

Gourmet galley

Rupert Holmes shares ideas for easy, tasty meals and has tips to help extend shelf times of foods on boats with limited refrigeration

Seeking to make life on board more like that at home, by maximising comfort and convenience is understandable – as humans we've been doing that ever since we started creating makeshift mattresses by stuffing animal skins with grasses and leaves more than 10,000 years ago.

However, sometimes seeking to replicate how we do things at home when on board can lead to wistful solutions that are expensive and barely feasible for the average boat. Several of the larger yachts I've tested yachts for one of PBO's sister titles have 300-400lt of refrigeration and freezer capacity – three times larger than my unit at home. Yet 40 years ago a yacht of the same size would have had no more than one third of that capacity and some

of the 55-60ft yachts of that era I've sailed originally had only iceboxes.

Nevertheless, for many the idea of doing without a fridge for more than a couple of days is unconscionable today. Yet, even within Europe, reliable refrigeration is a relatively recent advent for a lot of people. For example, it's well within living memory that many remote houses in Greece got reliable electricity. As late as the 1980s and 1990s there were people living without refrigeration, despite the searing summer temperatures.

As a result there's still a lot of knowledge available about how to keep food without a fridge and there's

much we can learn from these traditional methods before they are forgotten.

A fundamental principle is that, if you can't keep food cold, then you need to keep it away from the microbes that are floating around in the air. It's a similar principle to using a vacuum pump to remove the air from a part-used bottle of wine, allowing it to be enjoyed at a later date without the taste becoming impaired.

The life of an opened carton of milk or fruit juice can be extended by squeezing the air out when you screw the cap on.

This works particularly

LEFT Cheese covered in oil



Zoonar GmbH/Alamy

Steve Cole Images/Getty

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Cultura Creative RF/Alamy

well for UHT milk, as its higher temperature treatment kills many more spores than regular pasteurised milk.

Equally, butter and many cheeses will keep for weeks, if not months, at ambient temperature if stored in oil.

For shorter periods, I keep feta in water, which works fine for up to a week, even in a Greek summer, providing you change the water at least once. Using brine rather

LEFT Storing feta in water works fine for up to a week. For longer voyages, store the feta in brine to extend its freshness **BELOW** The versatile butternut squash stays useable for months

LEFT Much can be done to keep and prepare great food, even on low tech boats
RIGHT Break off and eat the outer leaves from a lettuce first, the heart lasts far longer

than water would extend this time still further. It is kept in a locker in the bilge, which is generally the coolest part of a boat's interior.

A part-used jar of pesto is liable to go mouldy after a few days in summer without refrigeration, but will keep indefinitely covered in oil. As you get towards the bottom of the jar the pesto it may eventually mix with the oil, but even then it doesn't have to go to waste – it can be used as the base for a salad dressing.

The more items that can be kept like this without relying on refrigeration, the greater the chances of having fridge space for white wine, beer or tonic, as well as other items such as salad.

Fresh provisions

On that subject, the heart of a lettuce keeps amazingly longer than the outer leaves, with hard varieties such as iceberg being particularly good in this respect. They last longest if the outer leaves of several heads are broken off (never cut them with a knife) and used first, followed progressively by the middle and inner leaves. You might therefore use three lettuce over the course of a week, consuming a few leaves of each every day. By doing this on one Atlantic crossing we were able to eat fresh lettuce up to day 18.

Similarly, savoy cabbage can keep for four to five weeks even

without a fridge if you eat the outer leaves of each head first, while red and white cabbages keep even longer.

For those who need to be autonomous for extended periods, or who are on low budgets, some vegetables will keep for an extremely long time. Butternut squashes are a prime example that will be useable after months, while onions also keep for extended periods in temperate climates. Aubergines may keep for a week or two, smaller squashes such as cucumber and courgette generally keep less well.

'These methods free up fridge space for wine, beer or tonic'

The two keys to storing fruit and vegetables for more than a few days are ventilation and secure stowage in which items can't become bruised through moving around. Most items will keep better if stored away from direct light. Although nets are frequently recommended for stowing fresh provisions, they aren't ideal for a number of reasons, unless they can be positioned immediately under the deck head, such that they won't swing around in a seaway.

A number of modern boats have pull-out plastic baskets in the galley lockers, which are ideal, although extra capacity may still be needed for long passages.

