



THE
MAKINGS
OF TWO DAYS'
WORTH OF
AMAZING MEALS
HIDE IN THESE
PACKS



TRAILBLAZERS



FRENCH TOAST
WITH
PINEAPPLE BERRY
SYRUP

Miles from civilization, the women behind the blog *Dirty Gourmet* take backcountry cooking to new (crazy delicious) frontiers.

BY ELAINE JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY

WE'RE

in a pine grove at 7,500 feet when we decide to stop for lunch. Sitting on a log, Emily Nielson, her cousin Aimee Trudeau, and their friend Mai-Yan Kwan get to work, layering avocado and kale salad on sandwich rolls and slicing lemon zest on a cutting board about the size of a cell phone.

"A log will be a required part of the sandwich recipe," Mai-Yan says solemnly, looking out at the sweeping view of Angeles National Forest and then laughing.

"It doesn't take much to make our recipes special, but the scenery helps," Emily agrees.

We're backpacking into Little Jimmy Trail Camp in the San Gabriel Mountains, about 40 miles from Los Angeles and a 2½-mile hike from the car. As I attempt to revive my more extreme (pre-career, pre-kid) outdoorsy side, the women are teaching me the camp cooking skills they've become known for on their blog, Dirty Gourmet (*dirtygourmet.com*), and in their workshops. Fresh ingredients and big flavors are a large part of Dirty Gourmet's appeal. But so is its message of self-reliance: "It doesn't have to be the man who starts the campfire," says Aimee. "Women are realizing, 'Yeah, I can do it.'"

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TRIP, I had gotten a sneak peek of the women in action. Meeting up in Arcadia, they divvied up the gear—light-weight cooking pots, doll-size tools, Ziploc bags filled with pre-measured ingredients—with practiced efficiency. The conversation, meanwhile, swung from "backpacking dresses" to booze: "I have whiskey!" Emily assured us.

The next day, after reaching camp, I watch the women's impeccable packing pay off. Emily unsprings the legs of a tiny stove, and soon the fragrance of a Thai-style curry—a miraculous transformation of powdered and dehydrated ingredients—wafts through our site. For dessert, Aimee toasts what she calls Churro Chocodillas—like quesadillas but with chocolate chips and cinnamon sugar. I'd be thrilled to eat either dish at sea level, but they're downright decadent compared to typical backpacking fare. Those pre-packaged meals, says Mai-Yan, "aren't satisfying. They fill you up but they aren't made with love."

Later, around a headlamp "campfire," we pass the whiskey while talking about how Dirty Gourmet came to be. While the women's official inspiration came after taking a four-month bike trip seven years ago—an experience that pushed them to get creative with camp cooking—their roots in nature go deeper. Mai-Yan recounts her childhood in Quebec running wild with her brother through fields; Emily talks about what Outward Bound did for her confidence as a teenager. Aimee grew up in an outdoorsy family, her love of nature intensifying when she became a mother to twins.

Today, despite the 9-to-5 demands—Mai-Yan is a graphic designer, Emily is a sales manager at REI, and Aimee is a full-time mom—the women still find time to escape to the mountains. Sure, they may test-drive recipes while there, but they also let go of their to-do lists. "On the trail, everything slows down," says Mai-Yan. "You feel more alive, and listen closer." The next morning, I see what they mean. After eating creamy steel-cut oats with blueberries, we climb Mt. Islip a few miles away. At the peak, a 360° view unfolds—the Mojave Desert, Mt. Baldy, the San Gabriel Mountains, and L.A. "You can only get to a place like this by walking," says Emily. "There's such a satisfaction in knowing you got there with your own two feet."

DIRTY
GOURMET'S
EMILY NIELSON,
MAI-YAN KWAN
+ AIMEE
TRUDEAU



BUT
FIRST,
COFFEE



MOON-
BREWED
CAFÉ
AU LAIT



BLACK
BEAN
TORTILLA
SOUP



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ON THE WAY TO MT. ISLIP,
OVERLOOKING THE
SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

ROCKY ROAD
CHOCOLATE
CHIA
PUDDING



TIP
Bring a realistic amount of food. Too much and your pack will be heavy; too little and you'll be hungry. Along with ingredients for cooking, bring snacks and an emergency meal like instant ramen noodles.



