

SPROUTING with ideas

Some thoughts on food at sea from John Campbell

JUST BECAUSE WE LIVE ON A BOAT, many people automatically assume that we live as if we are camping out all the time. Time after time, people ask, 'Don't you get tired eating tinned food all the time?'

In fact, we live and eat pretty much like real people who live ashore. We eat some tinned food, but not that much really. Like everybody else, we eat mainly fresh food, life is more complicated as we have no fridge or deep-freeze.

In harbour, we shop little and often. In strange places, we try to buy what the locals buy. That is usually the best value for money. We try to steer clear of imported delicacies, however strong the craving. It is exciting trying new vegetables, fruits, fish, and meat. Whoever sells the produce is usually more than willing to explain how to prepare and cook it, even if our ignorance causes laughter. Much more interesting than a can of beans!

In warm places, my wife and I like to eat a lot of salads. Raw green vegetables, however, are a favourite source of 'traveller's tummy', but the risk can be greatly reduced by washing the greens in water that has a few potassium permanganate crystals dissolved in it.

'That's fine in harbour,' they say, 'but what about at sea?' Most fresh food, if properly prepared and cared for, will last a lot longer than many people realise. It is very rare indeed for us to make a passage longer than about thirty days, and many things will last a month.

Eggs are a favourite standby, and if properly looked after, will last much longer than a month. Choose eggs that have never been chilled or frozen, and as fresh as possible. Cover them with a thin coating of petroleum jelly to render the shells airtight, and store them pointed end down. The air sac at the rounded end will prevent the yolk from touching the shell, which seems to make the egg go rotten. Treated like this, and stored in a cool place, they should be good for 6 weeks.

Potatoes will also keep for many weeks. We have had most success by storing them in a hanging string bag in a dark place. They must be kept dry, otherwise they go mushy. If they start to sprout, then we pick the sprouts off. If the sprouts are left on, the potatoes shrivel and become soft and wrinkled. We have also noticed that potatoes seem particularly susceptible to fluorescent light. Potatoes that have been exposed to it have sometimes gone green and hard. Maybe it is just some kinds of potatoes and some kinds of light, but it can happen.

Other root vegetables such as carrots, turnips, and parsnips will easily keep for a month, if obtained fresh and kept dry and preferably in as dark and cool a place as possible. It is worth picking through the stock fairly regularly and throwing out any that are going bad. One rotten carrot, left in the pile, will turn all the others bad in a short time. The real secret is to avoid plastic bags. Condensation forms inside the bags,

Fully-grown mung beans on the left; fully-grown alfalfa sprouts on the right



mould flourishes, and the vegetables rot in no time. Net or string bags are much more suitable.

Onions will keep almost forever. Again, they should be kept dry and well ventilated. If they sprout, pick off the sprouts. If the outside becomes mouldy, peel off the outer layer or two. With a bit of care, they will last 2 months.

Of the greens, only cabbage will stay really fresh for a long time. A good, firm cabbage should keep for up to a month. If it does start to go off, it is usually just the outer leaves that are affected, and can easily be peeled off. Lettuce, unfortunately, does not last much more than a week, no matter what is done to it outside a fridge, and this has become the vegetable

Here are a few of our ideas. All these recipes will serve four people:

Egg Foo Mung

2 cups fresh bean sprouts	1 teaspoon salt
½ cup chopped cooked ham, pork, or shrimp	2 eggs
1 green onion, sliced	vegetable oil
	2 cups hot, cooked rice
	brown gravy

Toss first four ingredients. Add eggs gently to moisten all. Heat enough vegetable oil to coat bottom of the pan generously. Gently spoon mixture into the pan, forming four patties. Cook slowly 2 to 3 minutes; turn and continue cooking several more minutes, until ingredients have just set. Serve with hot rice and gravy.

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Stir-Fried Pork with Sprouts

2 tablespoons red seedless jam	1 lb pork, diced
3 tablespoons vinegar	2-3 tablespoons oil
3 tablespoons dry wine	8 oz mung sprouts
1 tablespoon dark brown sugar	4 oz alfalfa sprouts
3 tablespoons Soy sauce	1 large green pepper, sliced

Mix the jam, vinegar, wine, sugar, and Soy sauce and marinate the pork for 3-4 hours in the mixture. Heat the oil in a pan, fry the pork quickly for 15-20 minutes until cooked, and reduce the liquid to give a thick sauce. Keep hot. Quickly stir-fry the sprouts and green pepper for 2-3 minutes and serve with the pork. Rice is a good accompaniment, as are noodles.

