

Move over Manet

Pick a park and pack a picnic for two

by Lorraine Mercedes Picot, RNCP, ROHP, n.d.

Miles of blue skies above and a carpet of green grass to stretch out on. Who doesn't cherish a memory of a delectable picnic spread out on a checkered tablecloth on a warm sun-drenched afternoon. Tell Manet, his friend and the ladies to move over and grab a bit of summer before it passes you by...and don't wait for the weekend. Remember...what follows two days of rain? Monday.



We all need a break from recycled air and the hum of our computer terminals once in a while. Have a good hard look at your Daytimer and an equally discerning look at your co-workers to see who needs a break as much as you do. Send your chosen-one a tantalizing little email or, better yet, a hand-written invitation to a mid-day picnic in the park.

I've selected a few tempting recipes to include in your picnic menu. Plan a few days ahead so the day is as relaxing for you as it is for your guest. Don't forget to check the weather forecast.

Get hold of a wicker picnic basket or a good insulated carrier, some plastic containers to store your treats in, a few ice-packs, and colourful plates, napkins, and utensils. To frame your masterpiece, a bright cloth tablecloth is a must; make sure it's big enough to sit on.

Even a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich would taste heavenly with this much ambiance but this is a good time to show-off your savoir-faire. Wrapped sandwiches with exotic fillings that you either assemble on the spot or beforehand will be a sure hit so I've included a couple of them.

My favourite is still a delectable smorgasbord of savoury little cold dishes served with bakery fresh bread. Store-bought tabouli salad and hummus make great sandwich fillings or can be served as side dishes with your homemade additions.

If you're not too sure of your culinary skills, visit your local deli and peel off the labels. I won't tell.

Be sure to pack a couple of cold drinks such as old-fashioned ginger beer, refreshing fruit juices, or iced tea. Finish your meal with cold wedges of fresh pineapple to provide some digestive enzymes to get you through the afternoon.

Imagine that gentle breeze, the sun on your face....go for it!

Favourite Picnic Recipes:

Herbed Stuffed Tomatoes

4 medium-size firm tomatoes
1 green onion, thinly sliced
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Tbs. minced fresh cilantro
1 Tbs. minced fresh parsley
1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
½ Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
small dash of red pepper sauce



Core 3 of the tomatoes and reserve shells and pulp. Chop up tomato pulp along with remaining tomato. Blend together all other ingredients and stir into chopped tomatoes. Stuff mixture back into shells and sprinkle with more fresh parsley or cilantro. Place carefully in a tight-fitting container and chill thoroughly before serving.

Serves 2-3.

Colourful Brown Rice Salad

dressing:

½ Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
¼ tsp. honey
1/8 tsp. salt
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

salad:

2 cups cooked brown rice, cooled
½ red bell pepper, chopped
½ yellow bell pepper, chopped
½ small red onion, diced
2 green onions, thinly sliced
2 Tbs. capers, drained
¼ cup pitted and chopped black olives
2 Tbs. minced fresh parsley



In a small bowl or jar, combine all ingredients for dressing. Whisk until well blended. Combine all other ingredients in a larger bowl and pour dressing over top. Toss and place in an airtight container. Refrigerate overnight.

Serves 4.

Thai Noodle Salad

One 3 oz. package of thin brown rice noodles
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger root
3 green onions, chopped
½ tsp. toasted sesame oil
1 Tbs. honey
Juice of 1 lime
2 Tbs. of Tamari soya sauce
2 tsp. chili powder
1 Tbs. tomato paste
2 tsp. chopped peanuts
2 Tbs. chopped fresh basil or cilantro
2 carrots, grated
½ small Napa cabbage, shredded



Place rice noodles in a heat-proof bowl. Pour boiling water over them to cover completely and let soak for 7 minutes. Drain thoroughly.

In a large saucepan or skillet, sauté garlic, ginger, and green onions in sesame oil. Stir frequently and cook for about 2 minutes. Whisk in honey, lime juice, tamari sauce, chili powder, and tomato paste. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 2 minutes. Add drained noodles, toss and cook for about 4 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool.

Place grated carrot and cabbage in a large bowl and add noodles and sauce. Toss well and place in a container. **Serves 4.**

Cucumber and Yogurt Wrap

½ tomato, diced
½ English cucumber, chopped
¼ cup of plain yogurt
1 green onion, sliced
½ Tbs. fresh cilantro, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
2 large tortilla wraps or whole wheat pitas
8 lettuce leaves



Combine all ingredients except lettuce in a bowl. Line pita halves or tortilla wraps with lettuce leaves. Spoon stuffing into pita halves or into centre of tortilla wrap. Fold over bottom edge and roll tightly. Wrap in plastic wrap.

Serves 2.

Easy Black Bean Wraps

15-oz can black beans, rinsed and drained **or**
1 lb bag of frozen pre-cooked black beans, thawed
¼ cup of chopped tomato
12 black olives, pitted and chopped
3 Tbs. minced fresh cilantro
salt to taste
15-20 washed & dried spinach leaves
4 oz. jack cheese or soy cheese, grated
4 Tbs. hot salsa
Eight 6” or 4 12” tortilla wraps



Mash beans in a large bowl. Add chopped tomato, olives, cilantro, and seasoning to taste. Line each tortilla wrap with spinach leaves and spoon bean mixture in the centre. Sprinkle grated cheese and salsa. Fold over bottom edge and roll each wrap tightly. Wrap securely in plastic wrap. Assemble the wraps the night before your picnic so they don't get soggy. If you have these at home, you can warm them in a 350 F oven for about 10 minutes.

Serves 4.