

Outdoor

Gourmet

An international guide and outdoor chef maps out your best meal ever under the open sky. (Promise.)

TEXT, RECIPES AND COOKING BY MICHAEL GRAY
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I've been guiding wilderness trips, mostly by kayak, for 28 years.

Whether my clients are paddling in Alaska, New Zealand, Patagonia, Honduras, Florida's Everglades or here in my cherished home waters of the Great Lakes, they all share one thing in common: eating well.

In recreation and in our daily lives, so many things are beyond our personal control ... gas prices, bugs, weather, just for starters. But what and how we eat is almost entirely up to us, and over the years, I've found good food—food that's both physically and sensually satisfying—is an essential tool on an outdoors trip. Food can even be safety gear (forget the chocolate and things start to go wrong). There's something about that moment of sharing remarkable food in an exceptional place that says "BE HERE" like nothing else can.

Each region I lead trips to offers its own food traditions built around what

farmers grow and raise there. I find that incorporating local foods and food traditions into travel always results in a much deeper and more personal experience. That is as true here in Northern Michigan as it is anywhere else I've ventured. We have fabulous local resources to create memorable dishes. Sure we have some of the world's best cherries and Rieslings up here, but we also have family farms that produce cheeses and a variety of livestock as well as a bounty of fruits and vegetables.

From my front door in Benzie County, I can walk to buy organic greens, ice cream made with local strawberries, local maple syrup and crisp asparagus from Ware Farm organic growers. I've always provisioned trips from local fare as much as possible. It's not out of some recent political sensitivity or marketing

effort. I just like it better ... always have.

I have the best job of anyone I know. I make a living out of helping people experience the world from the waters that give us life, and I get to share great food with them. Teaching outdoor cooking classes has kept me hopping to schools and symposia all over the world. Favorite all-time meal? Traded three trout to share a chunk of beef cooked on a farm disc over a fire with some gauchos in Patagonia. I just happened to have a Malbec in my pack. I'm still an explorer at heart ... Lewis and Clark? I would have been all over that trip.

But of course, a wonderful thing about gourmet food cooked outdoors is you don't have to launch a grand excursion to get it. A public beach and a stop at good markets en route will give you the ingredients you need. Here I lay out the recipes and tips for what I guarantee will be one of the best meals you've ever had outdoors, whether you've paddled 100 miles or walked 100 feet to reach your party spot.



Lemon Garlic Shrimp With Creamy Parmesan Polenta
(Shrimp n' Grits if you speak Southern).

With so many good friends from Charleston, South Carolina, I had to include this "low country" favorite. This is my version. For six.

CREAMY PARMESAN POLENTA

- 2½ cups chicken broth
- 1 cup evaporated milk or half and half
- 1½ cups fresh mushrooms, any type (½ c if dried)
- 1½ cups polenta or grits, not quick type (polenta is from yel low corn; grits is from white corn, but otherwise very similar.)

(Note: Start shrimp marinating before starting polenta) In a medium pot, bring chicken broth, mushrooms and evaporated milk to boil for polenta. Stir in polenta, reduce heat a little, and stir often. (Begin cooking shrimp.) When polenta starts to thicken (about same time shrimp is finishing)—add salt and pepper and taste. Continue stirring, and once polenta have reached the consistency of oatmeal, stir in Parmesan cheese.

LEMON GARLIC SHRIMP

- 1½ pounds shrimp
- olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest
- 8 garlic cloves, divided
- 1½ cups onion, chopped
- 1 large red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 pound asparagus, cut into one-inch lengths

Peel and clean shrimp and marinate in a splash of olive oil, a tablespoon of lemon zest and four or five crushed gloves of garlic. In a second pot, sauté remaining garlic (minced) and chopped vegetables in olive oil for two minutes on medium heat. Add the thawed shrimp and sauté for 5 minutes in the garlic-infused oil. Remove from heat.

Ladle a healthy serving of grits onto each plate, top with shrimp and vegetable mixture. Tabasco to taste—use enough and your grits turn pink. Black pepper, and salt to taste. For extra credit add crumbled bacon bits to the top! You may want to make a batch of sweet tea to go with this.



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GUIDED DAY TRIP
Kayaking Wine Tour

After a morning mini-lesson with Michael Gray, paddle from an Old Mission Peninsula boat launch to a beach lunch cooked with local wines. Continue on to two private winery tours with appetizer and wine pairings. Tuesdays and Thursdays during July, August and September, 8:30 a.m. to 5:50 p.m., \$150/person, info@uncommonadv.com.



