

Safety Activity Checkpoint

Outdoor Cooking

First-Aider Required



Council Approval: Not Required

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A

Required: At least one adult is trained for outdoor cooking by GSNorCal

About Outdoor Cooking

Historically, wood fires were the primary source of heat for camp cooking, but the practice of cooking with large fires is no longer recommended because of the detrimental effects on the environment and surrounding vegetation. Instead, use an established fire pit to ignite a small fire or use alternative cooking methods, such as a portable fuel-based cook stove or a solar or box oven.

Extensive outdoor cooking is not recommended for Daisies, but a less extensive activity, such as roasting marshmallows or cooking a one-pot meal, is appropriate. Look for campsites and parks with designated firepit areas.

As girls progress, they can learn to use a variety of cooking methods, including wood fire, propane, gas stoves, charcoal, canned heat (great for grilled cheese sandwiches!), and even solar energy.

As older girls become accomplished outdoor chefs, they can expand their skills with new types and techniques of cooking. Learn how to start a fire without matches, try solar cooking, or taste test new campfire cuisine. Plan outdoor recipes. Vote for your favorite meals and plan how to cook them outdoors.

Learn More:

- [Leave No Trace](#)
- Outdoor recipe ideas: [Outdoor Cook](#)
- Outside Magazine: [The Absolute Beginner's Guide to Camp Cooking](#)

Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. For resources and information on accessible sport and adventure activities, visit [Move United](#).

Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as the proper equipment, prior experiences, and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Standard Safety Guidelines. Refer to the "Standard Safety Guidelines" in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) which apply to all Girl Scout gatherings and activities. When the adult-to-girl ratio, or other safety parameters, are stricter for a specific activity than in the Standard Safety Guidelines, always follow the stricter parameters in the activity chapter.

COVID-19 Guidelines. Review the "Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts" section in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the "Standard Safety Guidelines" section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal's specific COVID-19 guidance](#). When applicable, always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Outdoor Cooking Checkpoints

Verify leader/instructor knowledge and experience. Ensure at least one adult is trained or possesses knowledge, skills, and experience in the following areas:

- Outdoor cooking activities and leadership, including dishwashing, food storage, sanitation, menu planning, and level-appropriate cooking methods
- Outdoor skills necessary to lead the group
- Safety management
- Judgment and maturity
- Group dynamics and management
- Supervision of girls and adults

Connect with GSNorCal regarding permits with the local fire district, land management agency, and/or conservation office. The adult volunteer should also check the fire index with local authorities and ensures local air pollution regulations are followed.

Encourage girls to share resources. Support girls in creating a checklist of group and personal equipment and distribute to group members. Repackage all food to minimize waste and the amount of garbage that needs to be removed from the campsite.

Never cook inside a tent!

Be prepared for primitive campsites. If cooking in primitive areas with little to no modern conveniences, observe these standards:

- Use existing fire rings if a fire is necessary.
- Make sure the campsite is located at least 200 feet from all water sources.
- Avoid fragile mountain meadows and areas of wet soil.
- Avoid camping under dead tree limbs.
- Do dishwashing and personal bathing at least 200 feet away from water sources.
- Make certain to have a fire bucket or other fire extinguishing method close at hand.

Store food well away from tents and out of reach of animals. Check local regulations to find out if a bear-proof canister is required. If the site is in bear country, check with local authorities on precautions to take. Ensure that garbage, sanitary supplies, and toilet paper are carried out.

Take safety precautions. Fire safety rules, emergency procedures, and first aid for burns are reviewed with the group and understood. Procedures are established and known in advance for notifying the fire department or land management agency officials in case of a fire. Fire drills are practiced at each site.

Prepare for emergencies. Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a First-Aider with a current certificate in first aid, including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle burns and other injuries related to the location, including extremes of temperature, such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, frostbite, cold exposure, and hypothermia, as well as sprains, fractures, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a First-Aider with wilderness first-aid training. If feasible, a vehicle is available to transport an injured or sick person.