Cajunro chocodillos
(you'll be sad if you eat them
all now)



"YOU MIGHT THINK YOU CAN'T BRING FRESH THINGS BACKPACKING, BUT THE INGREDIENTS FOR THESE SANDWICHES KEEP A LONG TIME."

—AIMEE TRUDEAU



LEMONY KALE
AVOCADO
SANDWICHES

MOON-BREWED CAFÉ AU LAIT

**SERVES 4 (MAKES 6 CUPS) / 25 MINUTES,
PLUS OVERNIGHT TO STAND**

Strong coffee, whole powdered milk, and a nice layer of froth add up to joe that's worth waking up early for.

GEAR Nalgene bottle, nut milk bag*, 2-qt. backpacking saucepan, backpacking stove and fuel, spork, milk frother*

1½ cups coarsely ground coffee
3⅓ cups reconstituted whole milk
(1 cup powdered whole milk* plus
3 cups water)

1. The night before, combine coffee and 1 qt. cool water in a Nalgene bottle and shake to combine. Set aside in a critter-free spot overnight, such as a bear canister.
2. In the morning, strain coffee through a nut milk bag into a 2-qt. saucepan. Heat to simmering, stirring, then divide among four mugs. Heat milk in pan, stirring, then froth with a milk frother. Pour over coffee.

*Find reusable fine-mesh nylon nut milk bags such as SoSoft Brands at natural-foods stores and amazon.com, and milk frothers at kitchen stores. For more on powdered whole milk, see page 94.

PER SERVING 160 Cal., 48% (77 Cal.) from fat; 8.6 g protein; 8.6 g fat (5.4 g sat.); 12 g carbo (0 g fiber); 125 mg sodium; 31 mg chol. GF/LS/V

FRENCH TOAST WITH PINEAPPLE BERRY SYRUP

**SERVES 4 / 5 MINUTES AT HOME,
30 MINUTES IN CAMP**

The women at Dirty Gourmet cook their french toast in coconut oil, one of their secret weapons for backpacking because it's solid at room temperature (and so less likely

to make a mess in your pack). The tropical flavor underscores the fruit topping. For best texture, add freeze-dried fruit to syrup at the last minute.

GEAR Resealable plastic bag, small bowl, spork, backpacking frying pan, backpacking stove and fuel, spatula, sheet of foil

9 tbsp. dried egg powder, such as OvaEasy*
3 tbsp. powdered whole milk, such as Peak*
1½ tsp. cinnamon
2 tbsp. virgin coconut oil*
6 English muffins, cut in half
SYRUP
6 tbsp. maple sugar*
½ cup each freeze-dried pineapple* and strawberries

AT HOME

1. For french toast, combine egg powder, milk powder, and cinnamon in a large resealable plastic bag.

IN CAMP

2. For syrup, combine maple sugar and 6 tbsp. water in a bowl and set aside. Add 1 cup water to egg mixture in bag; seal and massage with your hands until egg is fully hydrated.
3. Heat ½ tbsp. coconut oil in a backpacking frying pan over medium-high heat. Dip 3 English muffin halves in egg mixture, soaking briefly, then cook in coconut oil until browned, turning once, 4 to 6 minutes total. Transfer to a plate and cover with foil; repeat to cook remaining french toast.
4. Just before serving, stir pineapple and strawberries into maple syrup. Serve french toast with maple syrup and fruit.

*For more on OvaEasy egg crystals, powdered whole milk, maple sugar, and freeze-dried fruit, see page 94. Bring coconut oil packets (see page

94), or seal oil in a small screw-on Nalgene bottle. Find at natural-foods stores.

