

Solo Food Basics

By Bill Tucker (December 2013)

If you are looking for an article on gourmet solo cooking this is not the article for you. My favorite chefs are Chef Boyardee and Chef Campbell. My greatest culinary catastrophe occurred a few years ago when my only can opener failed and I finished the race opening cans with various combinations of knives, screwdrivers, and a hammer. For safety sake these tools are not recommended and now I have two very sturdy can openers onboard.

It is important to stay healthy when sailing and eating well and staying hydrated are an important part of this. It is easy to get absorbed with running the boat and forget to eat well and drink plenty of fluids. Bad weather and equipment problems can easily provide a distraction from eating and staying hydrated but even in these conditions one should have a plan and remember to eat and drink fluids.

That said I will describe my basic galley layout.

Galley Arrangement

My boat, a 1979 Beneteau First 30, GL3's galley is on the aft port side of the cabin. The galley consists of a two burner Origo stove that is gambled and has arms that hold pots of the stove. Behind the stove is storage for plates, cups, pots pans and some food. A drawer under the stove holds eating and cooking utensils. To the left of the stove is an installed ice box which I have reinsulated. Next to the ice box is a deep sink with water pumps from the lake and from my internal water tank. The sink cover has a cutting board that I installed on its back side. Food is stored on the port side behind the cabin seat in one long locker and under the port aft cabin seat. There is a bar in front of the stove to keep one from falling into the stove and a galley strap to keep the cook in place during rough seas. At the head of the main cabin a 4 gallon Igloo cooler is used to hold drinking water. This cooler is filled with ice and then water and will typically provide cool water for about 4 days depending on the weather. A small ice chest is also stored under the table in the main cabin. It is usually possible to keep things cold for 3 or 4 days. For the longer races such as the Super Mac and Back which one might expect to take about 10 days I do not plan to have cold stuff after about 4 days and so change the menu accordingly. My cooking knives are a bit on the dull side. I have considered sharpening them but decide that would just increase my chances of getting cut.



Basic Philosophy

Some racers will carry dehydrated food and only carry the minimum amount of food so as to keep boat weight to a minimum. I usually plan for a slow race. I assume that I will cover about 100 NM per day and then add about 20% to account for the possibility of light wind. I prefer to bring food that I like and that is easy for me to cook. As a result there is usually food left over at the end of a race.

I carry food with three ideas in mind:

1. General Meals

This is food I plan to eat for 3 meals a day, during moderate weather conditions, when I expect to have some time to prepare the meals, enjoy eating them in a relaxed manner and clean up the dishes afterwards. I really hope that all my meals will fall into this category and I typically bring enough food to support this for the duration of the race even with some slow sailing. More about these meals will be discussed below.

2. Bad Weather Food

This is food that I can consume if the weather is rough and I am not able to cook or take the time to prepare food in a relaxed manner. In some cases this may also occur when the weather is not bad, but where my time is consumed fixing a boat problem, navigating in restricted waters or around traffic, or when I just don't feel like taking the time to cook. I carry enough food like this so that I can use it for an entire race if necessary. Typically this food includes items like the following: peanuts, apple sauce cups, granola bars (lots of granola bars!), trail mix, apples, Lipton cup of soup, orange juice boxes, and hot chocolate or coffee. I can boil water on the stove in an enclosed tea kettle to make the Lipton cup of soup, hot chocolate, or coffee even in rough weather.

3. Snack Food

This is just stuff to nibble between meals. Typically this includes, cheese, crackers, honey roasted peanuts (lots of these), cashews, potato chips, apples, carrots, V8 juice, orange juice, and juice boxes.

Obviously some food may fit into several of the categories mentioned above. The following describes my typical meals in a bit more detail.

Typical Meals

These are some examples of my typical meals that I cook when it is not too rough and I am not too busy. I usually eat in the cockpit or sitting in the companion way under the dodger. I usually put the food in bowls rather than plates as it tends to stay there better.

Breakfast

Breakfast usually consists of a bowl of cold or warm cereal. I carry a half gallon of milk. Also breakfast includes a box of orange juice and some fruit such as a banana or apple. If weather is rough a granola bar substitutes for the bowl of cereal. On longer trips, after the ice is gone and the milk has been consumed, a granola bar substitutes for the cereal. Breakfast may also include a cup of coffee or a cup of hot chocolate.