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Chicken and Sprout Soup

2 oz butter or margarine	1 tablespoon flour
1 large onion, finely chopped	1 pint milk, or milk and water
1 clove garlic, crushed	6 oz sprouts
8 oz chicken, cooked	

Melt butter, and onion and garlic and fry gently until softened. Add finely chopped chicken and flour and cook for 3-4 minutes. Add milk, or milk and water, bring to the boil, and simmer for 20-30 minutes. Add sprouts for last 5 minutes of cooking time and serve garnished with toasted breadcrumbs. This could also be served cold as a summer soup.

we miss most on a long passage.

We also have found that citrus fruit and apples keep well when wrapped in newspaper and packed loosely in a box. We manage to keep cheese for a long time by wrapping it in paper towels soaked in vinegar. If this is placed in a sealed plastic bag, the cheese will last for ages without going mouldy.

On passage, we have all these fresh things, but we still used to crave a good salad now and then. Toward the end of a long passage, often most of the fresh food was gone and we would resort more and more to tinned food. Then we began to crave anything fresh, anything a little bit crisp, rather than the bland, soggy stuff that came out of the tins.

It was only after several ocean passages that we made two discoveries. They both have their origins in the East and have made our sailing easier and far more enjoyable. The two miracles? We got a junk-rigged boat and grew our first bean sprouts. Sailing with the junk rig proved so easy, it left us more time to eat. Discovering how easy it was to grow a variety of sprouts on board made eating more enjoyable. It then ensured that however long a passage we make, we can have fresh, crisp, tasty vegetables right up to the very last day of the passage.

I suppose that all seeds will sprout, and most sprouts are edible, but some are more convenient to grow and taste better than others. The first sprouts we grew were the Chinese mung beans. They have probably become our favourite. These are the bean sprouts you get in your Chop Suey from the local take-away.

Almost all beans are rich in protein and when they begin to sprout they become rich in Vitamins B and C. So, not only do they taste good, but they do you good and will help prevent scurvy. Vitamins are largely destroyed by cooking, so most tinned foods, with the exception, I believe, of tomatoes, are almost devoid of Vitamin C. On a long passage, if you are going to live on tinned food entirely, take vitamin pills. Scurvy is a very serious condition, and I have met more than one person showing the symptoms after a long passage.

If the sprouts are going to provide all the nutrition possible, they are best eaten raw or just lightly cooked. Actually, they taste better that way because if cooked too long, they become soggy and bland, almost as if tinned.

Our next favourite sprout is alfalfa. Like the mung, alfalfa sprouts are good raw or cooked. However, they are much smaller and their taste is more delicate than mung, so would not be cooked as much, if at all. Either a mixture or both can form the basis of a salad. Slice a raw carrot, an onion, and maybe a beetroot. Add these and some mayonnaise or other salad dressing to the sprouts, and never pine for lettuce again.

Raw sprouts will do wonders for a sandwich. A few sprouts on top of cheese or cold meat, again perhaps with a little mayonnaise, taste great, whether you are beating back home to your mooring, or bowling down the Trade Winds.

An omelette becomes a proper meal if a handful of sprouts are thrown in just before it is folded over (mung sprouts should be mixed in with the liquid eggs). A bowl of sprouts can even be a good night-watch 'munchy' if all the chocolate bars and peanuts have been finished.

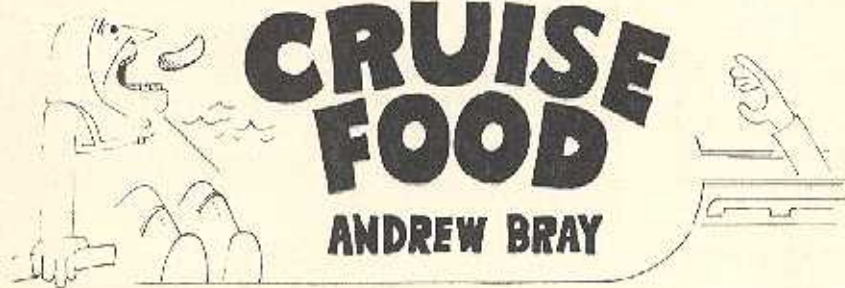
What of the other seeds? We tried wheat, but raw it tasted like grass, and cooked it was bland. We sprouted some soya beans, but did not care for their strong flavour. Aduki beans are popular sprouters, but they tend to be more expensive and are slow growing. Mustard seeds grow quickly. The sprouts are hot and spicy, and are particularly good with any kind of cold meat in sandwiches.

