

Picnics



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The History of the Picnic

If you say the word several times fast it sounds a bit funny. But, the picnic is one of the few things in history that means basically what it did in the beginning when the concept was first introduced. Here is a short history of the activity known as the picnic.

It is believed that the word “picnic” came from the French word, *piquer*, which for those of you who didn’t choose to take French in high school, means “to pick.” The first picnics were more formal. But, the concept was that the invited guests brought something to share with the entire group. In France, it was wine and the picnic was held in a bistro like setting.

The picnic then turned into a much needed rest from hunting. In Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hunting was a sport of the rich and famous with little dogs and a poor fox. People would sit and relax while eating and drinking and laughing.

Still, in keeping with the bourgeoisie class, picnics moved away from hunting to social gatherings. Each person still contributed something to the occasion, whether a meal or some sort of game. The food served was cold since the only thing you had was a blanket and there were no outdoor cooking places.

Picnics have come a long way in a short time. People began using public parks when the government opened them to citizens. You could bring your blanket, your basket full of goodies, and relax under a shady tree to watch the ducks swim by as you enjoyed a delicious meal. What a great way to get some much needed relaxation and fun.

Once the picnic moved to the park, parks began providing benches and various forms of protection for picnic guests. After a good rain the ground is not exactly hospitable to blankets and bottoms. Shelters mean that even if it rains, the group is safe and dry while they wait it out.

Now the occasion for a picnic can be a gathering of friends, church members, family, or an intimate meeting of two lovebirds. The food no longer has to be cold cuts and soda pop. City parks provide outdoor grills so picnickers can enjoy burgers and hotdogs just like in their own backyard.

Parks also provide activities for the group if they want to do something more than play board games or throw the Frisbee. Paddle boats, hiking trails, and bikes for rent give everyone their choice of what they want to do for the day.

When invited to a picnic, it is still customary to bring something to contribute to the meal. This way, no one person has to pay for everything or prepare the entire meal on their own. And, everyone still has fun away from home.

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Picnic Baskets

When picnics first took off during the Victorian era, people packed their wicker baskets with all sorts of cold cuts, desserts, and other scrumptious goodies. They wrapped chilled wine in newspaper to keep it cold and everyone headed off to the park for a day of fun in high style.

You can still find those traditional picnic baskets today. The wicker is probably sturdier than it was back then, but the gingham lining is still the same. Unlike before, the accessories are not the finest China and crystal wine flutes, but instead acrylic or plastic ware to withstand the bumps and bangs that tend to happen when carrying the baskets to parks. Picnics are not such a hoity-toity affair anymore, but you can still dine in style with your favorite picnic lunch basket.

There are several sites online that feature picnic baskets for sale in all shapes and sizes. Some can run you as high as several hundred dollars for the larger ones. These superior picnic baskets come with service for two, four, or six that includes cloth napkins, cups or wine glasses, corkscrew, cutting board, slicer, plates, and silverware. With all that inside, there is still room left for food, a bottle of wine, and maybe a blanket if you roll it up tight.

Families with children may want to take a more practical approach to the picnic basket they choose for their days at the park. For them, there is the cooler tote. They are a cross between a picnic basket and an insulated cooler. The outside covering is heavy duty fabric available in a variety of colors that is easy to clean. The insulation keeps cold foods chilled and hot foods warm.

These coolers also come with a service for two, four, or six. Usually the utensils and other items are in a front compartment, leaving the main portion of the cooler open for drinks and food. You can even purchase these cooler type totes on wheels to save your back from the strain of carrying it along with your children's toys, games or younger children.

For couples or groups out for a hike, there are picnic baskets of sorts for you as well. It is more like a cooler tote that fits on your back, so we'll call it a picnic backpack. They can be slung over the shoulder or carried on the back just like a normal backpack. Many feature compartments for wine bottles and other beverages that are separate from the compartment for the food. Silverware, plates, and the like are included as well.

To check out some of the older, more time-honored baskets, as well as newer trends in picnic baskets go to the Internet. Sites like www.picnicworld.net and www.picnicfun.com offer a huge selection of totes, coolers, wicker picnic baskets, and picnic backpacks to suit almost every taste and requirement.

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Picnic Necessities

Have you ever gotten to the park for a picnic and realized you forgot something once the car was unpacked? Yeah, me too! Thank goodness for cell phones. They allow you to call someone up and see if they can bring along whatever item was forgotten.

Here is a list of some of the more essential picnic items. In fact, any outdoor excursion may need these items, so keep the non-perishable ones handy in your car. You never know when they will prove useful.