PER SERVING 436 Cal., 32% (141 Cal.) from fat; 15 g protein; 16 g fat (8.9 g sat.); 58 g carbo (2.5 g fiber); 336 mg sodium; 208 mg chol. LS/V

OVERNIGHT OATS WITH BLUEBERRIES

**SERVES 4 (MAKES 4 CUPS) / 5 MINUTES
AT HOME AND 15 MINUTES IN CAMP,
PLUS OVERNIGHT TO STAND**

Steel-cut oats have a wonderful chewy texture but can take a long time to cook. By soaking them overnight, all you have to do is heat them in the morning. Chia seeds help make the cereal creamy and filling.

GEAR 2-qt. backpacking saucepan, spork, backpacking stove and fuel, Nalgene bottle (for measuring), backpacking ladle

1 cup steel-cut oats
3 tbsp. chia seeds*
½ tsp. kosher salt
4 packets almond butter*, such as Justin's (1.15 oz. each)
¼ cup packed light brown sugar (optional)
½ cup dried blueberries

AT HOME

1. Combine oats, chia seeds, and salt in a small resealable plastic bag.

IN CAMP

2. The night before, pour oat mixture into a 2-qt. saucepan. Stir in 4 cups water. Bring to a boil and cook 1 minute, then remove from heat. Cover with a lid and place in a critter-free spot overnight, such as a bear box, if available. Or let mixture cool, transfer to a plastic bag, and seal in a bear canister.
3. In the morning, heat oatmeal until simmering, stirring often and adding more water if you'd like it thinner. Spoon into bowls and top

with almond butter, brown sugar if you like, and blueberries.

** For more on chia seeds, see page 94. Find almond butter packets at natural-foods stores.*

PER SERVING 430 Cal., 46% (198 Cal.) from fat; 14 g protein; 22 g fat (2.7 g sat.); 49 g carbo (13 g fiber); 338 mg sodium; 0 mg chol. LS/VG

LEMONY KALE AVOCADO SANDWICHES

SERVES 4 / 25 MINUTES

The ingredients for these sandwiches will keep for a few days in a backpack (stash kale and avocados near the top to prevent crushing). Parmesan lasts a week if you bring a chunk and grate it as needed.

GEAR Bowl or plastic bag, small cutting board, small knife, grater (optional), spork

5 large leaves Tuscan (Lacinato) kale
½ lemon
4 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil*
⅓ cup shredded parmesan cheese
Salt and pepper
2 firm-ripe avocados
4 sturdy sandwich rolls, such as ciabatta, each 4½ to 5 oz., split in half

1. Tear kale into pieces, discarding ribs, and put in a bowl or plastic bag. Carefully cut zest from lemon half with a small knife. Cut zest into slivers and add to kale. Dress kale with juice from lemon, oil, and parmesan. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
2. Cut avocados in half and dice flesh. Spoon out flesh onto both sides of each sandwich roll and smash to spread. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Spoon kale mixture onto one side of each roll and cover with top of roll. Eat right away, or wrap in foil or waxed paper and

pack in your backpack for later for a pressed sandwich. (The kale wilts a bit but still tastes great.)

** A tiny plastic container like those made by Nalgene (see page 83) is handy for transporting olive oil, or buy oil packets such as Marconi (see page 94).*

PER SANDWICH 529 Cal., 36% (191 Cal.) from fat; 14 g protein; 21 g fat (3.3 g sat.); 72 g carbo (7.2 g fiber); 735 mg sodium; 4.8 mg chol. V

PANANG CURRY

SERVES 4 (MAKES 3 CUPS CURRY AND 4 CUPS RICE) / 10 MINUTES AT HOME, 35 MINUTES IN CAMP

The complex flavors of this Thai curry come from powdered coconut milk and peanut butter, plus multiple kinds of dehydrated vegetables. For a faster option than boil-in-bag rice, you can bring instant.

