

Safe Picnics

“There are always ants at a picnic.” You can see ants and avoid them, but it’s not possible to see, taste or smell dangerous bacteria that can cause illness if food is mishandled. Bacteria grow and multiply rapidly in the danger zone between 40 °F and 140 °F. Food transported without an adequate ice source or left out in the sun at a picnic or when tailgating won’t stay safe for long. Family and friends who eat mishandled food may get the flu-like symptoms caused by foodborne illness.

Follow these tips for packing food safely for a picnic or when tailgating.

- Try to plan just the right amount of foods to take. That way, you will not have to worry about the storage or safety of leftovers.
- Clean preparation is essential. Wash hands and work areas; be sure all utensils are clean before preparing food.
- Foods to be cooked ahead should be cooked in plenty of time to chill them thoroughly in the refrigerator. Use an insulated cooler with sufficient ice or ice packs to keep the food at 40 °F. Pack food from the refrigerator right into the cooler.
- If you are planning on take-out foods such as fried chicken or barbecued beef, eat them within two hours of pick-up or buy ahead of time and chill before packing the foods into the cooler.
- Overwrap raw meat packages, or place in plastic bags and pack in a cooler separately from ready-to-eat foods to prevent cross-contamination.
- In warm weather, do not put cooler in the trunk; carry it inside the air-conditioned car.
- At the picnic, keep the cooler in the shade. Keep the lid closed and avoid repeated openings. Replenish the ice if it melts.

- Use a separate cooler for drinks so the one containing perishable food will not be constantly opened and closed.
- Except when it is being served, the food should be stored in a cooler.
- When handling raw meat, remove from the cooler only the amount that will fit on the grill. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends against eating raw or undercooked ground beef since harmful bacteria could be present.
- To be sure bacteria are destroyed, cook hamburgers and ribs to 160 °F (medium doneness). Cook ground poultry to 165 °F and poultry parts to 180 °F. Reheat pre-cooked meats until steaming hot.
- Do not partially grill extra hamburgers to use later. Once you begin cooking hamburgers by any method, cook them until completely done to assure that bacteria are destroyed.
- When taking foods off the grill, put them on a clean plate to avoid cross-contamination. Do not put the cooked items on the same platter that held the raw meat.
- Place leftover foods in the cooler promptly after serving. Any food left outside for more than an hour should be discarded. If there is still ice in the cooler when you get home, the leftovers are okay to eat.

Try one of these menus the next time you tailgate for a safe and delicious meal.

TAILGATE MENU 1

Curry-Yogurt Dip with Fresh Vegetables
Oven-Fried Chicken
Pasta Salad
Mini Pineapple Cheese Cakes
Bubbling Jade

Game Plan: Make everything the night before; package in containers with tight-fitting lids and store in the refrigerator. Prepare dip by stirring 6 tablespoons mayonnaise and 2 tablespoons curry into one pint of plain yogurt. Toss cooked pasta with crunchy vegetables and Italian dressing. Package tomato wedges in a separate container to garnish pasta salad when ready to serve.

Mini Pineapple Cheese Cakes

8 small graham cracker crusts
3-ounce package pineapple-flavored gelatin
1 cup boiling water
1½ pounds cottage cheese
¼ cup sugar
8½-ounce can crushed pineapple, undrained
1 tablespoon water
2 teaspoons cornstarch
Dissolve gelatin in boiling water and cool to lukewarm. In a blender, thoroughly mix the cheese and sugar. Slowly add the gelatin and blend well. Pour the cheese mixture into the individual crusts. Refrigerate until firm. Empty the pineapple and juice into a saucepan, add water and cornstarch. Bring to a boil stirring constantly. Cool 15 minutes and spread over the top of each cheesecake. Chill at least 1 hour.

Bubbling Jade

Two 3-ounce packages lime-flavored gelatin
2 cups boiling water
4 cups cold water
Two 6-ounce cans frozen limeade, thawed undiluted
46-ounce can pineapple juice
64-ounce bottle ginger ale
Dissolve gelatin in boiling water. Stir in cold water, limeade concentrate and pineapple juice. Chill. Add ginger ale before serving. Makes 20 cups.

Game Strategy: This menu makes enough for eight hungry fans. The dip, chicken and cheesecakes are perishable and must be kept in the cooler with plenty of ice. Make sure food is thoroughly chilled when it goes into the cooler. The pasta salad and beverage are not as perishable, but still belong in the cooler. You may want to freeze the punch in a gallon milk jug to help keep the other food cold and safe. Remember to return leftovers to the cooler and keep the cooler cold.

TAILGATE MENU 2

Nibbles
Dried Beef Open-Face Sandwiches
Basket of Fresh Fruit
Oatmeal-Raisin Cookies

Game Plan: Make nibbles and cookies ahead of time and store in airtight containers for up to a few days. Wash fruit before packing in the picnic basket. Take an assortment of whole-grain party bread, bringing only what you expect to use. Choose the dried beef that is sold in the canned meat section of the grocery store and take mustard and horseradish as condiments. Unopened canned meat does not need refrigeration.

Nibbles

6 cups dry cereal (like puffed wheat, rice squares or oat circles)
2 cups pretzel sticks
1 cup peanuts
⅓ cup margarine
4 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon celery flakes
1 teaspoon onion powder
½ teaspoon garlic powder
Combine cereal and pretzels. In a saucepan, melt margarine and combine with Worcestershire sauce and seasoning. Toss with cereals and add peanuts. Place in a shallow roasting pan. Bake at 275 °F for 1 hour, stirring every 10 minutes. Makes 2 quarts.

Game Strategy: The foods selected for this menu will pack into the picnic basket. Choose this game strategy when refrigeration is limited or to keep on hand in case you have extra guests.

SOURCE:

1. The National Food Safety Database. *Safety in Your Picnic Basket*. Prepared by Susan Brewer, July 1994.

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