Don't forget a blanket. Many picnickers choose parks with shelters, but sometimes it is relaxing to sit next to the water and feed the ducks. A waterproof ground covering works in dry or damp conditions and are also easier to clean. Simply wipe with a damp cloth and dry with a towel or allow to air dry.

Pack the picnic basket with utensils, plates, and cups. In a hurry to get all the food accounted for, we often times forget about what we will eat on. For a small gathering of two, four or six, custom made picnic baskets come complete with plates, utensils, and cups. Larger groups can use disposable items that can be thrown away afterwards so as little as possible returns home. After all, who wants to wash dishes after they've had such a relaxing afternoon?

Carry items for the grill. If you're venturing to a park with BBQ grills available, you'll definitely want to remember these items. Public grills may or may not be cleaned by the last person who used it. Charcoal is not provided and neither are tools such as spatulas. Covering the grill with aluminum foil keeps the food from coming into contact with dirty grill elements or food pieces from someone else's meal. A jug of water is used to put out the coals and clean dirty hands after eating.

Oh, I almost forgot the food. Cold foods should be kept on ice in a cooler that is separate from the one for drinks and/or hot foods. You may not be carrying anything hot, especially if it is a summer picnic, but drinks need their own cooler apart from raw meats.

Kids want to be entertained. Pick up a few games to take with you so they won't get bored. If they are into video games and have a Nintendo DS or a Game Boy, you just need a supply of batteries. Board games, card games, and the like are great for adults and children as well. Don't forget the Frisbee, horseshoes, badminton racquets or volleyball, if the area is set up for such activities, either

A first aid kit is a good thing to have handy. Unfortunately, accidents do happen. The cook can get burned on the grill and kids can get cuts and scrapes from playing. In your first aid kit, include bandages, antibiotic ointment, pain medication, antiseptic wipes, and gauze. You can find small first aid kits that are perfect for storing in your vehicle at most pharmacies.

In all the excitement of an upcoming picnic gathering, don't forget what is important to bring. Make a list if you have to, so nothing is left behind. Once you arrive, you'll find it much more relaxing if you don't have to return for something forgotten or use that cell phone to call someone else to bring it to you. So, set the ringer on that phone to mute or better yet, leave it in the car and enjoy the day of fun, family and good food.

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Fun Picnic Activities for Everyone

Picnics combine a good time with great food. Everyone chips in to bring a variety of fare that can be enjoyed throughout the gathering. Guests shouldn't forget they are responsible for the entertainment on a picnic as well. Here are some ideas for picnic activities for both kids and adults that are sure to add to the fun and laid back atmosphere of the day.

Will there be music at this picnic? If so, bring along a karaoke machine. Everyone can participate in this part of the fun. Friends and family can impersonate their favorite musical artist and sing a song or two. The rest of the group can critique just like on "American Idol." It's fun and will get everyone laughing and having a great time.

Races are a fun thing to do at a picnic also. For family gatherings where people haven't seen each other in a long while, there is a lot of bravado going on. Give the guys (and gals, too) a chance to prove their athletic prowess with a few competitions. Try the potato sack race, the three-legged race, the egg toss, and the wheelbarrow race. The winners are given bragging rights until the next get-together.

Young kids may enjoy board games like Chutes and Ladders, Candy Land, or card games especially for them. Set up a picnic table where they can all sit together and play together. If you decide on arts and crafts, and the children are younger and need supervision, an adult or older child can supervise so kids don't eat anything that they shouldn't from the craft table or cut themselves with scissors, etc.

Games like charades work well at picnics too. Divide the participants into two teams. Let each team think up things to act out for the opposing team. Choose a common theme like movies, television, sports, or entertainment. Charades is a great indoor game, but when you take it outdoors there's even more ideas of things to think of and more room to really get into the game.

Some of the work is already done for you when the spot for the picnic offers activities to park goers. The adventurous members of the group can go for a hike along nature trails. Most trails are simple so no one gets hurt and are clearly marked to avoid anyone getting lost. There may even be challenging trails available, for those who are more daring, which snake through the hills, trees, or tall grass and across small streams.

Depending on the park, picnickers can set up the volleyball net and play a game or opt for badminton rackets and a shuttlecock. As long as nothing is destroyed and all equipment is removed most park officials don't have a problem with these types of recreation. Responsible picnickers are good picnickers so check with the park beforehand to make sure games such as these are allowed.