Be Properly Trained. At least one adult must take the following outdoor cooking courses:

- Trip and Outdoor Basics
- Cook In
- Cook Out

The Camp Out course may be required depending on the level of cooking that will be involved. Visit [GSNorCal's Training Section](#) of the website to learn more.

On the Day of Outdoor Cooking

Store garbage in insect- and animal-proof containers with plastic inner linings and cover it securely when there is a campsite garbage-pickup service. When there is no garbage-pickup service, remove garbage from campsite in plastic bags and discard, as appropriate. Recycle whenever possible. Do not bury food; carry out food, trash, grease, and fuel canisters. Do not remove natural materials, such as leaves or branches.

Prepare for safe use of portable cook stoves. Portable cook stoves differ in size and in fuel use. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully, and closely supervise the girls when using any stove.

- Use of propane and butane stoves is recommended; liquid fuels such as gas, kerosene, and lighter fluid is prohibited.
- Take an adequate amount of propane and butane and store the extra fuel supply away from the cooking flame.
- Do not overheat the fuel tank.

Keep all stove parts clean. Check that lines and burners are not clogged. Do not refuel the cook stove or change canisters near an open flame. Take care not to spill fuel; if fuel does spill, relocate the stove before lighting it.

Be aware of stability. Place portable cook stoves in safe, level, and stable positions, shielded from the wind and away from foot traffic. Do not pile rocks or other items around the cook stove for stability. Use pots of appropriate size, so that the stove is not top-heavy.

Do not dispose of pressurized cans in a fire, leave them in direct sunlight, or keep them in enclosed areas where the temperature is high. See the manufacturer's instructions on the label. Store and dispose of fuel canisters in the recommended manner.

Consider fire safety. Be sure to check with local authorities to make sure cook stoves are permitted during times of extreme fire danger.

Cook safely with solar stoves. If using solar cookware, remember that pots and food inside a solar oven are hot even if the stove does not feel hot. Use insulated gloves when removing pots and opening the lid. Ensure adequate cooking time for your area.

Practice safe cooking with open fire. If cooking over open flames:

- Build fires in designated areas and avoid establishing new fire sites. An established fire site is clear of overhanging branches, steep slopes, rotted stumps or logs, dry grass and leaves, and cleared of any burnable material, such as litter, duff, or pine needles.
- Use existing fire rings if a fire is necessary.
- Make certain to have a fire bucket or other fire extinguishing method close at hand.
- Tie hair back on girls and adults or cover with bandanas.
- No plastic garments, such as ponchos, are to be worn around open flames.
- Where wood gathering is permitted, use only dead, fallen wood, and keep the cooking fires small. Store wood away from the fire area. Watch for flying sparks and put them out immediately.
- Before leaving the site, check that the fire is completely out by sprinkling the fire with water or smothering it with earth or sand, stirring, and then sprinkling or smothering again. Do not douse the fire with water, as it will create steam which can cause severe burns.
- Hold hands over coals, ashes, partially burned wood, or charcoal for one minute to verify coolness.
- Follow the campground and/or parks rules for extinguishing fires safely.
- Cold ashes and partially burned wood should remain in the fire pit and/or BBQ. Do not put ashes and burned wood in a plastic pail; do not leave a pail with ashes or burned wood against the side of a building or on a wood deck.
- If the camp site requires removal of coals and partially burned wood, use tongs to remove the coals and wood, placing them in a bucket of water to ensure they are completely cold.
- Wrap the cold coals and wood in aluminum foil and remove from the campsite.
- Obtain wood from local sources to avoid bringing pests and diseases from one location to another.
- Practice safe cooking with charcoal fires. If using charcoal, fires should be started with fuels explicitly labeled "charcoal starters." Never use gasoline as a fire starter. Never add charcoal lighter fluid to a fire once it has started.

Tips for Safe Food Preparation and Storage

Pack the appropriate amount of food. In order to avoid discarding unused food, make sure to bring along the appropriate amount of food for the group. To properly plan food supplies, consider the activities you will be participating in, keeping in mind that girls will burn more calories and hence need to eat more when participating in rigorous activities. Also, more calories are needed during cold weather.

