

Picnic

125 Recipes with 29 Seasonal Menus

DeeDee Stovel



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DEDICATION

To My Daughters,
Kate and Meg



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PREFACE

The more cookbooks, novels, and magazines I read, the more I realize that people all over the world love to picnic, maintaining unique traditions for making and packing food to share with family and friends in the great outdoors. The picnics I grew up with were of the commonplace variety, mostly in our backyard or the neighbors' yards. But what I recall most fondly are the faces of dear people, the warmth of friendship, and the flavors of favorite recipes.

This book is sprinkled with family and friends who joined me in countless outdoor meals and adventures and who inspired or shared many of the recipes and menus in this book. It is my hope that this book will help you make many special picnic memories of your own. I hope the menus and recipes included here (those marked with an asterisk in the menus) will serve as a guide as you create your own picnic traditions.

A Favorite Picnic?

While writing this book, I asked many people to tell me about their favorite picnic. Invariably heads tilted back, eyes shut, and smiles crept across faces. Picnics nourish the body, mind, and soul.

One friend recalls a starlight picnic on a hill within walking distance of home after a long, hard week of work. The toils of the week melted under the soothing starlight. Another evening picnic with a romantic twist took place on a beach in the moonlight at Half Moon Bay in California.

I remember family picnics on a small bay in Rhode Island, where our friends ordered a huge clambake layered with clams at the bottom and lobsters at the top. We usually skipped the middle layers of fish and vegetables.

My most unusual picnic was eaten on a bus crossing the desert. After a delightful week in Ogden, Utah, our hostess packed us a picnic lunch of antelope sandwiches on which we gratefully munched as we crossed the Great Salt Lake Desert and Nevada on the way to San Francisco. The possibilities are endless!

A Word about the Recipes

These are my favorite recipes, which contain my favorite foods. Some go back to my grandmother's youth, many have been collected along the way from friends and family, and others are the result of my own experimentation. If you enjoy fresh foods, a well-balanced diet, have a sweet tooth, and make an effort to cut down on the sugar, salt, and fat in your diet, you share my tastes. These recipes do not avoid the villains of the American diet, but the amounts are kept low in most recipes.

I rarely sift flour. If the recipe calls for sifted flour, be sure to sift *before* measuring, as the volume changes with sifting.

Generally, the recipes are for eight people. Cut the recipes in half if your outing will consist of a quartet, or plan to have leftovers. Romantic picnics for two are designed for smaller quantities.

The recipes also are a reflection of my having grown up on the East Coast and living in New England for many years. There is also a strong California connection based on one year of residence, many visits, and a growing fascination with the climate, land, and abundance of intriguing foods and recipes — thus, the bicoastal flavor of this book.

May good food, good friends, and happy moments make all of your picnics memorable!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gathering people around good food in a lovely setting was what family meant to my mother, Beatrice McCoy. She was locally known as a good cook. Seemingly without effort, she produced wonderful meals for family and friends. Her admonition to never economize on food remains with me, even though I know it is possible to do so and still enjoy great food. We must all eat to live, but in my family the emphasis was on living to eat. My mother was an artist who loved to cook. Her artistry was expressed in the care with which she prepared food and the beauty of its presentation. I am grateful to her.

My husband, Jack, willingly was the chief sampler of picnic fare. My daughters, Kate and Meg, participated in many picnics, and also helped test and review recipes. Their help and encouragement were invaluable. And I must also say that I appreciate my friends and family who sampled recipes, commented on the food and menus, gave ideas for recipes, and joined us in memorable picnics.

Thanks also to Sally Patterson of Storey Books, who oversaw the revisions of *Picnic*, for her encouragement as well as her editorial and culinary skills. I also appreciate the fine editing skills of Arlene Bouras, Marie Salter, and Dianne Cutillo and the enthusiasm for this project of Maggie Lydic.

WHAT IS A PICNIC?

