

A RECIPE FOR CAMPING WITH KIDS

People think I'm crazy when I tell them I like to go camping with our young children. I can read it in their faces. Am I a saint? Insane? Or both?

It can be a challenge. For example, when our youngest was a toddler, her idea of exploring meant putting things in her mouth. We spent a lot of time steering her away from bite-sized pieces of wood, rocks and pine cones.

Our daughters are four and six now, and this year we spent five nights under the stars at Charleston Lake near Gananoque. Unlike "real" camping, in which one paddles into untrammelled wilderness far from hot showers and ice machines, we simply drove to a reserved campsite and pitched our tent beside it. Suited me just fine.

These are some of the extra items that helped make our camping experience a little easier.

1 Garrity LED headlamp. Woven elastic straps adjust to fit any size. Perfect for hands-free nighttime exploring. No broken flashlights! It has three settings: high, low, and flashing. It's also a great tool for catching fireflies. \$16.99 at Canadian Tire.

2 Marbles. I'm not keen on bringing toys along camping, but this was the exception. The girls made up their own games and played quietly during dinner prep time. Also, glow sticks and sparklers make nighttime more fun. \$1 each at the Carlingwood Dollarama. Stock comes and goes, so if you don't find it, check back.

3 Bridgehead coffee, pre-ground for the French press. If you've just woken up after a night of breaking up raccoon fights and shifty sleeping mattresses, you will know how utterly priceless the morning cup of coffee can be. Using the press (along with good beans) is a low-tech way of getting a richly flavoured cup of brew. \$7.50 for half a pound of Guatemalan beans.

4 Beer in cans. It took us three years to realize that it's more practical to transport beer in cans than in bottles. They cool faster, more will fit in the cooler, and there's no glass to break. If you leave your empties behind, money collected from the deposit goes toward the purchase of new equipment for the park. \$1.75 at the LCBO.

5 Bioré Pore Perfect daily deep pore cleansing cloths. Great for removing layers of sweat, sunscreen and bug spray from your face if you're too far from the comfort station. I've expanded their intended use to include my entire upper body. My husband, who normally eschews this kind of "sissy stuff," was glad to have them too. \$4.99 for a portable package of 10 at PharmaPlus.

6 Terra Nova stretch shorts from Mountain Equipment Co-op. Comfortable, lightweight and made of quick-dry fabric, they offer positive proof that outdoorsy clothes can look cool. I wore mine almost every day. \$38.

7 Calamine lotion. Chalky pink smears on tanned skin are a little unsightly, but this stuff is cheap and it works. Calamine eases itchy bug bites and is supposed to help with sunburn too. We're still using the bottle we bought at Algonquin Park three years ago. Available at any pharmacy for about \$3.

8 A pre-planned menu that accommodates everyone. Now is not the time to introduce something new and weird. Stay with the basics. Campfire pizzas are a tried and true meal of choice.

CAMPFIRE PIZZA

Pita bread

Small tin of tomato sauce
Pizza-related ingredients (personally, I would love roasted onion, red peppers and feta cheese, but, knowing my family, I make the sacrifice and just use shredded mozzarella and a stick of pepperoni)

Light a fire. A Teflon grill would be handy, but you can also cover the grill with barbecue-strength foil. Spread sauce on the pita. Add ingredients. Leave on grill covered with a foil tent to melt the cheese on top. Eat when it looks ready.

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