GEAR Nalgene bottle (for measuring), 2-qt. backpacking saucepan, backpacking stove and fuel, small knife, spork, small cutting board, backpacking ladle

1 cup coconut milk powder*, such as Wilderness Family Naturals
6 tbsp. peanut butter powder*, such as PB2
2 tsp. packed light brown sugar
2 tsp. garlic powder
½ tsp. kosher salt
6 tbsp. mixed freeze-dried vegetables*, such as carrots, green and red bell peppers, and green beans or peas (Harmony House Foods)
2 tbsp. dried onion flakes*
¼ cup chopped dried shiitake mushrooms
6 tbsp. red curry paste*
2 pouches boil-in-bag brown rice, such as Uncle Ben's
¼ cup roasted salted peanuts
1 lime

AT HOME

1. In a bowl, combine coconut milk

and peanut butter powders, brown sugar, garlic powder, and salt; transfer to a 1-qt. resealable bag. Combine freeze-dried vegetables, onion flakes, and mushrooms in a second 1-qt. bag. Seal curry paste in a small plastic bag.

IN CAMP

2. Pour 1 cup water into bag with dried vegetables; seal and set aside 15 to 20 minutes to rehydrate.
3. Meanwhile, in a 2-qt. saucepan, bring 4 to 5 cups water to simmering. Add rice, set lid slightly ajar on pan, and simmer rapidly, adjusting heat as needed, until grains look cooked, 10 to 15 minutes. Lift bags from water, draining water from them, and set on a plate. Cover with another plate and set aside. Drain all but 1 cup water from pan.
4. Cut a hole in bag with curry paste and squeeze into hot water. Pour in coconut powder mixture and stir until well blended. Stir in rehydrated vegetables. Cook curry over medium heat, stirring, until steaming, about 3 minutes.
5. Cut open rice bags and pour onto plates. Spoon curry next to rice and sprinkle with peanuts. Cut lime into wedges and add to plates.

** For more on coconut milk powder, peanut butter powder, and freeze-dried vegetables, see page 94. Find dried onion flakes with the spices at well-stocked grocery stores, and red curry paste in the international aisle.*

PER SERVING 1,088 Cal., 26% (280 Cal.) from fat; 30 g protein; 31 g fat (13 g sat.); 176 g carbo (15 g fiber); 1,964 mg sodium; 0.1 mg chol. GF/VG

BLACK BEAN TORTILLA SOUP

SERVES 4 (MAKES 8 CUPS) / 5 MINUTES AT HOME, 30 MINUTES IN CAMP

“Rule number one of camp cooking—be ready to improvise!” says Mai-Yan Kwan. On our trip, we forgot the



