

Picnic Planning

The cool thing about having a picnic meal is that it can happen in almost any outdoor scenario. There is something special about enjoying a meal outdoors on a nice day.

Outside is the way to go, whether you plan to take advantage of your backyard or venture out to a local park. When planning a picnic, some essentials must be on your list. Here is how to plan a picnic you will not forget.:

Location

Location is the most important variable of any picnic experience. Remember, all picnic spots are not created equal, and finding the right one can make or break your picnic experience. If going to a state or national park, beforehand check to see if they are open and what facilities are best for a picnic. Always remember, park etiquette is important; you should always carry out what you carry in.

Date And Time

Once you have found the perfect location, it is time to pick a date and time. While weekends and holidays are popular picnic times, do not forget about weekday afternoons or evenings for a quieter experience.

Planning a picnic for the warmer months is no guarantee when it comes to temperamental weather. Keep an eye on the weather forecast and have a backup plan if needed.

Supplies

The very first step to planning a picnic is preparing. List everything you think you will need, from sunscreen to utensils, so nothing gets forgotten.

Bring a blanket, large towels, or a tablecloth. Having something to sit on is important in case picnic tables are unavailable. Consider a portable picnic table if you prefer to enjoy nature seated at the table. Take lawn chairs, cushions, or pillows for anyone who might find the ground too uncomfortable.

You will also want a picnic basket, reusable shopping bags, an insulated tote, or a backpack to carry the lighter-weight and non-perishable supplies like plates, cups, utensils, napkins, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and a bottle opener or corkscrew if needed. To ensure that there is a level surface for drinks, bring a cutting board.

A cooler, ice packs, and/or ice are essential for keeping the foods and beverages cold. Consider reusable utensils, bottles, and food storage containers. Make sure whatever containers you use seal well to avoid spills.

Other picnic supplies you might want to bring include insect repellent, sunscreen, a trash bag for cleanup, a hat and sunglasses, and an umbrella for shade. Activities add another layer of fun to a picnic. You may also want to take a few games to enjoy. Frisbees, balls, board games, and playing cards are good options.

Meal Planning

Picnic food ideas are numerous. Themed picnics sound fun to me. Pick a place in the world whose cuisine you enjoy, and theme a picnic around their most famous dishes.

Picnics and backyard barbecues are all about relaxation! So ensure your menu is full of no-fuss recipes you can quickly whip up. Keep it simple whether you choose a potluck style or pack a few picnic staples. I recommend taking foods that travel well and do not need to be refrigerated.

The best picnic foods are foods or drinks that are easy to transport and eat. Think of handheld items like sandwiches and wraps. Foods that can be made in advance are also preferable. To complete the meal, bring the appropriate condiments, such as fruit preserves, salt, pepper, mustard, mayo, ketchup, etc.

Staying hydrated is essential. Water should always be an option, but drinks like iced tea and lemonade are delicious – and who can say no to an Arnold Palmer?

Regarding the food you are packing, the possibilities are endless. You can never go wrong with chips or pretzels, but you could also bring chopped vegetables, trail mix, or nuts. These healthy options will also not take up as much room as an air-filled chip bag.

Fresh fruits like berries, peaches, cherries, grapes, and watermelon are excellent treats. For something sweeter, pack desserts that do not need utensils, such as cookies, cupcakes, and brownies.

Keeping Food Safe

Proper food temperatures must be maintained to keep food safe from harmful bacteria. Food must never remain in the “Danger Zone”- between 40°F and 135°F

for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if outdoor temperatures are above 90°F. When the weather is too hot, bacteria can multiply quickly, leading to foodborne illness.

Packing beverages in one cooler and perishable foods in another is an excellent way to prevent perishable foods from being overexposed to warm temperatures. Keeping coolers closed as much as possible will help to keep the contents cold longer.

Hot food should be kept hot at or above 140°F. Wrap hot foods well and place them in an insulated container until serving.

Remember that hand washing is still very important! Bring water and soap or sanitizing wipes to clean hands before, during, and after the meal.

Picnics are the perfect warm-weather activity. There is nothing quite like spending a sunny day outdoors, surrounded by good company, and feasting on delicious food.

(Sources: www.fightbac.org; richmond.ces.ncsu.edu; usda.gov)