A picnic evokes thoughts of leisure, relaxation, and enjoyment of the outdoors. It can be a still life in the open air or a boisterous frolic on the beach. Some picnics celebrate a special occasion, some offer the opportunity for friends to gather, and others provide an excuse for breaking the routine of daily life. In all cases, food is the centerpiece. Ask friends to go on a picnic with you and watch their eyes light up. A picnic is more than eating a meal, it is a pleasurable state of mind. “Let’s go on a picnic” means “Let’s have fun.”

The people, the place, and the food are the essential ingredients of a memorable picnic. A truly magnificent picnic consists of dear friends or family, a spectacular setting, and delectable food and drink. You choose the companions and the site, and this book will provide you with recipes and ideas for the food and its presentation.

Picnics in Art

The history of picnics and eating outdoors is visually evident when one strolls through a museum of European paintings. Recall the images of great outdoor eating and drinking extravaganzas among the peasants in Peter Brueghel’s works. The Impressionists, particularly Claude Monet and Edouard Manet, were fond of depicting romantic meals in secluded gardens. The most striking and well-known impressionist picnic painting is Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* (“Picnic on the Grass”), where the food clearly was not the main focus of the afternoon. Dining outdoors evokes festivity and romance, even though, in some cases, it is dictated by the necessity of cooking out-of-doors.

Picnics in History

Historically, picnics were meals to which each person attending contributed something. This idea of “potluck” meal goes back to the Greek word *syncomist*, which means “brought from different places and put together.” A *syncomist* initially was a coarse bread made of the by-products of flour. *Syncomist* was expanded to designate a meal in common to which everyone brings something, or a picnic.

These communal meals spread throughout the continent and were enjoyed by Scandinavians, Germans, and French. The picnic as an English institution was first described in the early 19th century as a fashionable social entertainment to which everyone took something. The institution evolved to include excursion parties to the country, where either everyone contributed food or one person provided the entire picnic. In the early 19th century, the English had a Picnic Society devoted to entertainment and theatricals as well as dining, where each member contributed something. The English, French, and other Europeans continue this tradition of outdoor dining.

Picnic Entertaining

Picnics are the ultimate in do-ahead entertaining. Whether served at a fabulous outdoor spot, in the backyard, or at the dining room table, all the food is prepared and stored in containers that will keep safe, appetizing, and ready to serve at the desired temperature. The cook does not have to deal with the last-minute panic of wondering if all the dishes will be ready at the same time and at the right

temperature. All the hostess has to do is put it out and enjoy the party.

Seating themselves on the green sward they eat while the corks fly and there is talk, laughter and merriment, and perfect freedom, for the universe is their drawing room and the sun their lamp. Besides, they have appetite, nature's special gift, which lends to such a meal a vivacity unknown indoors, however beautiful the surroundings.

— French gastronome Brillat-Savarin

The Sandwich Story

Our present-day concept of a sandwich is often associated with portable meals or picnics. The idea of a sandwich as a snack goes back to Roman times. Scandinavians perfected the technique with the Danish open-faced sandwich, or smorrebrod, consisting of thinly sliced, buttered bread and many delectable toppings. These elaborate concoctions are not as portable as their sturdy American counterparts but can be constructed on-site and are highly suitable for an elegant picnic. The Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu, the 18th-century gambler who was known to have sat at the gaming table for 24 hours with nothing more than roast beef placed between two slices of toast for his nourishment is the person to whom we are indebted for putting a top on the sandwich.



PICNIC PLANNING

What differentiates a picnic from other meals is that it's packed to go. Because the food must travel and the weather may be warm, the packing of the food and accoutrements becomes critical. This chapter provides you with some ideas and a checklist to simplify your picnic planning.

WHEN A PICNIC BASKET ISN'T A BASKET

Modern technology has broadened the selection of picnic paraphernalia, with insulated bags, backpacks, and water bottles or wine duffels now widely available. There are compact sets for a simple bread, cheese, and wine picnic with corkscrew, cutting board, and knives, with or without an insulated duffel for the bottle of wine. At the other extreme are elaborate backpacks or totes completely outfitted with everything one could possibly need on a picnic. The advantage of a backpack is its comfort. Carrying picnic accoutrements on your back is easier than lugging a heavy basket, no matter how artfully arranged. Whatever your choice of carrier, I recommend leaving it packed with all but the food and ready to go.