If provisioning for a long passage, or in a hot climate, washing items in a solution of weak disinfectant (vinegar will do) gets rid of any unseen surface mould and insect eggs. This will also help keep the boat clear of wildlife such as fruit flies and cockroaches, as well as postponing the onset of mould. Note that some items, principally leaf-type vegetables such as cabbages, onions and leeks, may be

Oleksandr Perepelysia/Alamy



Mihai Blananu/Alamy

best left unwashed, as water trapped between the leaves can accelerate their decay. Checking over fresh produce daily will maximise its shelf life – this can be a tedious chore, but there's a good reason for the old cliché about the rotten apple.

Eat like a local

By buying local produce you'll often get great food without paying a fortune, as well as frequently fewer problems with storing perishables. In the Mediterranean it's easy to follow the diet of the locals, although a lot of Brits don't do this. Borrowing some of these techniques can make life on board easier when cruising in a summer heatwave in the UK.

Dipping bread in olive oil mixed with a few herbs and a sprinkling of salt avoids the need to keep butter cool, and is healthier. In remote areas of hot countries, fruit and vegetables that are sourced fresh from market every day is often sold from mobile trucks. This is nearly always better quality than the often poor selection of fresh produce found in village shops.

In hot climates a wide selection of salads is essential. I'm not thinking masses of lettuce here, rather a variety including pasta salads, lentil salad, Greek salad, potato salad and so on. That said, I'm very also partial to the Greek marouli – shredded lettuce leaves, with a simple dressing of olive oil, lemon juice and salt, often with the addition of fresh dill and spring onions.

Some dishes are so easy to make from scratch there's no need to store ready



Greek salad

Malcolm P. Chapman/Getty

made versions. Hummus is a favourite of mine and can be made with store cupboard ingredients and no special implements. Mash chick peas with tahini (sesame paste) using a fork and add lemon and garlic to taste. It's so simple I've even made it while racing two-handed across the Atlantic.

Fava or Greek gigantes (butter beans with a tomato and dill sauce) can be made using dried beans easily, especially if you have a pressure cooker. They make a cheap, tasty and nutritious side dish based on ingredients that are easy to stow and last almost indefinitely.

Home-made guacamole is an easy treat and beats the ready-made varieties hands down. Simply mash ripe avocado with a

'Hummus is so simple I've even made it while racing two-handed across the Atlantic'

fork, adding a little minced onion and finely chopped tomato, garlic, plus lemon or lime juice. Equally, salad dressings only take a few moments to make from olive oil, vinegar or lemon juice, plus flavourings such as garlic, honey, mustard and so on. Each batch can be kept for a few days without refrigeration.

Popcorn makes a perfect snack for small boats without a lot of stowage. The unpopped corns take up next to no space and are almost ridiculously cheap, yet it's quick to make – I usually use olive oil instead of butter.

Bread-making

Bread is easy to make on board via a number of routes. I have friends with larger boats who have breadmakers,

making it as easy as at home. These use a relatively small amount of electrical power – roughly 35Ah for a loaf – a similar value to running a fridge all day.

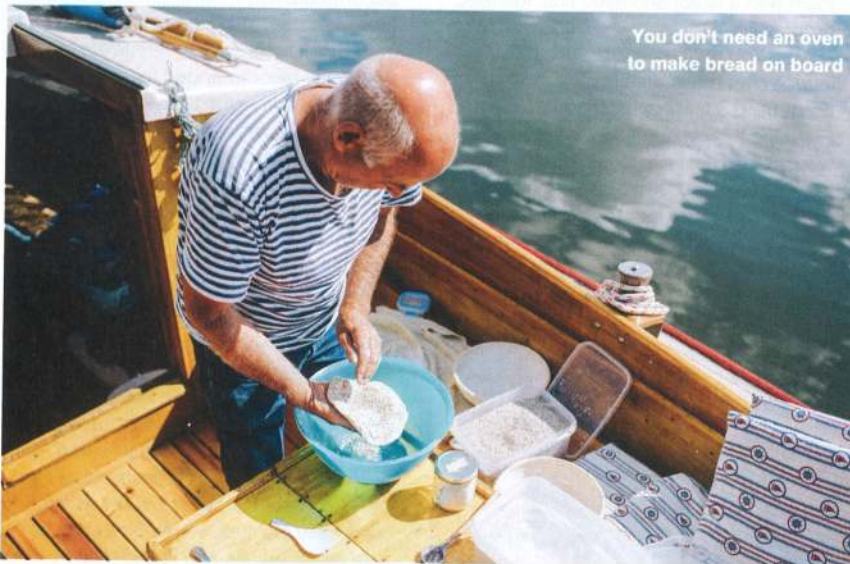
However, on a boat with a good supply of solar panels they can be run during a sunny afternoon when batteries are already full and the regulator is dumping excess power. Alternatively, it can be run without impact on batteries while motoring in a calm (if you're not expecting to motor for long, time the baking part of the cycle for the period you expect to use the engine). I don't have space on board for a breadmaker, so mix and knead dough by hand. Of course it needs to prove at the correct temperature (ideally between 24-28°C).

