

## **Boil In Bag Meals- A Burner's laziest and easiest option.**

Boil-in-bag meals are a fantastic option for those of us that want a quick, nutritious home-made meal on the playa with little-to-no waste. Here's a quick run down of the boil-in-bag meal plan I executed in 2009 on the playa. The possibilities are limitless on these and you can tailor them to any diet, taste or hunger level. The basic boil-in-bag meal consists of 4 components...

- 1) A starch- rice, couscous or noodles
- 2) A protein- beef, chicken, meatballs, or tofu
- 3) An accompaniment- Veggies, "flavor profile items" (bacon, cherries, mint) and such
- 4) A sauce

There are very specific ways to prepare each of these components so that they (and in turn, the dish) turn out as tasty and appetizing as possible... I will go into these in detail over the next few pages. First there are a few things you will need...

- a) Vacuum sealer with appropriate bags- I'm pretty sure this is the one I got for last year->

[http://www.amazon.com/Seal-A-Meal-VS107-Vacuum-Food-Sealer/dp/B000KL5IJM/ref=sr\\_1\\_5?ie=UTF8&s=kitchen&qid=1279311399&sr=1-5](http://www.amazon.com/Seal-A-Meal-VS107-Vacuum-Food-Sealer/dp/B000KL5IJM/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&s=kitchen&qid=1279311399&sr=1-5)

As far as bags go, there are individual 1-quart bags that work well for single and double serving meals, and larger rolls of bags that you can cut to size and seal for larger meals or fruit/berries

- b) Large flat trays (aluminum disposable turkey roasting trays or flatter serving pans work best) to freeze the components and a fair amount of freezer space (Chest freezer works great)
- c) 2 gallon ziplock bags for freezing components
- d) A LOT of ice trays

- e) Coolers, dry ice and newspaper. You should wrap the dry ice packets in newspaper to insulate- USE GLOVES so you don't fuck up your hands. Put a layer of dry ice on the bottom of the cooler, some in the middle and a layer over the top to keep everything super cold throughout the duration. It is important to remember that even though all meals will go out frozen and stay that way for a few days, you should check on them every day to make sure they're staying cold. They WILL have to be iced down about halfway through the week to keep them cold. It's fine if they are not frozen, but should never go above 40 degrees F.

#### A FEW NOTES-

ALL components must be cooked separately and completely, frozen separately and assembled while frozen prior to bagging and sealing. Vegetables like Broccoli, onions and bell peppers don't have to be cooked... carrots do not have to be cooked either but it's best to let the final meal steep a little longer to more fully cook them before serving. Cheery tomatoes work exceptionally well when frozen.

Only keep the frozen components out for as long as you need to during the bagging and sealing process... if they melt and refreeze together it will turn into one big lump and will take much more time to reheat later, and the texture will be mushy. This is especially important for the sauce cubes.

Make sure there is a tight seal on the bags and that no air leaks back in after sealing. If the seal is not tight water will get into the meal, thereby water-logging it.

### **STARCHES**

The most common starches used for these are Pasta, Rice and Couscous.

-For pastas you want to cook it thoroughly, drain and let sit so that all excess water is drained. Then you can put it in gallon bags and freeze (always lay everything FLAT in the freezer). When it's time to bag the meals you can throw it on the ground to break up any stuck together pasta (much like you would a bag of ice). Bowtie Pasta, Corkscrew and Macaroni work very well- longer pastas like linguine and spaghetti don't work too well.

-Rice and Couscous is a little bit more tricky. Normally I do NOT cook this beforehand for 2 reasons- a) it's too small to break apart and often times just sticks together in a clump when frozen and b) it's much more flavorful if you heat/cook it with the stocks, sauces and boullions that you prepare for the dishes. One frozen cube of stock usually equals 1 fluid ounce and rice and couscous really soak up a lot of moisture, so when you do your measurements make sure to use a 2-to-1 ratio stock-to-starch.

## SAUCES

Some sauces are very easy to make, some not so much. The easiest way to prepare them are to make them in a large pot, make sure the flavors are STRONG and seasoned appropriately, and then ladle them into ice cube trays to freeze. Normally the best ones that work in my experience are cheese sauces, Chicken/Beef broth/Au jus, Tomato/Spaghetti sauce and gravies. 8 frozen sauce cubes equal one cup of sauce in the meal. Generally I tend to put 1.5-2 cups of sauce cubes into each meal, depending on the starch. ALWAYS use a minimum 2-1 ratio sauce-to-starch when using couscous and rice, and about 1-1.5 cups of sauce cubes for pasta dishes.

Jarred pasta/spaghetti sauces can be frozen as is without any extra preparation. Beef/Chicken stocks should be a little more concentrated than usual and gravies should be just a little thin. Cheese sauces should be thick yet easy to pour.