You can even make up your own games to play and activities to do. The point is to provide plenty of entertainment so no one, no matter how old or young, gets bored when they should be having a good time.

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Picnic Safety Tips

When it is time to attend a picnic, everyone thinks about the good times they will have. No one is thinking about the safety factors involved. At your next picnic, consider these issues so that everyone has a great time without incident or injury.

1. Check out the facilities where the picnic will be held. Is there a grill, ample trashcans, bathrooms, and decent shelters? Some shelters have bathrooms nearby or within the shelter if it is a large one. No one wants to run halfway across the park to locate a bathroom for their five-year old child. Know the place you will be using before you get there when possible.
2. Even if the weather is not hot, the sun can burn the skin of kids and adults playing or grilling. Be sure that everyone has a good layer of sunscreen on to protect them all day. Waterproof sunscreen works best in the presence of sweat so protection isn't compromised. Don't forget to bring along hats and sunglasses as well.
3. Completely clean coolers before filling them with ice. The ice cooling the drinks may be used to keep drinks cold in cups. As the ice melts, drain it into empty containers or cups for ice cold drinking water instead of buying bottled water.
4. Don't forget the insect repellent. Check labels to make sure it is safe for kids if they will be attending the picnic. Avoid the eyes and other mucous membranes when spraying or rubbing it on the skin and reapply as needed to keep those nasty buggers away.
5. Have adequate refrigeration for cold foods and raw meat. The night before the picnic, refrigerate all raw meats and anything that will need to maintain a cool temperature at the picnic. Move them directly from the refrigerator to a cooler full of ice. Dump the ice from the raw food cooler once the food has been prepared so no one mistakes it for ice to be used in their drink.
6. Cover all foods on the picnic table. It is easy for a fly or other insect to crawl or fly into the macaroni salad or land on the chicken when no one is looking. Use aluminum foil or plastic wrap and keep your food safe from these unwanted guests.
7. Bring hand sanitizer and a jug of water for hand washing and cleanup. Hand sanitizer works best when hands aren't visibly soiled. Use water to rinse off dirt and grime, dry, and then cover hands with a generous dollop of hand sanitizer. The water can be used to cool off hot coals when grilling is complete as well.
8. Throw away any mayonnaise or milk based dish that has been sitting out for more than an hour. In the heat, it doesn't take long for these types of foods to go bad. Really, any dish that needs to be served cold should be gotten rid of after meal time as well.

When you remember these and other picnic safety rules, you're in for a day full of fun and protection for everyone who attends.

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Pesky Picnic Pests

It never fails. If you build a picnic, they will come. I'm referring to the creatures of the earth that seem to find gingham and the smell of charcoal so appealing. The next time you throw a picnic be aware of crawling, flying, pesky insects that are out to ruin your day.

Now, I must be fair. The insects probably aren't purposely trying to rain on our parade, but they are a nuisance nonetheless. The biggest of which are ants. They march across the blanket or mat like an army claiming territory for their leader.

Did you know that an ant can move objects that are several times their body weight? So if you see your sandwich moving across the table and you didn't develop mental telepathy overnight, it is more than likely an ant problem. You'll kill a few but there will be reinforcements sent in to replace them and it won't take long.

Bees are another problem. The reason that bees are so scary is that many people are allergic to the venom in their stings. A bee sting can send an allergic person into anaphylactic shock in minutes. Not to mention, that stinger really hurts even if you are not allergic.

Other insects like spiders may flock or build webs under picnic tables or inside the wooden rafters of the shelter. Flies are attracted to anything and everything. They just want to land on something whether it is your bowl of uncovered potato salad or plate of hotdogs, they don't care. These bugs are too gross for words so we don't want them anywhere near our picnic festivities.

Dealing with insects is a delicate situation. Many insect repellants are made with chemicals that can be hazardous to our health if ingested or inhaled. It may be okay for the skin, but can irritate mucous membranes like the eyes and nose, especially in children. So, what are we to do to keep the critters away so that we can enjoy our picnic?

Avon cosmetics make an insect repellant that comes in a spray or a lotion. It contains sunscreen to protect when outdoors too. The best thing about it is that it's a DEET-free repellant to protect children and adults from pesky mosquitoes, flies, bees, and other biting things. It was always thought that their SkinSoSoft body oil repelled insects quite well even though that was not its intended purpose. Some people agree with this while others don't. You'll need to determine what product is the best for you and your family to keep the bugs from making you itchy and miserable during your picnic.