Packing to Go

The perfect picnic basket contains all the things you will need to create an idyllic afternoon, evening, or morning with your friends in a beautiful spot. Perfection can be achieved in many ways and planning ahead can help, but don't plan so much that you lose the sense of spontaneity that is essential to a picnic. Since you have to carry the basket, you don't want to take everything you could possibly ever need, you want the things that will make this event memorable and fun. There are different baskets for different types of picnics. Everyone has a different image of perfection, but let me share mine with you.

My favorite picnic image is of an antique market basket with a loose bouquet of fresh flowers poking out of one corner, a bottle of wine protruding from another, a fresh tablecloth covering fresh loaves of bread, garden vegetables converted to savory servings, chilled meats and cheeses, a luscious dessert, and steaming coffee. I like a cloth tablecloth and napkins and, depending on the occasion, enjoy colorful paper and plastic products for plates and tableware. For elegant picnics, I'd choose glassware, china, and silverware unless a hike is involved.

I personally like baskets of all sorts and shapes and am a sucker for them at antiques and secondhand stores. If you prefer new items, today you can find extremely well-equipped picnic baskets with matching plates and utensils, cloth napkins and tablecloth, stemware, and containers for the food. These traditional wicker baskets are often lined in gingham. If your tastes are less traditional, insulated bags, coolers, duffels, and cloth totes can serve as the "perfect picnic basket." Whatever you choose, pack your basket with as much food, drink, and excitement as it will hold.

Keeping Food Safe

At the end of the following recipes, you will find special packing tips. Safety is the main issue.

Preventing bacterial growth that could cause illness can be accomplished by observing some simple procedures. Because picnic food often sits for long periods of time without direct heat or conventional refrigeration, observing sanitary practices in preparation and storage becomes particularly important. Clean hands and work surfaces are basic and essential. Keeping fresh foods in the refrigerator before and after preparation is essential. Using vinegars, lemon juice, and acidic ingredients in recipes is a useful way to avoid bacterial growth. Keeping cold foods cold and hot foods hot is the goal for both safety and appeal.

Keeping Food Cold

Preparing foods that will be served cold is the least complicated approach. Foods can be prepared, placed in traveling containers, and refrigerated or frozen until it's time to pack the picnic basket. The problem of soggy sandwiches can be eliminated by wrapping the bread in a plastic bag and packing the filling ingredients separately, then chilling them in the cooler. All cold food should be refrigerated until it is *thoroughly* cold. Meat, poultry, or fish that is to be grilled can be carried frozen to the picnic in the cooler and slowly thawed en route. Do not let meats, poultry, or fish thaw at room or air temperature, because bacteria can form on the warm outer surfaces. Cold food can be packed in cold thermos bottles, stowed in coolers with ice or freezer packs, or wrapped in heavy tablecloths, quilts, or layers of newspaper and placed in the picnic basket with a chunk of ice.

REMEMBER THE ENVIRONMENT

Care for the land on which you have your picnic and abide by the backcountry rule that you leave nothing but your footprints. Avoid excess use of disposable plastics and foam cups and plates. Take a garbage bag and collect all your trash and take it home, or leave it in an appropriate roadside trash container. See how little trash you can generate on your picnic. There are many beautiful, colorful throwaway picnic items on the market, including plates, cups, and napkins. There are also attractive lasting ones. If you plan to picnic frequently, it will benefit both you and the environment to invest in some permanent picnicware.

