

June 2006 Feature Article



Make your own MRE's

One of the most important preparations for your bug out bag is your food. Deciding what and how much to carry can be a daunting task, since there are many factors to consider: Nutrition, Weight, Cooked or Non-Cooked, Pre-Packaged or homemade.

Depending on your geographical location, the need to carry water to reconstitute your freeze-dried super meals can add a considerable amount of weight to your bug out gear. This article is just to give you an idea of what works in my location. I live in western Washington, surrounded by forests, rivers and streams and you will likely run across water somewhere along your hike or bugout. Except in the summer, rain falls quite frequently so gathering water is mainly a matter of purifying it and containing it.

I have been looking for sometime for a direct replacement for the commercial MRE due to the high price, weight and limited choices in entrees. I first started back in 1983 with a then new vacuum sealing system. This was before retort pouches were widely available and the few that were had a limited variety. I was unhappy with the results I was having with the available choices of food for backpacking trips and started experimenting with my own concoctions. I tried instant rice, instant potatoes etc... I met with varied success but was never really satisfied with what I was coming up with.

With all the new advances in packaging and the different choices now available, a homemade "MRE" style food pack can be made for a fraction of the cost of the commercial variety. I have recently searched on the web for prices on MRE's and have seen them as low as \$62.00 dollars per case up to \$89.99 and that does not include shipping!

Besides being expensive (I feel), MRE's are fully constituted so they are heavy as well as bulky. I have heard some people that claim to strip down their MRE's to lighten the load. If that is what you are going to do, just buy the entrée instead of the whole thing. I do have several cases of MRE's, I don't think they are all that bad other than the price. Mine however, will be stored in my safe room or pre-positioned at my base camp at a later date. I don't want to carry all that weight. Over time my criteria evolved and culminated in this current home made MRE.



Here is a picture of version 1:

Contents

- 1 packet hot chocolate
- 2 packets flavored instant oatmeal
- 2 packets instant cup of soup
- 1 packet cappuccino mix
- 1 packet spiced cider
- 1 package cheese n crackers
- 1 granola bar
- 1 package raisins
- 1 packet of tea
- 2 packets of beef bouillon
- 1 Oberto meat stick
- 1 book matches
- 3 pcs jolly rancher hard candy
- 1 vitamin pack
- 1 quart size ziplock freezer bag

This is designed with the premise that breakfast and supper on the trail will most likely be eaten in the same encampment. It is also designed around a warm meal with warm drinks for cooler and cold weather. The rest can be consumed while on the move during the day. 2 packages of oatmeal in the morning along with either cider or cappuccino for breakfast, granola, crackers, raisins, hard candy and meat stick for on the trail, hot soup and hot drinks for evening after the day's journey.

Notice the size of these 3 meals compared to one MRE meal.

This MRE weighs nearly a pound all by itself! While I don't have a weight on the ration pack I know it is not that heavy.





In order to increase the amount of calories available per day I am considering the meal extension pack.

If at anytime you are hungrier than what the homemade MRE will satisfy, a spoonful of peanut butter and/or honey will help satisfy that hunger. The bacon bits will lend a bit more meat into your diet as will the tuna and the mashed taters mixed with a bullion packet will be better than going hungry.



Here is another meal extension pack:

Add the French vanilla flavoring to your oatmeal or make a hot beverage with it. Trail mix needs no explanation.



Here is a second version ration pack I have created:

It has most of the same basic contents, with a few additions to "beef up" the amount of available food. In this pack you see a different soup mix which will make 1 quart of soup. Just because we are travelling light doesn't mean the contents have to suck.



Here is 5 days worth of meals from home made rations.



Now lets compare this to 5 meals of MREs.

Each of my ration packs will require between 2-1/2 to 3 quarts of water per day. Since there is no water added, a good purifier is a must! This doesn't include what I will drink on the trail. I will be carrying at the least 2 quarts and when I make camp I will need several gallons for cooking, drinking, washing and restocking my canteens. Some can be boiled, some will be purified.

Cost wise, I save money on my rations by visiting food warehouses and liquidation stores. I bought everything but the matches and bouillon packets at a liquidation store near where I work. Boxes of granola bars were a \$1.00, a package of almonds for \$0.25, a box of instant oatmeal for \$1.00. You see how cost effective this can be. Also, when I am visiting other stores, I am always on the lookout for other items that would make good additions and add variety to these packs. Over a few months time, I have assembled a 30 day supply for each of us three.

I realize this would not work for very arid regions due to the amount of water you would have to carry. Those regions can pose big problems. Perhaps someone else will be inspired by this article to tell us what their solution is.

These meals are good for taking on patrol or eating on the way to your retreat, not to mention you can carry a goodly amount with you. A 7 day supply with ration extenders weighs 11 lbs compared to the pre package MRE's meal equivalent weight of 18 lbs 6 ozs!. The homemade ones take up less space in your pack also, allowing you to carry more food or other gear. The economies of scale are also worth considering.

Homemade MRE Menu

Breakfast:

Oatmeal Packet (2)

Hot Drink (chocolate, coffee, tea, cider, bullion)

Lunch:

Crackers and Cheese

Granola Bar (2)

Raisins

2 pcs Hard Candy

Trail Mix?

Water

Hot Drink (if desired)

Dinner:

Soup Packet (2)

Mixed Nuts

1 pc Hard Candy

Hot Drink

Hot Drinks:

Cappuccino/Coffee

Hot Chocolate

Hot Cider

Tea Packet

Bouillon Packet (2)

Vitamin Pack

Ziplock Freezer Bag (Qt., Gal?)

Book of matches

Pack of gum

Add your own favorite dried food such as fruit or vegetables to make a heartier evening meal.

Now, how do you heat the water to make these hot meals? No campfire if you are in a bug out situation. Use Trioxane fuel bars, Sterno, Butane, Alcohol or Gas stoves. If you can build a smokeless fire with very dry twigs you would be very lucky. Another drawback to fire is that it leaves traces that announce that you were there. If you want to travel with some stealth, this is not a good thing.

So there you have it! Your homemade MRE/ration pack can be as varied as your budget and your imagination allows.