When it comes to the food situation at your picnic, keep all items covered with foil or plastic wrap. Anything that doesn't need to sit out can be stored in the cooler or picnic basket when it's not being served.

Another tip to consider, when it comes to bees is to avoid wearing bright colors or perfumes. Bees are attracted to brightly colored objects and sweet smells. Leave those things to the flowers growing around you to keep the bees attention on them instead of you.

Keep those pests from ruining the fun with safe insect repellants for the body. Cover food at all times and close coolers and containers whenever possible, and you'll be sure to have a fun filled day outdoors.

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Picnic Menu Ideas

The reason for a picnic is to get away from home and have a good time. At a picnic, everybody brings a dish and helps to clean up. Some shelters even provide kitchen facilities to store food that has to be kept cold when the festivities last all afternoon and into the evening.

The picnic feast has grown from a few cold items to almost anything you can think to eat. With the addition of barbeque grills at public parks, menu ideas expanded. Picnics can even turn into three or four course meals depending on your crowd. Kids won't be interested in hors d'oeuvres, just the main course.

When fashioning your menu, make sure to include something for everyone. While the main course is being prepared on the grill, people will play games and nibble on whatever you have to start off the party. So, what do you have?

My vote goes to deviled eggs. They are easy to whip up and being eggs, need to be gobbled up as soon as possible. We don't want to mess with Salmonella or anything like that. It has a way of ruining a picnic and rightfully so. For non-egg eaters, set out some cheese and crackers. Choose sharp cheddar, cheese whiz (for the kids), or another favorite cheese type along with a variety of crackers and chips such as pretzels.

Unless you have a sufficiently sealed cooler or kitchen facilities, anything with mayonnaise or a dairy base should be eaten at the start. If any of these dishes sit too long in the heat, they can be dangerous to eat. To solve the problem sit each bowl of pasta salad, macaroni salad and the like on top of a separate bowl of ice for serving.

For the main course, go traditional with burgers and dogs or add steaks to the menu. A good steak can be marinated overnight to tenderize the meat and add flavor. Chicken takes a while to cook but can be grilled. To speed up grilling, use chicken on skewers to make shish kebabs. They grill faster and can be served over a bed of rice.

Most keep side dishes simple: chips. But, adults aren't typically satisfied with a bag of greasy chips. Opt instead for a green salad or fruit salad.

A cooler full of soda is one option for beverages, but bringing in some lemonade or fresh brewed ice tea would hit the spot better. Keep the pitchers on ice. There are tea dispensers on the market that have a place for ice underneath to keep it cold.

When it's time for the next picnic, give the menu some thought. Let all of the intended guests help put it together to come up with a meal that suits everyone.

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Planning the Perfect Family Picnic

Planning a picnic is a great way for family to get together. For the person who undertakes such a task, it is important to know the participants well enough so that no one will be disappointed in your choices for the occasion. But, if they are family members, then hopefully you know them well enough anyway. Here are some tips for organizing a family picnic that will be a hit with everyone involved.

First, send out invitations. If you are like me, your extended family is not very large so it is easy to round up everyone with a few telephone calls. However, if you're blessed with a larger brood, you may want to mail invitations including RSVP requests to assess how many people will be attending. There's nothing worse than preparing food and drinks for fifty guests and having eighty show up. People tend to get a little testy about their food.

Give yourself at least two to three weeks before the event for the invitation process. In the meantime, start scouting for spots to host the picnic. Most public parks have large shelters for big parties. Base the size of your shelter on the number of invitations sent out times two. That will be a rough estimate. People may have children.

Let's discuss the location for a moment. Choose a place that has additional activities for kids to participate in. Paddle boats and volleyball nets are usually a good choice. People can get up a game while others go out on the water. Hiking is also a fun thing to do at a picnic. Find a buddy and a trail and you are ready for action. Also, it probably isn't wise to picnic in an area that isn't easily accessible by the elderly or those with small children.

Now comes the hard part. It is time to decide on the menu. We know what traditionally is served at a picnic but our family may be anything but traditional. Entertain the thought as well that there may be vegetarians or non-meat eaters in the group. People may not eat pork or beef for religious or health reasons or simply because they are trying to cut back. Either way, food choices of those attending need to be taken into account.

At a recent picnic, several dishes such as chicken were cooked beforehand and brought to the gathering. Buffet servers and Sternos were used to warm up the meats while other items like hotdogs, ribs, and hamburgers were cooking. Another idea is to bring chafing dishes to keep hot foods hot and cold dishes cold during the entire time you are picnicking.