On our family camping trips, we created chunks of ice by thoroughly cleaning half-gallon cardboard milk containers, filling them almost to the top with water, and freezing them the night before we left. The chunk of ice lasted about a day, and the melt-water provided a refreshing drink for tired, thirsty campers. You can see the necessity of cleaning the container first. Plan to take your own water supply, as even the most sparkling streams may be polluted with animal bacteria or chemical waste. In hot weather, if people will be exercising, sufficient amounts of water are essential.

Keeping Food Hot

Packing food that should be served hot is more of a challenge. For liquids, bring the food to as high a temperature as you can and then put it into a thermos bottle that you have just rinsed with boiling water. For other foods, also bring them to a high temperature and then wrap them in heavy-duty aluminum foil and place them in an insulated bag or a heavy cloth. If you can keep the food above 140°F, it should be quite safe. For winter picnics at subfreezing temperatures, this can be difficult. I recommend bringing hot drinks and/or soups in a good-quality thermos and not attempting to keep other foods hot on a cold day. With hot foods, it is best not to take home leftovers. For cold foods, leftovers can be packed in the cooler for not more than four hours. Remember the old adage "When in doubt, throw it out." Eat all you take, but take plenty of food, because fresh air enhances the appetite.

Plan well and cook well and there won't be many leftovers.

What to Take to Create Ambience

Besides carefully chosen and prepared food, a picnic includes the plates, the flatware, colorful napkins, tablecloths, and cups. Essentials include matches and garbage bags. Special touches are fresh flowers, mints, and candles. Don't forget a corkscrew if you bring wine. To avoid forgetting an essential item, a checklist is helpful, and a prepacked picnic basket is even better, because then you can be spontaneous and just grab your basket and go. With all these notes on preparation, remember that a picnic is fun. Don't get so overburdened with the planning that you don't want to bother with the picnic. Do it in a way that suits your style and inclination. Create a perfect day by combining good company and good food in a beautiful setting.

A Taste of the Past

For a slightly different approach, or for a Victorian picnic, you might refer to Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management, in which she lists "Things not to be forgotten at a picnic." Our idea of essentials is somewhat different from Mrs. Beeton's in 1859:

A stick of horseradish, a bottle of mint-sauce well corked, a bottle of salad dressing, a bottle of vinegar, made mustard, pepper, salt, good oil, and pounded sugar. If it can be managed, take a little ice. It is scarcely necessary to say that plates, tumblers, wine-glasses, knives, forks, and spoons must not be forgotten; as also teacups and saucers, 3 or 4 teapots, some lump sugar, and milk, if this last-named article cannot be obtained in the neighborhood. Take 3 corkscrews.

Baskets at the Ready

Some people choose to have their basket ready to travel so they can move at the hint of a picnic. Those people also have on hand a selection of ground covers, including reed mats, space blankets, beach towels, blankets, and quilts.

Essentials

These are the basics. You may well want to keep these items stocked in your picnic basket and ready to go.

- Plates
- Tableware
- Glassware
- Cutting board and knife
- Ground cloth, blankets, old quilts, or whatever suits your mood
- Paper napkins
- Tablecloth

Corkscrew (for those who like wine)

Bottle opener (for those who don't)

Paper towels or wipes

Garbage bags

Insect repellent

Sunscreen

Nonessential but Nice

These items depend on your mood and style:

Candles, candle holders, and matches

Flowers and vase

Wineglasses

China, crystal, and silverware

Cloth napkins or bandanas

Rattan or paper fans

Umbrella, sunshade, or hats

Flashlight

Rainy-Day Alternatives

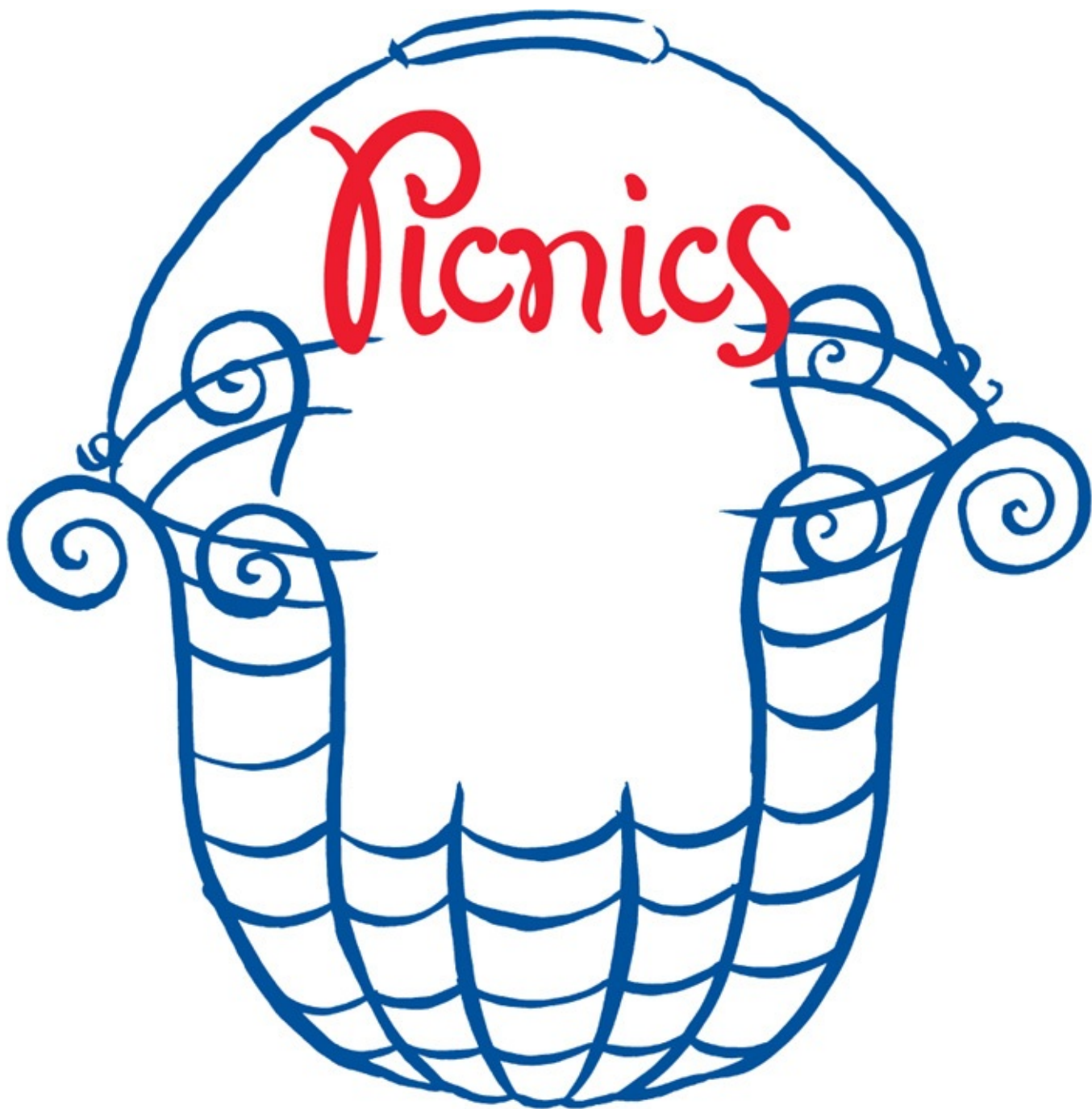
We envision glorious, sunny weather for our picnics, and unless we live in a perpetually sunny climate, we cannot count on that. When the weather doesn't cooperate with our plans, we have several options: We can cancel our picnic, we can reschedule it, or we can choose another location under cover. In choosing the third alternative, some of our picnics may end up on the dining room table. That may result in a lovely picnic, but with some advance work, an even better site can be selected.

One of my favorite picnics is to gather family and friends several hours before sunset and hike a short distance up the Appalachian Trail to a beautiful meadow with a panoramic view of the mountains. In this mellow setting, we can watch the kaleidoscopic sky as the sun drops into the hills. On one such occasion, the weather was threatening. It was essential to find a place with a view. We located an unused building with a wide porch on the local college campus and were prepared for our picnic adventure in the event of a storm. In this case, the weather cleared just as we left and we were able to see the sunset after all.

