what you want for each meal. You don't have to be too fancy, just have some kind of a plan before you go shopping.
- Food safety: I won't bring raw eggs/meat camping, but I'm a little weird. Use common sense, follow the basics – cook thoroughly, keep raw and cooked separate, wash everything (especially hands) as well as you can, and keep the cooler cold. Hand sanitizer is the modern medievalist's best friend.
- Be realistic! I've brought **way** too much food **so** many times. Also, it took me a few seasons to accept the fact that I don't actually like cooking while camping. Another thing I've learned is that you're more likely to just snack all day on Saturday than to sit down for a real lunch (this goes along with looking at your schedule, too) – when in doubt, pack lots of snacks.
- Lots and lots and lots of water! You'll need water to drink, to cook, and to wash.
- Bring the tools you need to prepare and eat what you bring. I've forgotten to bring a can opener an embarrassing number of times, and once I even forgot the stove.
- Check site rules, especially with respect to fire and alcohol, well in advance, and plan accordingly.
- As you get more comfortable with all of this, have fun with cooking! If you love to cook and have the time, pre-cook meals and reheat them on-site. Try period recipes (see the end of this handout for links), and learn to cook over a fire. Or, try eating in persona for a weekend rather than just "generic peri-oid."

Foods that require no cooking:

Salami, smoked salmon, purchased cooked meat (like rotisserie chicken, or, if you don't mind spending a little money, Trader Joe's sells a nice beef roast) – dressed up with a period sauce, salad (try bagged mixes, all you need is oil, vinegar, and salt for a period dressing), fresh fruit, dried fruit, raw veggies, nuts, cheese, store-bought hummus and pita bread, period sweets (eg candied ginger and shortbread cookies), pickles, sauerkraut, olives, yogurt (plain), cottage cheese, artisan bread

Foods that require a little bit of cooking:

Pre-cooked sausages (I buy them from Fetzer's at the farmer's market), pasta (go for egg noodles, or refrigerated stuffed pastas, ie ravioli and tortellini) served with olive oil or butter and grated cheese (no tomato sauce!), canned or aseptically packaged soup/broth (stick to something at least vaguely period, I'm partial to lentil), canned/aseptically packed beans/lentils, couscous (before the event, mix together a measured amount of dry couscous with dried fruits, salt, and spices – on-site all you need to add is boiling water and some oil), oatmeal (you can get real, totally period stone-ground Scottish oatmeal from Bob's Red Mill at natural food stores), anything grilled, flatbread (make the dough at home or buy refrigerated pizza dough – fun to cook on the fire).

Foods that you can make in advance and eat on-site:

Hummus, period sweets, quiche, hard-boiled eggs, roasted meat, sweet or savory pies, homemade pasta (noodles, ravioli, cheese gnocchi), etc.

A basic cooking set-up:

Stove (bring propane), sturdy table (you might want one for eating and one for cooking and prep), cooler, box with all your non-perishable food and tools, saucepan with lid and a frying pan (you might consider buying some just for camping – then you won't care if you ruin them, and won't have to unpack between trips), wooden spoon / spatula, knife (preferably with a cover) and cutting board (again, consider having separate camping-only tools), something (like a basin) to wash your dishes in, soap/sponge (I use those disposable sponges that come with soap in them), lots of kitchen towels.

You might make some considerations about feast gear – don't bring your nicest stuff camping! Wood isn't fragile, neither is metal. If you do want ceramic or glass, choose cheap things (thrift stores!) so that you won't mind if they do break, and wrap them up in those kitchen towels.

Advanced topics:

Pre-cooking: Lots of people make food for the weekend during the week leading up. The key here is to stick to things that can be easily reheated with stove/fire or eaten cold. Consider transport – soup can be a pain. Pre-cook part of a meal (eg rice for fried rice) to save time and fuel. Food Savers are also popular (but expensive).

Open fire cooking: With a sturdy firepit and some cast iron cookware, you too can cook in a more period fashion. Fascinating and fun, but beyond the scope of this class. For beginners, try grilling, or I make flatbread. It's not really that much harder to cook with fire than to cook with a propane stove, it just takes patience and practice.

Camping without a cooler: If you really want to have a medieval experience, you'll have to leave that big blue chest at home. Again, we're getting out of the realm of an introductory class, and I haven't even tried this myself, but I've included some links. Or, try looking for recipes or records from people on various travels in period.

Drinks:

Lemonade, herbal tea, juice/cider, milk (we buy those single serving plastic bottles), sekanjabin and other Islamic drinks (do a 'net search for recipes), spiced honey water (unfermented mead)

Links, further reading:

My webpage: <http://www.geocities.com/shadowdryad/SCA/food.html>

My blog (I post recipes here): <http://briwaf.blogspot.com/>

Mestra Rafaella d'Allementejo: <http://www.fridayvalentine.com/>

Gode Cookery (best place to start for period recipes): <http://www.godecookery.com/>

Cariadoc's Miscellany: <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cariadoc/miscellany.html>, OR

http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/miscellany_pdf/Miscellany.htm

Camping sans cooler: <http://www.geocities.com/yourstruly/nocooler.html>

Cooking with fire: *The Magic of Fire: Hearth Cooking* by William Rubel

LOTS of links: <http://www.currentmiddleages.org/tents/cooking.htm>

Fantastic introduction to medieval food, with a great new world vs old world listing:

<http://www.advancenet.net/~jscole/introfoodclass.pdf>