Watercress can also be grown on board, but cress is grown beyond the sprouting, to the leaf stage. Cress makes a good salad green, and watercress soup, believe it or not, is delicious. It is not as convenient to grow as sprouts, as it grows best spread out on wet muslin or wet blotting paper, and is a bit liable to end up in the bilge!

The sprouts, however, could not be easier. The method is to use a large jam or coffee jar and a piece of porous cloth; nylon stocking is ideal. The seeds are put into the jar. For mung beans, use about two tablespoons; for alfalfa, about one. It is amazing how they increase in size, so don't put in too many. The cloth or stocking is stretched tightly over the top of the jar and secured with a rubber band or string. Next, add enough warm water to cover the seeds easily and leave over night in a warm, dark place. In the morning, drain off the water through the cloth, and rinse with a little fresh water. Drain that off, then place the jar upside down and tilted at an angle in a bowl, so that water will continue to drain out. If the seeds sit in water, there is a chance they will rot.

The rinsing/draining process should be done two or three times a day. The sprouts will grow more quickly in warm temperatures. Mung beans will take three to four days to grow to about an inch or inch and a half. Alfalfa are much smaller seeds, but they grow to about half an inch in 2 days.

It is best to grow the sprouts in the dark. They will be a pale cream colour. If they are grown in the light, they will start to turn green as the seed begins to make chlorophyll. It is thought that their nutritional value is reduced by the manufacture of chlorophyll. Sprouts are best eaten within a day or two, but will keep up to a week in a fridge if wrapped in a plastic bag. They are so easy to grow, though, it is pointless really to keep them. We prefer to grow them little and often. <



Cruise Food — the complete answer?

I THOUGHT I had fully digested all the facts when preparing the article 'Cruise Food' (p1475 June). In fact, it was not until I reached the Azores after the first leg of AZAB and after many uninspiring evenings spent balefully staring at yet another plateful of easily-prepared but pretty indigestible slush that I was introduced to what must surely be to hunger what Stugerion is to seasickness. It comes in foil packs, no water needs adding or tins opening, it is quick to prepare and the contents are

just plain delicious. The menu ranges from cannelloni or casseroles to hot pot or haggis (good for the apparent wind).

The person who introduced me to this cruise food revolution tactfully pointed out that he had first read about it in YACHTING MONTHLY ... the next person who told me where he had read about it was not so polite, but the message was clear, they all raved over it.

The brand name is Wine & Dine and they are available, mail order, from Stevens-Lefield, Colquhoun Avenue, Glasgow G52 4ND (Tel: 041 882 1599). Max-Craft, Enesco House,

The Quay, Poole, Dorset BH15 1HJ also sell a similar or the same product and we have seen other versions in some Sainsbury and Marks & Spencer stores, equally good.

Stowage is easier than with cans as the packs can be stacked, although care should be taken to avoid puncturing them. They lack the all too familiar tinny taste and texture of canned food that can become so nauseous after a few days and preparation could not be simpler. The pack is placed unopened in boiling water for 9 minutes, snipped open and served. Alternatively, the unopened but hot packs can be wrapped up in a towel or blanket to keep them hot while the hot water is used to cook vegetables or instant mash, etc. Altogether economical in terms of gas and no great cordon bleu skills are necessary for a more than palatable meal — maybe even more important, washing-up is kept to a minimum. Sample menus and prices: Beef Goulash 8 oz for 68p; Carbonnade of Beef 8 oz 64p; Pork in Cranberry Sauce 8 oz 62p. Double portions 15 oz for £1.14, £1.08 and £1.01; postage £1 for 8 single/4 double portions.

More than tins or dried, perhaps, but we think more than worth it. AB