A porch provides a welcome spot for a rainy-day picnic, because there is still some sense of being outdoors. On cold days, a picnic by the fire in the living room offers coziness with a relaxed atmosphere. Sunshine and picnics go together, but watching a rainstorm from a dry porch can offer a different way to enjoy the outdoors. In planning a picnic, be aware of the weather forecasts, but be resourceful! Think of ways to enjoy your picnic in all kinds of weather.

SPRING FLINGS

There is little sweeter than the first gentle breezes of spring. The crocuses start peeking out, a green haze covers the willows, tiny spears of green poke through the tangle of grasses and twigs in gardens and woodlands, and streams, unlocked from blankets of ice, gurgle happily down mountainsides. People slough off winter coziness and eagerly take to the outdoors. Any excuse will do to get outside whether it is for a walk or a spring cleanup project, or — best of all — to have a picnic!



SPRING DAY-HIKE PICNIC

SPRING BREAKFAST

AT THE BEACH PICNIC

“AFTER THE WEDDING”
BRUNCH PICNIC

SPRINGTIME AT THE OFFICE
LUNCH PICNIC

BREAKFAST IN A
MEADOW PICNIC

SPRING PROJECT PICNIC

Spring Day-Hike Picnic

Tiny, early spring violets, wild lily of the valley, and bunchberry poke their blossoms through the dense leaf cover along the trail and, with luck, a trillium or lady's slipper appears beneath the trees. Find yourself a glade of these miniature beauties and look through the leafless trees to find a view that would be hidden in the summer. It's often too muddy to hike in the spring and the bugs can be a bother, but it's a thrill to see things growing after a long winter. Pick a sunny day with soft, balmy breezes and enjoy the chance to dine in the open air.

Menu

Grilled chicken fillets*
in a spinach wrap

Artichoke salad*

Carrot sticks

Gingerbread* and fruit

Herbal iced tea*

*Recipe included in this chapter

What Else to Take

For the Food

- Thermos bottles

- Small insulated bag with ice pack

- Backpacks

- Water bottles

Extras

- Insect repellent

- Space blanket or moisture-resistant ground cloth

Grilled Chicken Fillets in a Spinach Wrap

The simple satay marinade on this chicken is a staple in my kitchen. Not only is it fantastic on chicken, but I love it on grilled fish such as swordfish, halibut, or tuna. With or without the spinach wraps, this chicken is delicious.

*8 chicken breast halves, boned and skinned
8 spinach wraps or flour tortillas
corn oil for cooking*

MARINADE

*½ cup soy sauce
¼ cup mirin (sweet cooking sake) †
2 tablespoons lime juice
2 tablespoons sesame oil
2 large cloves of garlic, minced
1 tablespoon honey
1 tablespoon peeled and grated fresh ginger root
½ teaspoon Chinese five spice powder †*

† Available in natural foods stores

1. Rinse and pat dry the chicken; place in a shallow glass pan.
2. TO MAKE THE MARINADE, combine the marinade ingredients in a small bowl and pour over the chicken. Let sit for 30 minutes in the refrigerator.
3. Preheat gas grill to high.
4. Remove the chicken from the marinade and brush lightly with corn oil. Grill the chicken for 3 minutes on a side or until cooked through, brushing often with the marinade. An alternate cooking method is to cook on a ridged grill pan on the stovetop. Use medium-high heat with the exhaust fan running. Cook about 2 minutes per side until marked and cooked through. The trick is not to overcook the chicken and dry it out.
5. Let the chicken cool slightly and then refrigerate. Wrap the cold chicken in aluminum foil for transporting. Place the spinach wraps in a resealable plastic bag and pack them in your backpack. At the picnic site, roll the chicken in the spinach wraps, and enjoy hearty sandwiches of tender and moist grilled chicken.