For entertainment, be sure to have plenty of games on hand, especially if there will be children present. Instead of bringing music, especially if older family members are present, sing songs together or tell childhood stories about each other. All it takes for a family gathering to be a success is a good dose of laughter and a great serving food.

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Simple Romantic Picnic Ideas

When the weather gets warm, the feelings of romance begin to grow and flourish. Everyone wants to have a good time with their chosen sweetie. What better idea is there than to pack up a few things and head on out for a romantic picnic? Here are some ideas you can use to have a special day at the park, in the mountains, or even in your own back yard.

If the idea is to rekindle the flame, keep it simple. People pack too many things or plan too many activities surrounding the picnic and get frustrated if all doesn't go as planned. That's one way to sour a romantic mood before it even gets started. By keeping your planning uncomplicated you're well on your way to have a nice, relaxing picnic with your love.

The first thing to keep simple is the menu. Romantic dates are about enjoying each other and this includes picnics. Decide on food items like fruit slices, chicken fingers, cheese, crackers, and a beverage, preferably something with sparkling bubbles like wine, champagne, or something non-alcoholic if you're driving to the picnic spot.

A soft blanket or cushy waterproof mat gives you both a place to sit and enjoy your rendezvous. Another blanket will be used to keep out the cold as evening approaches. Jackets are a wise choice too in case of inclement weather, but consider shielding each other from the chill by cuddling as well.

For an even cozier picnic, bring a tent. Yes I said a tent. It doesn't have to be large, just big enough for two. That way, if you fall asleep or want to watch the sun go down, you are sheltered from the elements. A romantic picnic in a pup tent is so nouveau chic.

It is nice to have a traditional picnic basket for romantic occasions. Remember that a cooler will also be needed for the food if anything needs to be kept cool. Wicker picnic baskets look nice but they are not made to carry foods that need to maintain a certain temperature. The baskets you can buy online or in stores now come with utensils, cutting boards, corkscrews, and wine glasses so that part will be a no-brainer.

If you plan on exchanging gifts, set the mood. Bring some flowers for your partner and sing him or her love songs. Guys, this would be the perfect time to remember "your" song. Take the time to remember back to the early days of your relationship when both of you were nervous and awkward around each other. Or, if you're now married, reminisce about those newlywed days.

A romantic picnic can be so much fun if you keep things simple and go with the moment. It doesn't have to be perfect just memorable. Take the time to really connect with one another and just plain enjoying each other's company.

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Indoor Picnics are Just as Fun

Who says that a picnic has to be outdoors? It is a given, yes, that it will be outdoors but it is not set in stone. What if it rains or one person in the family is under the weather? There's no need to cancel your fun in these instances. Instead have the picnic inside. Here are some ideas for hosting an indoor picnic.

Whatever the reason you are indoors for the picnic, it can be just as much fun as it would be if it was being held outdoors. Start the fun by setting the scene. Will the setting be a picnic on the beach or a family picnic in the park? The choice is yours.

To start, clear a space in the middle of the room that will be used for the picnic. The living room is the usual spot but the family room or the den may be more ideal in your home. Spread out a big blanket for everyone to sit on. In a beach scene setting, each person can have their own blanket or towel to sit on.

At the beach you have sand and umbrellas and bathing suits. Since you are indoors, participants may want to opt for shorts instead of swimsuits, but you can still have the rest more or less. Spread plastic seashells, buckets, and shovels around the room. Attach big colorful sun pictures to the walls on a rainy day to liven up the picnic.

Indoor picnics can be intimate occasions as well. When the kids are small it may not be feasible to sneak away for an outdoor picnic. Wait until they are asleep and steel away into the living room for a romantic picnic for two. Some examples of setting the scene for a romantic picnic indoors include using candlelight to set the mood instead of the setting sun or playing a CD of ocean sounds to replicate the beach.

One advantage of an indoor picnic is the kitchen facilities. There is no preplanning other than making sure that you have the food you want to eat available in the fridge. Grill steaks, hotdogs, hamburgers, and chicken on an indoor grill top or in a grilling skillet. Even cleanup can wait until the next day if you want.

The best part about an indoor picnic is the fact that there are no bugs or noise ordinances. You can sing, play music, laugh, and have a ball all night long in the comfort of your own home and no one will bother you.

Indoor picnics don't have to be boring or corny. Treat it just like a picnic outside in the fresh air. Serve up picnic fare and have games to pass the time. Even at home, somehow, food tastes better when eaten on a blanket. Give it a try tonight.

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