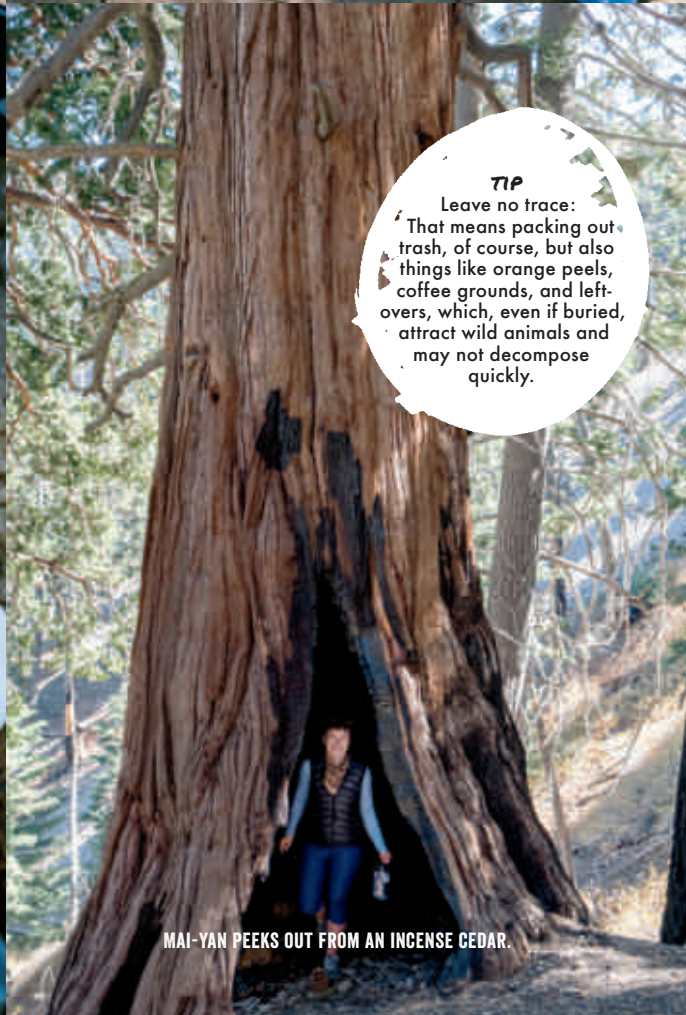
**CHURRO
CHOCODILLAS**



**OVERNIGHT OATS
WITH BLUEBERRIES**



PANANG CURRY



TIP
Leave no trace:
That means packing out
trash, of course, but also
things like orange peels,
coffee grounds, and left-
overs, which, even if buried,
attract wild animals and
may not decompose
quickly.

MAI-YAN PEEKS OUT FROM AN INCENSE CEDAR.

chips to go with this mildly spicy soup, so we made our own by toasting flour tortillas in oil.

GEAR Nalgene bottle (for measuring), 2-qt. backpacking saucepan, backpacking stove and fuel, spork, backpacking ladle, small cutting board, small knife

- 4 tsp. dried onion flakes*
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 tbsp. chili powder
- 2 tbsp. tomato powder*, such as Savory Spice Shop or Harmony House Foods
- 3½ cups dehydrated black bean flakes*, such as Frontier Co-op
- 2 cups freeze-dried corn*, such as Harmony House Foods
- 2 vegetable bouillon cubes
- Crushed tortilla chips
- 2 limes
- 1 firm-ripe avocado

AT HOME

1. Measure out half *each* of onion flakes, cumin, chili powder, tomato powder, black bean flakes, corn, and bouillon cubes into 2 large resealable plastic bags.

IN CAMP

2. Add 3½ cups water to each bag and let sit about 10 minutes to rehydrate. Pour one bag at a time into a 2-qt. saucepan and heat over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until simmering, 12 to 15 minutes. Spoon into mugs and heat remaining soup.
3. Cut limes into wedges and avocado into cubes. Serve soup with tortilla chips, lime, and avocado.

**Find dried onion flakes with the spices at well-stocked grocery stores or online; find tomato powder online. For more on black bean flakes and freeze-dried corn, see page 94.*

PER 2-CUP SERVING 443 Cal., 20% (87 Cal.) from fat; 12 g protein; 10 g fat (1.7 g sat.); 140 g carbo (6.3 g fiber); 1,086 mg sodium; 0 mg chol. LC/VG

CHURRO CHOCODILLAS

SERVES 4 / 1 MINUTE AT HOME, 20 MINUTES IN CAMP

These chocolate and cinnamon-sugar treats are so good, you may want to “test” them at home before your trip.

GEAR Backpacking frying pan, backpacking stove and fuel, backpacking spatula, small cutting board, small knife

- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 1½ tsp. cinnamon
- 4 tsp. virgin coconut oil*
- 4 flour tortillas (6 to 7 in. diameter)
- ½ cup chocolate chips

AT HOME

1. Combine sugar and cinnamon in a small resealable plastic bag.

IN CAMP

2. Heat 1 tsp. oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Set 1 tortilla in pan and sprinkle half the tortilla with 2 tbsp. chocolate chips. Fold tortilla over and brown lightly on each side, turning once, 4 to 5 minutes total. Transfer to a cutting board and sprinkle on both sides with cinnamon sugar. Cut into wedges. Repeat to make more chocodillas.