Serves 8

Soft deli rolls or hamburger rolls are nice with this chicken. For a more substantial and tasty bread, try focaccia, lavash, or sourdough or Portuguese rolls.

Artichoke Salad

Jytte, a Danish friend, shared this recipe with me years ago. It quickly became a favorite item in picnics I catered for people attending the music festival at Tanglewood in Lenox, Massachusetts — summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

three 6-ounce jars marinated artichoke hearts with marinade

- ½ pound fresh mushrooms, washed, dried, and sliced*
- 6 sun-dried tomatoes, cut into strips*
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced, including some green tops*
- 1 medium tomato, seeded and cut into bite-size chunks*
- 1 stalk of celery, sliced*
- 1 small sweet onion, thinly sliced*

DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar*
- 2 tablespoons olive oil*
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil*
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice*
- 1 teaspoon sugar*
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano*
- ¼ teaspoon salt*
- freshly ground black pepper*

1. In a large bowl, combine all of the vegetables.

2. TO MAKE THE DRESSING, whisk the ingredients together in a small bowl and pour over the vegetables.

3. Let the salad sit in the refrigerator 8 hours or overnight. Place in a covered plastic dish and tuck it into your knapsack.

Serves 8



Late summer is artichoke season on the central California coast. Buy a bag of tiny artichokes, trim the ends off each leaf, cut in half lengthwise, and steam

them to use in this salad. They are so small that the chokes usually don't have to be removed.

Gingerbread

Gingerbread is a classic spice cake that speaks of home and hearth. It's also a great traveling food because it's both sturdy and moist. It will keep for several days and freezes well. Enjoy it with whipped cream or brandied hard sauce, or have it plain.

1 cup molasses

½ cup buttermilk

1 egg, lightly beaten

2 cups all-purpose flour

½ cup sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground allspice

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted

1 cup heavy cream, whipped (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9-inch square disposable baking pan.

2. In a small bowl, combine the molasses, buttermilk, and egg and stir to blend.

3. Sift the dry ingredients into a large bowl. Add the molasses mixture and mix well. Add the butter and stir just until blended.

4. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 25 to 35 minutes, or until a tester inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan on a wire rack. When completely cool, cut into eight generous pieces and cover securely with aluminum foil for packing.

5. Put the whipped cream in a small covered container in the refrigerator until packing time. Wrap the container in heavy aluminum foil and place it in the pack. Stir before serving. If the hike is longer than 1½ hours, leave the whipped cream at home.

Serves 8

For a more intense ginger experience, substitute 1–2 tablespoons peeled and grated fresh ginger root for the 1 teaspoon ground ginger. Add it to the molasses mixture instead of to the dry ingredients.

Herbal Iced Tea

This cold infusion is refreshing on a warm spring day or in the heat of midsummer. It is a favorite with children, too.

*6 bags of Orange Zinger, or other herbal tea
2 quarts cold water
2 tablespoons honey (optional)
lemon slices*



1. Put the tea bags into a large pitcher.

2. Pour the water over the bags and add the honey, if desired. Store the pitcher in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour, during which time the tea will infuse the water.

3. Remove the tea bags and pour the cold tea into thermos bottles when ready for your hike. Put the lemon slices in a resealable plastic bag and serve them with the cups of tea for a refreshing drink after a long hike.

Makes 2 quarts

If time allows, make the tea in the traditional way by boiling water and pouring it over the tea bags. Steep for 5 minutes, and then store in the refrigerator.

Spring Breakfast at the Beach Picnic

For those who love the ocean and are lucky enough to live near it, a warm spring weekend is a call to the sea. Begin a glorious day with breakfast or brunch on the beach. Fresh air, open space, and the sound and smell of the sea make a picnic on the beach one of the most perfect picnics. (If it is a gusty spring day, take along a kite for after-breakfast excitement.) A lakeside beach would be an equally nice way to celebrate the beginning of spring.

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