Prepare nutritious meals. Meals should be prepared with consideration of food allergies, religious beliefs, and dietary restrictions (such as vegetarianism and veganism). Whenever possible, buy food and supplies that avoid excess packaging, and buy in bulk. Review health considerations, including the importance of keeping utensils and food preparation surfaces sanitized, cleaning hands, cooking meats thoroughly (use a meat thermometer to verify cooking temperatures), refrigerating perishables, and using clean water when preparing food. Do not use chipped or cracked cups and plates.

Cook with caution. Girls should learn about the safe use of kitchen tools and equipment, including knives. Maintain discipline in the cooking area to prevent accidents with hot food and sharp utensils. Do not overfill cooking pots, and do not use pressurized cans, soda-can stoves, or plastic basins, bottles, or cooking utensils near an open flame.

Avoid spreading germs. Each person has an individual drinking cup. Wash hands before food preparation and eating. No person with a skin infection, a cold, or a communicable disease participates in food preparation.

Be certain all cooks and fire tenders roll up long sleeves and tie back long hair.

Keep perishables cool. Store perishables such as creamed dishes, dairy products, meats, and salads at or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit in a refrigerator or insulated cooler with ice. If this will not be possible, use powdered, dehydrated, freeze-dried, or canned foods. On extended trips, do not use foods requiring refrigeration.

Use safe drinking water (see the “Water Purification Tips” below) to reconstitute powdered, dehydrated, or freeze-dried food. Once reconstituted, eat perishable items within one hour or refrigerate them.

Dispose of leftover food to avoid food poisoning.

Water Purification Tips

Access a safe drinking water supply for cooking, drinking, and personal use. Safe drinking water is defined as tap water tested and approved by the local health department. All other sources are considered potentially contaminated and must be purified before use. *Giardia lamblia* (a parasite) should be suspected in all surface water supplies.

Use one of the three water-purification methods:

Strain water through a clean cloth into a clean container to remove sediment, then...

- Boil water rapidly for a full minute and let cool (if over 6,500 feet in elevation, boil for three minutes);
- Disinfect water with water-purification tablets, following the manufacturer’s instructions (check product’s shelf life to make sure it hasn’t expired) *; or
- Process water through a water purifier or specially designed water-filtration device that removes *Giardia lamblia* (method will also remove many other contaminants; follow the manufacturer’s instructions carefully).

*Using water-purification tablets may not remove *Giardia lamblia* from water, so it is best to either boil water or use a filtration system.

Wash dishes in a prescribed area according to this procedure:

- Remove food particles from utensils and dishes and dispose of properly in waste bags.
- Wash dishes in warm, biodegradable soapy water.
- Rinse dishes in hot, clear water.
- Sanitize dishes by dipping in clear, boiling water or immersing for at least two minutes in a sanitizing solution approved by the local health department. Use long-handled utensil, tongs, or tool to remove sanitized dishes.
- Air-dry and store dishes in a clean, covered area.
- Dispose of dishwashing and rinse water according to the campsite regulations. In backcountry areas, scatter particle-free wastewater on the ground at least 200 feet beyond any water source or trail.

Safety Gear

- Potable water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning
- Source of refrigeration to keep perishable foods cold such as an insulated cooler, along with ice
- Fuel source (as necessary for the type of cooking you are doing)
- Insulated fire-retardant gloves

- Firefighting equipment, such as fire extinguisher, bucket of water, loose soil or sand, and a shovel and rake
- Hand sanitizer or soap and paper towels
- Knives and cutting boards
- Rubber bands, barrettes, or bandanas to tie back hair
- Three dish pans for dishwashing, along with biodegradable dishwashing soap
- Pot scrubber
- Mess kit with non-breakable plates, bowls, mugs, and cutlery in dunk bag
- Rope for dunk-bag line
- Portable cook stove and fuel (as necessary for the type of cooking you are doing)
- Long-handled cooking utensils such as ladles (as necessary for the type of cooking you are doing)
- Water purification method (tablets or filter), if needed