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Travel

## Move beyond skewers and s'mores on your next camping trip



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By **Kate Silver**

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For some of us, the concept of campfire cooking calls to mind hot dogs char-bubbling on sticks and gooey s'mores scorching the roofs of our mouths. But for Sunny Jin, the campfire cooking menu is a little more involved. Jin is executive chef at the Resort at Paws Up, the luxury ranch resort in Greenough, Mont., near Missoula, that coined the term “glamping” more than a decade ago. He says the key to a successful campfire cookout is preparation, planning and connecting with the natural world. Jin shared these tips on how to level up your campfire game on your next outdoor adventure.

**Don't be intimidated by the campfire aspect.** When asked if there are any foods to avoid cooking while camping, Jin draws a blank. Braising, searing, sautéing, roasting — it can all be done over the embers.

**Finesse your fire.** First rule of campfire cooking: Don't douse the logs with lighter fluid, Jin says. For one thing, it could burn out quickly; for another, dinner could taste like chemicals. Jin says to start with pine needles, build up to smaller twigs and then kindling. When that gets going, start adding the logs.

**Invest in the right equipment.** There are a few items that can help improve your wilderness spread, Jin says. First, he says, buy a portable grill with folding legs so that you have a platform to cook on. "Then you can do some grilling, roasting, slow-basting and searing off to the side while you're having some snacks that are over the direct heat," he says. He also suggests purchasing an inexpensive nonstick sauté pan to be used solely on camping trips.

**Pack versatile ingredients.** When Jin prepares for a camping trip, he says he'll cut up a bunch of vegetables and use them one night for trout stir fry — if he catches a fish — or fajitas if he doesn't. The next morning, he'll toss any leftover vegetables into a breakfast hash.

**Stock up on spices.** Bring along salt, pepper and your favorite spices. Jin says he cleans out old medicine bottles and makes them into a camping pantry. "They're amazing for carrying herbs, they're nearly indestructible and they take up very little room," he says.

**Eat from the land when you can.** Jin is a fan of fishing and hunting, and he also loves foraging to add variety to his campfire meals. One thing he never leaves at home is a mesh bag so he can harvest while hiking. "It's really rewarding when you can figure out how to be living in more of a minimal state," he says.

**Put food safety first.** Hot, muggy outdoor temperatures and raw meat aren't the best bedfellows. "I'll have a large Tupperware of raw meats," he says. "But instead of filling my coolers with ice, I'll take my steaks, hamburgers, hot dogs, whatever and I'll freeze them so they basically act like cool packs."

**Get s'more creative.** S'mores are something of a science at the Resort at Paws Up, where the staff includes a dedicated "s'moreologist." While chocolate, marshmallows and graham crackers are an excellent combination, consider them a launching point. "Start thinking about other ingredients that are near and dear to your heart," says Jin. He loves layering on Reese's Peanut Butter Cups to add more flavor. Or, he'll soak some marshmallows in Scotch.

To Jin, the connection with the natural world that he craves can mean catching dinner from the lake, using a twig as a s'more skewer or collecting forest fruits for a cobbler cooked over the fire in a Dutch oven. "The more you start to open your eyes a little bit, you start to realize it's kind of hard to starve when you're in the middle of the woods."