Lunch

I usually eat a light lunch and it typically includes a granola bar and an apple. Sometimes I will also prepare a salad for lunch. At times I may eat a heavier meal for lunch and eat a light meal at dinner particularly if I anticipate heavier weather.

Dinner

I usually eat dinner after the sun has gone down and things have started to cool off as this makes cooking more comfortable. Typically dinner will start with a green salad that includes lettuce, celery, onions, green peppers, and Italian dressing. I usually eat my salad while the rest of dinner is cooking. The main course may consist of any of the following: hot dogs and sauerkraut, Chef Boyardee lasagna or ravioli, Campbell chunky soup, Dinty Stew, or something similar. Sometimes I add a vegetable from a can. Desert usually consists of chocolate or butterscotch pudding that comes in a small container and does not require refrigeration or a small can of fruit such as fruit cocktail, peaches, or apricots. Dinner is finished off with a cup of hot chocolate.

Provisioning

Generally I inventory what is on board before I make up a shopping list. It is really annoying to find out in the middle of a cold night that you don't have another packet to make hot chocolate. I then make up a shopping list. If I have a long trip to get to the starting line I may need several days of food before I get to the area of the starting line. For long races such as the Super Mac and Back I write out a spreadsheet and plan out roughly how much of each category of food I will need. Usually nonperishable things are purchased a day or so before I plan to leave and the perishable items are purchased the evening before or the morning I plan on leaving. In the lockers behind the seats I stow items by category so to the far right one finds deserts such as pudding and fruit cups, then vegetables, then main courses such as soup, and canned pasta, then to the far left is the stash of granola bars. Crackers and cookies are stored in the pockets behind the port seats. Juice and water are stored in the locker under the aft port cabin seat. All items that go into the ice box are typically re-bagged in Zip Lock bags so they will not be damaged by water in the ice box as the ice melts.

Ice Box Tips

If one relies on an ice box and ice chests it can be a challenge to keep stuff cold for the duration of the race. Here are some tips to extending the cooling duration of your ice chest:

- Use block ice instead of cubes.
- Cool the ice box off before your trip and then top off the ice just before you leave. This may require that you use a combination of block and cube ice.
- Pack the ice box as full as possible. This minimizes the turnover of air in the ice box; that is the cold air being replaced with warm air when you open the ice box. As you use up items try to refill the ice chest with other items.
- Don't remove the melted water from the ice box. It will help to keep the box cool longer and take up space that might be replaced with warm air when you open the box. If you do this though be sure you have items packaged so they can't get wet.
- Minimize the number of times you open the ice box and the duration, as it will let in warm air and let out cold air each time.
- If you have more than one ice box and ice chest consolidate all your items in one ice box as you use up the items and space permits.
- Consider storing some items such as drinks in a locker that is below the water line and in contact with the outside water. This will keep the items cool though not as cool as the ice box and will allow more ice to be put in the ice box and minimize the times the ice box is opened and closed.
- Make sure you have plenty of insulation around your installed ice box including the lid. You can use spray can foam to augment the insulation around your ice box. On my boat the first time I used the ice box all the ice was gone in just a few hours. I discovered there was not insulation around it. I reinsulated the box including the lid and now typically get 3 to 4 days cold stuff.

Galley Safety

Galley safety is important. It is easy to get burned or cut in rough conditions. Here are a few suggestions:

- If not present install a bar in front of the stove to prevent one from being thrown against the stove.
- Install a galley strap that will hold one in place and that one can lean against while cooking in rough weather.
- Boil water in an enclosed tea kettle
- Install gambles on your stove and burner rails to keep pots in place. Adjust the burner rails so your posts don't move around.
- When weather is rough avoid using the stove especially with open pots and pans.
- Keep your cooking knives a bit dull and round off the points.
- Drink hot liquids in mugs with lids.

Final Comment

There are a variety of different ways to stay well-nourished and hydrated while sailing. My wife does not like my favorite hot dogs and sauerkraut so that is why I cook it for myself when I am solo sailing.

Whatever you do, develop a plan that includes food that you like and that you are comfortable preparing. What you cook may not help you win the race but it can certainly help you enjoy it more.

I hope my rather basic discussion will inspire or should I say horrify some of the GLSS culinary experts to put there cooking experiences in writing.