In the UK this may mean pre-heating the oven or a pan gently, but out of season in Greece I simply put the dough in a saucepan to keep warm in the sun.

What if you don't have an oven on board? This isn't a problem either – bread can be made in a covered frying pan – you just have to make sure the temperature stays within appropriate limits. This also has the advantage of using a lot less gas – many boat ovens are astoundingly badly insulated and consume a disproportionate amount of fuel.

Indeed, my friend Aleko Stephan got so accustomed to making bread this way while sailing his Nicholson 32 from Greece to the Pacific, via the Magellan Strait outbound, and Beagle Channel and Falkland Islands returning, that he continued to make bread this way after returning home. He typically adds herbs, olives and nuts to his loaves, turning them almost into a meal in their own right.

Equally, bread can be made with honey instead of sugar. What if you have no yeast? Don't worry – although dried yeast is fantastic mankind was successfully baking bread for millennia before its advent. Yeast is present in small quantities in air and is surprisingly simple to harvest. An easy method is to add warm water to a little dried fruit, which will promote growth



You don't need an oven to make bread on board

Wayra/Getty



Hummus can be made with store cupboard ingredients

Ian May/EyeEm/Getty

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In hot climates a wide selection of salads is always welcome



of any yeast on the surface of the fruit. You can then simply use the yeasty water for making bread.

Easy yoghurt

It's also easy to make yoghurt on board, although the culture doesn't like movement, so it's best done on a calm day in port. First heat a pan of milk up to almost boiling – this kills the bugs you don't want – and allow to cool. Then heat to around 38°C, transfer to a pre-warmed container and add a couple of table spoons of natural live yoghurt. This then needs to be kept warm for 8-12 hours – one of the easiest ways is to place it in warm water in an insulated cool box. If you prefer Greek yoghurt, strain by placing it in a sieve lined with muslin (or a very clean tea towel) for a few hours. Yoghurt doesn't need to be made with fresh milk – UHT is fine and when he was travelling Aleko used powdered milk.

Bottling is an age-old method of preserving food that can easily be carried out on board. Apart from some high-acid fruits a pressure cooker is needed to achieve a temperature of 121°C that's needed to kill the spores that cause

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rupert Holmes has 80,000 miles of offshore experience, including racing two-handed around Britain and transatlantic.

botulism. Even then, scrupulous cleanliness is essential, as is following instructions carefully, including exactly how much to fill each jar.

As with many aspects of food preparation the first few times can seem convoluted and complex, but you quickly establish an easy routine.

This is a great option if you have glut of freshly-caught fish, or pick up a basket full of cut-price food at a market.

Equally, it means part of a big batch of home-made gigantes or fava can be saved and stored for later use, without needing refrigeration. Vacuum bagging is a more up to date option, although it requires more equipment and creates some plastic waste.

These are not only options for long-distance cruisers. Eating great food on board is a highlight of many sailing holidays, but is often tempered by the effort required to prepare it. However, bottling or vacuum bagging components of a meal in advance at home can dramatically reduce the effort required to prepare meals on board.

In some parts of the world in the right season it is also possible to dry food in the sun and wind. If you're in harbour or at anchor for a week in the Mediterranean, for instance, that will be enough to dry some sliced fruits and vegetables.

The process can be greatly speeded up using a solar cooker (choose a model that does not cook in a sealed container) when two or three sunny days may be all that is needed.

£50 ice box

A thoroughly insulated space in the coolest part of the boat can keep food chilled for an extended period. Under bunk lockers are ideal as their base is against the sea and therefore naturally cooled.

Insulate the top and sides with expanded foam insulation such as Celotex – ideally a 4in thickness, although 2in will work. Add a hard acrylic outer face to make it easier to clean. If items are placed in there cold, along with a frozen 5lt water bottle, the box will stay cool for a week, even in high summer.

A better galley

Many of today's new yachts have well laid out galleys, with optimised stowage and streamlined ergonomics, in the same way as you'd expect of a high-end kitchen at home. However, a huge number of older boats have badly designed galleys where economy of construction was the prime factor in the design, rather than ease of use. UK company GN Espace recognised this and offers a big range of storage and food preparation products designed to make the most of a compact galley.