Spinach Salad with Grilled Pears and Pan Seared Sea Scallops

Easy, fresh and elegant as a lunch salad or an amazing appetizer.
For six.

- 1+ pounds large sea scallops:
- white wine
- 2 teaspoons lemon zest
- 1 pound washed baby spinach
- 1 sliced red bell pepper
- 4 ounces crumbled feta
- 2 fresh pears (Barlett or similar)
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 splash sparkling wine
- olive oil
- fresh lemon juice (optional)
- Fustini's peach-infused white balsamic vinegar, or similar. (Fustini's Oils and Vinegars: fustinis.com.)

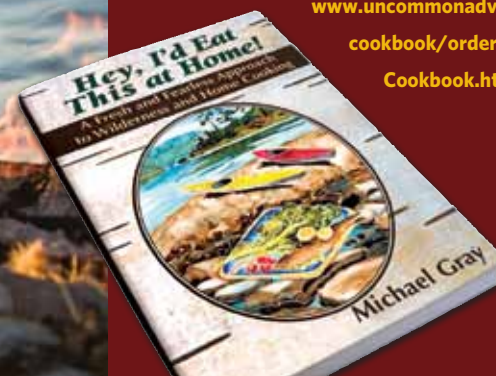
Rinse scallops and marinade in a little white wine and 2 teaspoons of lemon zest. While sauté pan is heating to medium heat, plate spinach and arrange peppers and crumbled feta on top for each serving. Gently brown pear slices (with skin on) in butter and arrange on greens. Turn up the heat to searing temps, sear scallops on one side (about 2 minutes) turn, sear on other side for one minute, add 1 tablespoon butter (will brown; it's okay) a splash of sparkling wine, and let butter and wine reduce into a sauce for another minute. Dish a couple of scallops out center stage on each plate of greens, and spoon a little of the sauce on them. Dress with a splash of olive oil and a squeeze of lemon or Fustini's peach-infused white balsamic vinegar.

OUTDOOR COOKBOOK

Hey, I'd Eat This at Home

More than 100 recipes (including some from this article) trail tested by Michael Gray during his nearly 30 years of guiding and exploring the world through food culture.

[www.uncommonadv.com/
cookbook/order
Cookbook.html](http://www.uncommonadv.com/cookbook/orderCookbook.html)



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OUTDOOR COOKING TIPS

Random but Good Advice for Chefs in the Wild

- **PACK A GOOD SPICE KIT.** Fresh herbs are portable and most flavorful. Wrap uncut herbs in a damp paper towel and then package them loosely in a cellophane-lined paper coffee bag (the type you buy coffee beans in).
- **KITCHEN SHEARS** work well to cut sun-dried tomatoes.
- **HEAT MANAGEMENT:** use a heat diffuser plate on the stove burner to avoid burning and a foil windscreen around the stove to retain heat under pots and pans (conserves fuel).
- **SMALL MICRO-FIBER KITCHEN TOWELS** are lightweight, easy to clean, and work as hot pads, top insulators, napkins, placemats, and even ... well ... towels.
- **WINE ADDS FLAVOR** to a number of dishes and is available in small Tetra Pak containers or Mylar bags inside paperboard boxes. Leave the box behind and you have an easy-to-stow package of wine.



Spring Harvest: Panfish, Asparagus and Morel

The sublime flavors of Northern Michigan Spring.
For six.

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|-----|-------------------------------------------------|
| 2-3 | tablespoons butter, divided |
| 5 | wild leeks root bulbs (corms), coarsely chopped |
| 1 | pound morels (soaked and halved) |
| 2 | pounds asparagus |
| 12 | panfish (perch or bluegills) |
| | olive oil |
| | flour to dust mushrooms |
| | salt |
| | pepper |

Rinse scallops and marinade in a little white wine and 2 teaspoons of lemon zest. While sauté pan is heating to medium heat, plate spinach and arrange peppers and crumbled feta on top for each serving. Gently brown pear slices (with skin on) in butter and arrange on greens. Turn up the heat to searing temps, sear scallops on one side (about 2 minutes) turn, sear on other side for one minute, add 1 tablespoon butter (will brown; it's okay) a splash of sparkling wine, and let butter and wine reduce into a sauce for another minute. Dish a couple of scallops out center stage on each plate of greens, and spoon a little of the sauce on them. Dress with a splash of olive oil and a squeeze of lemon or Fustini's peach-infused white balsamic vinegar. **T**

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