**Bring packets of coconut oil (see page 94), or seal oil in a small screw-on Nalgene bottle (see page 83).*

PER SERVING 305 Cal., 44% (135 Cal.) from fat; 5 g protein; 15 g fat (9.7 g sat.); 41 g carbo (1.5 g fiber); 300 mg sodium; 6 mg chol. LC/LS/VG

ROCKY ROAD CHOCOLATE CHIA PUDDING

SERVES 4 (MAKES 2 CUPS) / 5 MINUTES AT HOME, 25 MINUTES IN CAMP

Chia seeds give this no-cook dessert a silky, lightly chewy texture like tapioca pudding.

GEAR 2-qt. backpacking saucepan, Nalgene bottle (for measuring),

spork, backpacking ladle, small grater (or small cutting board and knife)

- ¼ cup coconut milk powder*, such as Wilderness Family Naturals
- 4 tsp. unsweetened cacao* or cocoa powder
- ½ cup chia seeds*
- ¼ cup maple sugar*
- Pinch of kosher salt
- 6 tbsp. each chopped roasted almonds and mini marshmallows
- ½ oz. semisweet chocolate bar

AT HOME

1. Combine coconut milk powder and cacao powder in a small resealable plastic bag. In another small bag, combine chia seeds, maple sugar, and salt.

IN CAMP

2. In a 2-qt. saucepan or bowl, mix together coconut powder mixture and ¼ cup water until no lumps remain. Add 1¼ cups more water and the chia seed mixture and stir well. Let stand until liquid is absorbed, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes.
3. Spoon pudding into bowls and top with almonds and marshmallows. Grate chocolate over pudding, or cut it into small pieces.

**Find unsweetened cacao powder at natural-foods stores and online. For more on coconut milk powder, chia seeds, and maple sugar, see page 94.*

PER SERVING 341 Cal., 62% (210 Cal.) from fat; 10 g protein; 23 g fat (5.8 g sat.); 30 g carbo (14 g fiber); 144 mg sodium; 0 mg chol. GF/LC/LS

PSST ... the women of Dirty Gourmet are working on their first cookbook (with Mountaineers Books). Look for it next spring.

S DIGITAL BONUS
Get Dirty Gourmet's full gear list: sunset.com/backpackingchecklist. Watch Dirty Gourmet cook at Sunset Celebration Weekend: sunset.com/cw.

OUTDOOR-KITCHEN ESSENTIALS

After trying pretty much all the gear out there, the Dirty Gourmet women swear by these tools for backcountry cooking.



1. MSR DragonFly backpacking stove (for groups). Adjustable flame for precise cooking; holds large pans steady (\$140, fuel bottle from \$18, and fuel \$13; msr.com). Or **Snow Peak Giga Power Stove-Auto** (for 1 or 2 people). Easy to use and folds up palm-size (\$50; fuel from \$4.95, snowpeak.com).

2. Butane lighter. Reliable even in wind.

3. Snow Peak Titanium Double 450 Mug. Insulated, with folding handles (\$50; snowpeak.com).

4. Opinel No. 8 beechwood handle knife (\$15; opinel-usa.com).

5. BearVault BV450 Solo food canister. Bring several for a group (\$67; rei.com).

6. GSI Outdoors Pinnacle Camper cookset. Pans, lids, and dishware; the carry sack doubles as a sink (\$140; gsioutdoors.com).

7. Katadyn Hiker Pro Microfilter for water (\$85; katadyn.com).

8. Nalgene wide-mouth 32-oz. bottle with measurements (\$11; nalgene.com).

9. Snow Peak Trek titanium plate, bowl, and titanium spork (plate \$17, bowl \$17, spork \$10; snowpeak.com).

10. GSI Outdoors small ultralight cutting board (\$2.95; gsioutdoors.com).

11. MSR Alpine Utensil Set. Folding grater/strainer, spatula, and ladle/measuring spoon (\$17; msr.com).

TIP

Bring a filter and at least 1 water reservoir and water bottle per person. No natural source of water where you're going? You'll have to haul it; plan on at least 5 liters per person per day, more if it's hot or you're trekking long distances.