Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.
Decoration Day weekend is coming close. That's a favorite weekend to spend outdoors. Maybe you're going on a camping trip or a hike over the holiday. Maybe you're taking the family on a picnic. Or maybe you're just planning to enjoy your own backyard. Anyway you're likely to be having some meals out in the open. So you may appreciate a few tips on campfire cooking from the Forest Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. (The foresters, you know, are old hands at cooking over a campfire.)

Now you may be an expert cook in your own home kitchen yet find yourself lost and clumsy when you try to get a meal over a campfire. In camp you have to get along with so few utensils and supplies that you need to use only the simplest methods and menus. Even if you're travelling in a car you don't want to load up with too much food and too many gadgets. They're a nuisance in camp. But that doesn't mean you have to limit yourself to hot dogs and hamburgers by way of menu. Far from it. A good camp cook learns to cook a great variety of dishes with the help of a couple of pans and kettles and a sharp knife, a long spoon and a fork.

Another reason cooking over a campfire is different from cooking at home is that you can't turn the heat on and off and up and down when you please. You have to learn how to build a fire and when it is just right for cooking. Whether you're cooking in the middle of the forest or in a fireplace in your own backyard, here are a couple of points to keep in mind.
The first is that a small fire is best for cooking. The second is to cook over coals not flames. A flame just blackens your pan and scorches your face. Wait until the fire burns down to embers before you start cooking. The foresters say to build a bigger fire than necessary is the sign of a tenderfoot. A bonfire, they say, just fills your eyes and lungs with smoke and your food with ashes. But a deep bed of glowing embers is the ideal cooking fire. That's the fire that cooks the finest steaks and the best coffee. Many good camp cooks now carry along a bag of charcoal as a quick and easy way to get embers.

In many picnic and camp grounds today you'll find fireplaces already built that you can use. Many camp grounds in the National forests have camp stoves for use of visitors. But if you're building a fire on the ground, the foresters say be sure to shovel away all needles, dry leaves and litter that might spread the fire. Shovel down to the bare earth a spot at least 10 feet in diameter. In the center of the cleared space dig a hole a few inches deep and about a foot or two wide. Now stop and get the direction of the prevailing wind. Shovel away the side of the hole exposed to the prevailing wind. This opening will be the front of the fire. The air going in will pass along the side walls of the hole and then rise so you will have a good draft to keep your fire burning as you want it. On either side of the hole lay some flat-topped rocks to set your kettles on. Then cut a couple of green poles 4 to 6 inches in diameter and lay them across the hole to use as back-log and front-log. Space them at a proper distance to support a camp kettle, frying pan or coffee pot. Kindle the fire beneath them.

So much for your camp fireplace. Now about what to cook there. Tender meat like steak, chops, and young chicken is delicious broiled directly over the coals if you use extra fat with it.
Pan-broiling is also a good way to cook tender steak, or chops of lamb, mutton, pork and venison. Have your heavy frying pan very hot and slightly greased. Lay the meat in. When it is brown on one side, turn it over and brown on the other. Remove the pan further from the coals and turn occasionally until done. Season with salt and pepper. Cook pork until all the pink color has disappeared.

Meat and rice in Spanish sauce is an easy-to-make, inexpensive dish—actually a whole meal together in one kettle. Boil one cup of rice in salted water and drain off the water. Mix the cooked rice with 2 to 3 cups of tomatoes, a can of meat and a sliced onion. Cook until the mixture thickens. Then season to taste. In place of the rice you can use macaroni, spaghetti, noodles or cooked hominy.

Another good and easy mixture is hamburger stew. Make it by seasoning a pound of hamburger with salt and pepper, forming it in small balls, and rolling each ball in flour. Put 2 tablespoons of fat in a hot frying pan. Slice one onion into the fat. Fry lightly until the onion turns yellow. Brown the meat balls in this fat. Pour over the meat one can of vegetable soup. Cover and cook slowly until the meat is done.

Hash tastes good in camp. Here's how to make browned hash. Knead together a can of chopped meat, 4 cups of mashed potatoes, and 1 chopped onion. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Mold in a flat cake and fry slowly on both sides until crusty. Slow cooking over the coals is what makes that crisp brown crust on hash.

That's all the news about camp cooking for today. More some day later.

#####