**Food Planning & Packing Your Cooler**

1. If possible, plan menus with your entire group. Check to see if anyone has dietary restrictions, food allergies, is vegetarian, etc. Decide if all food will be “community”, i.e. purchased together and costs split equally or if individuals will be expected to provide part of the food at their own expense. Some groups divide up the evening meals and have individuals or cooking groups provide the ingredients.
2. Freeze any food ahead of time that can be frozen and doesn’t need to be eaten on the first day. For example chili can be packaged in Seal a Meal bags or Ziploc bags and frozen at home. When packed this adds more ice to the cooler and saves time by having to simply reheat a meal on the river instead of preparing it from scratch. If still frozen on the day you want to eat the meal, just take it out ahead of time and let it thaw. Or cook food directly in the bag (ex. Boil your Seal a Meal bag with precooked pasta in it to save time cleaning up pots and pans).
   * **NOTE:** Do NOT use glass containers. Always transfer contents to plastic ones.
3. Freeze one gallon milk containers or juice jugs of water instead of using blocks of ice (number will vary depending on size of cooler). Doing this gives you fresh water toward the end of the trip and keeps water out of the cooler. Remember not to fill the jugs all the way up to the top to allow water to expand while it freezes. Put one jug on either end of the cooler, put pre frozen food in-between with another jug on top. Fill in the rest of the cooler with food in the order they’re to be used each day. Make sure to put delicate items on top.
   * **NOTE:** Try to alleviate standing water in your cooler by using loose ice. When the ice melts, it has a tendency to get into bags of cheese, salad greens and other items and ruin them. Always empty standing water in your cooler. Open the cooler as little as possible. Make sure you pack your cooler tight as air pockets can increase the temperature inside.
   * **PRO TIP:** It’s always a great idea to freeze collapsible water jugs to save space and eliminate excess trash once empty. You can also freeze one gallon milk or juice jugs.
4. Once you close the cooler lid, open it as little as possible. If you are on a trip with a large group, pack coolers marked to be reopened on specific days with a separate cooler containing items, such as lunch foods, that need to be accessed daily. Once packed, work hard to keep your cooler out of the sun whenever possible.
   * **PRO TIP:** Strap a [Paco Pad](http://downriverequip.com/?s=Paco+Pad" \t "_blank) to the top of the cooler if it is going to be exposed to direct sunlight.
5. Ease the garbage carryout by eliminating extra packaging; transfer dry mixes into Seal a Meal bags or Ziploc bags (cut out cooking instructions and put them in the bags). Even in dry boxes, bag dry goods in plastic, just in case.