When the sauces are frozen in the ice trays, you can loosen them as you would a regular ice cube. Empty them into a ziplock bag and put them immediately in the freezer for another hour to ensure that they stay cold and frozen during the bagging process.

**BASIC CHEESE SAUCE-** melt a half stick butter, 2 cups 2% milk, chopped garlic, a medium block of Colby Jack cheese and a small block of Velveeta in a pan (Velveeta is somewhat necessary as regular jack cheese has a very viscous and rubbery texture when melted- it also doesn't mix very well with milk/butter. Velveeta makes a much smoother texture and binds everything together beautifully). Mix everything together until it forms a pourable mixture- add more milk if needed. Salt and pepper to taste. You can then pour it into ice trays and freeze for later use

## MEATS

Chicken, beef and lamb should be thoroughly seasoned and cooked- I usually choose to braise or slow roast, or use a pressure cooker. For beef/lamb roasts you should brown the outside in a frying pan or grill after seasoning it, and before roasting. Other things you can use include andouille sausage, frozen shrimp, chorizo or diced ham. Only the chorizo needs to be cooked beforehand out of those 4. After cooking, the meat can be pulled apart into bite-sized pieces, laid flat onto trays and frozen. Bacon should be pre-cooked to render off as much fat as desired, cut into small pieces and frozen in ziplock bags.

## VEGGIES/OTHER

Generally vegetables do not have to be pre-cooked- they will heat and cook sufficiently during the boiling process and retain a very fresh, crispy texture. Just make sure to rinse/drain them thoroughly and cut into small pieces before freezing. Another great ingredient to use is mini-mozzarella balls- just drain and let sit on a paper towel to make sure they're dry, then freeze and add to any dish that you might use pasta sauce for.

**BREAKFAST/EGGS-** Egg dishes are actually quite easy to assemble and they cook up great on the playa. They also save the hassle of having to break/dig out/throw away the egg-shells. Simply beat the eggs as you would when you make regular scrambles and pour into ice trays. **USE A NON-STICK SPRAY ON THE ICE TRAYS FIRST-** last year I had to pry those fuckers out of the ice trays individually because they stuck/bonded to the plastic and it sucked. 2 egg cubes generally equal one egg and I usually assemble them to feed 2 people- 8 iced egg-cubes plus ham, cheese squares, chorizo, bacon, peppers or whatever else you may feel like putting into a playa-scramble.

**ASSEMBLY-** Basically, this is something that you want to eyeball when putting everything together. Generally I use 1 cup of dry rice/couscous per person, and 1.5-2 cups of cooked and frozen pasta per person with enough of everything else to fill out the meal and provide balanced nutrition. It helps to have each separate component bagged in a gallon ziplock bag beforehand to keep things in one place. **THERE CAN NEVER BE TOO MUCH SAUCE.** Err on the side of overage when adding the sauce cubes. When the meal is assembled seal it immediately and put back in the freezer.

**COOKING/HEATING-** This is the easy part. The best thing to use is a turkey deep fryer base and large covered pot. Fill it half way with water and make sure the water is boiling before putting the bags in. It usually takes about 20 minutes to heat everything- 30 for rice and couscous dishes. Make sure they are mostly immersed in the water and use a large pair of tongs to handle the bags and stir them around occasionally to ensure even heating throughout.

Here is the menu I planned last year...

#### BREAKFAST

Turkey Hash  
Egg Scrambles  
-Ham, Cheddar, Green Pepper  
-Chorizo and Black Bean  
-Bacon, Sundried Tomato and Spinach  
Rice and Beans  
Fortified Fruit/Soy milk Smoothies  
Homemade Granola Bars

#### DINNER

Bacon and Broccoli Mac and Cheese  
Beef Stroganoff  
Chicken, Artichoke & Sundried Tomato Pasta  
Chicken, Pork and Shrimp Jambalaya (Wil's will be sans shrimp)  
Lamb Couscous w/ Apricots and red wine redux  
Pasta and Turkey Meatballs w/ Mini Mozzarella and Basil  
Hearty Chicken Stew

## LUNCH/EXTRAS

2 Bulk Soups- Chicken Noodle and Coconut Curry w/ lemongrass and Tofu

Dried Fruit/Nut Trail Mix

Chicken Salad- works AWESOME when pre-made and vacuum sealed- does not need to be frozen, just kept cold

Pasta Salad

PBJ Sandwiches

Pulled BBQ Pork/Chicken Sandwiches- Also AWESOME- just roast/pull a shitload of chickens, mix with BBQ Sauce and freeze. On the playa it helps to let it thaw (keeping it around 40 degrees F) so that it heats more evenly and quicker.

Mashed Potatoes/Gravy are also a good one... make the potatoes and gravy separately and bag/freeze them separately as well. Good for a bulk side dish.