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## FOOD

### Outing eats

You can cook savory cuisine when camping

By Jane See White

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Ah, summer — the time to flee from our blast-furnace weather at every opportunity, the time to load up our tents and backpacks or pack our RVs and head for the ocean, or the mountains, or any other place at all, as long as it's cool.

It conjures up pine scents, doesn't it? Ocean breezes? And, of course, the scent of . . . blackened, burning hot dogs.

Ugh. That's the problem with camping: lousy, boring, over-processed, badly cooked food. Cellophane-wrapped, preservative-doused fake cupcakes. Greasy chips. Cheetos sodden with whatever it is that makes them that weird orange color. Peanut butter. Burgers. Dogs. Ugh ugh ugh.

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Well, we're here to tell you that it doesn't have to be that way. You can eat well, very well, while camping — and it's easy. We even found an expert who's written a book on the topic: Robin Donovan, a San Francisco food writer whose "Campfire Cuisine: Gourmet Recipes for the Great Outdoors" (Quirk Books, \$15.95) was published in April.

Donovan, 39, used to avoid camping because of the horrific food. We asked about her worst-meal-while-camping memory, and she told us on

the phone that it was ramen noodles mixed with ground beef and prepared somehow over a campfire. We are not making this up.

But Donovan saw the light after she was dragged into the woods by friends who took good food seriously. On the first night, the menu included marinated chicken and vegetables on skewers and sliced potatoes and onions tossed with oil and Dijon mustard and then wrapped in foil.

She recalls it in her book: "Soon the foil packets hissed on the grill. The kebabs sizzled as their juices trickled into the fire. We all gathered around expectantly, poking at the fire with long sticks, sipping red wine from coffee mugs, breathing in the smells of wood smoke, browning meat and herbs wafting up from the glowing pit."

It sounds a lot better than staying inside the RV eating microwaved frozen dinners in their plastic trays, doesn't it?

Here's another favorite camping menu that Donovan described on the phone:

"We were in the Sierra foothills camping by a river. It was really hot, and we made shrimp tacos. We marinated the shrimp in tequila and lime juice and garlic and grilled them on skewers. Then we had tortillas, beans and fresh salsa. It was really simple, but it tasted so perfect, so rustic and refined at the same time. Kind of delicate. The perfect thing by a river in the sun."

You can tell this woman likes food, can't you? Her goal with the book was to help others prepare interesting, satisfying meals in settings outside their kitchen, whether around a campfire or on a sailing trip.

Her secrets: Buy quality ingredients (toss the hot dogs, bring skinless boneless chicken breasts; dump the chips, bring sweet yams), and add flavor with simple marinades, seasonings, drizzles, wood smoke and so on. Nothing complicated.

Donovan camps often, but her cookbook deadline fell during the winter — not the best

A s'moradilla is similar to a typical s'more but has a Southwestern twist — it's made with cinnamon and tortillas.

RON MEDVESCEK / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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#### TOP TIPS FROM "CAMPFIRE CUISINE" AUTHOR ROBIN DONOVAN:

- Plan menus and choose recipes before you leave home; make lists of ingredients, shop and pack with your meal plans in mind.
- Do as much prep work as possible at home. Chop and slice ingredients in advance and stow them in zippered bags. Mix marinades and refrigerate in small jars or plastic bins. Combine spices for rubs and bring them along in plastic bags.
- Freeze foods at home that you won't be cooking within the first couple of days and stow them in the coldest part of your cooler.
- Store ingredients properly and "buy ice every time you drive by a place that sells it. You don't want to get food poisoning out in the woods."

#### HERE ARE A FEW OF DONOVAN'S SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING FLAVOR:

- Marinate meats, poultry or seafoods in zippered plastic bags. Add citrus to marinades for zest. Try using flavored vinegars in marinades.
- Don't forget to pack fresh herbs like mint, cilantro and oregano for use on meats, in salads, on vegetables.
- Drizzle flavored oils over meats, vegetables or pasta.
- Bring along hot sauces and salsas, which are great on everything from simple roasted pork loin to scrambled egg substitutes from a carton.

#### WHAT YOU MUST HAVE:

- A propane-fueled one- or two-burner camp stove with small propane bottles and/or charcoal and chimney starter (many camping areas have permanent grills, or you might bring your own small portable grill; in many areas, open fires are barred or discouraged in these drought-ravaged times)
- Matches, lighter or fire wand

camping weather in Northern California. She enlisted a batch of foodie friends to help test the recipes using one-burner propane-fueled camp stoves, charcoal grills and open fires. Picture Donovan's mom wreathed by smoke in her back yard; better yet, picture Donovan herself shivering on the roof.

"I don't have a yard," Donovan said, "but a friend has a rooftop, so we set up a little camp kitchen up there. We'd climb out of her bedroom window to get to it. We had a camp stove and a grill and a little table. It was great. We could just see the tip of the Golden Gate Bridge from up there."

And the food was great.

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- Sharp knife
- 10-inch skillet with lid
- 2-quart pot with lid
- Can/bottle opener
- Corkscrew
- Tongs
- Spatula
- Paper plates and cups
- Spoons, forks, knives
- Sponge/scrubber
- Heavy-duty aluminum foil
- Zippered plastic bags
- Biodegradable dish soap
- Wooden skewers
- Paper towels
- Plastic garbage bags

S'Moradillas

**Serves 4**

- u 4 small flour tortillas
- u 1/2 cup semisweet mini chocolate chips
- u 1/2 cup mini marshmallows
- u Cinnamon to taste

Put 2 tortillas on the grill over high heat. Top each with half (about 1/4 cup) the chocolate chips, half (about 1/4 cup) the marshmallows, and a sprinkle of cinnamon. Place the remaining 2 tortillas on top. Cook 3 to 4 minutes, until the bottom tortilla is lightly browned and crisp. Carefully flip the tortillas. Cook 3 to 4 minutes more, until the second side is lightly browned and crisp. Cut each into quarters and serve.

**Note:** To prepare this in your RV kitchen or at home, prepare as directed, spray a skillet with nonstick cooking spray and cook the S'moradillas over high heat on the stovetop about 3 minutes per side until they're lightly browned and crisp on both sides.

Balsamic syrup

**Makes about 3/4 cup**

- u 1/4 cup packed brown sugar
- u 1/2 cup water
- u 1/2 cup balsamic vinegar
- u 1 teaspoon salt

Cook the sugar, without stirring, in a small saucepan over medium heat until melted (be careful not to let it burn). Carefully add the water, vinegar and salt. Don't be concerned if the sugar hardens when you add the liquid. As the liquid heats, the sugar will melt again and dissolve. Bring to a boil and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, 15 to 20 minutes, until the mixture is reduced to a syrupy consistency.

**Note:** This sweet, tangy syrup is perfect with grilled vegetables or atop grilled chicken or fish. This can be prepared several days in advance, refrigerated in a covered container and reheated before serving.

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