Food

Food preparation key to summer picnics

Enjoy the great outdoors this summer with a picnic. From simple to sophisticated, pienics go with robust activities like sailing and canoeing but are equally ap-. propriate for relaxing by a fishing stream, on the patio or at an outdoor concert.

Whatever your picnic pleasure and wherever it takes you, remember that warm summer weather always brings concerns about food safety. So, keep your picnics safe as well as delicious with these tips:

 When preparing picnic foods, keep hands, utensils, cutting boards and counters scrupulously Prevent clean. crosscontamination by using different cutting boards for raw and cooked foods. After each use, clean utensils thoroughly with hot soapy water or a mild chlorine bleach solution (1 tsp chlorine bleach to 4 cups water).

 Refrigerate foods soon after cooking and chill thoroughly, at least 2 to 4 hours, before packing for a picnic.

 Pack raw and cooked foods separately and wrap well to prevent juices from dripping onto other foods.

• Furthermore, pack hot and cold foods separately. Keep foods cold in a cooler or insulated bag with lots of frozen freezer packs. Layers of newspaper provide good heat insulation for hot in a separate insulated container. Place all foods in sturdy plastic containers or sealable plastic bags.

 To prevent bacteria growth, keep hot foods hot - above 140 degrees F (60 degrees C); and cold foods cold - below 40 degrees F (4 dgrees C). Protein foods such as meat, poultry, egg, fish and milk products are particularly susceptible to bacteria growth so use extra care when preparing and carrying these foods.

 When outdoors, keep food in a shady spot and don't leave too

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long before serving.

home, Before returning discard any perishables that have been at a warm temperature for several hours.

Picnic Fare

Perfect picnic meals include not only those foods you enjoy but those that travel well. In warm weather, chilled foods are usually preferred. It's much easier and safer to keep cold foods cold than hot food hot.

Sandwiches go to many a picnic, for good reason! They provide variety, are easy to pack and appeal to everyone, particularly the younger set.

When it comes to packing food for children, picnics are not the time to try unusual items. Stick to favorite foods - even if it's the inevitable peanut butter sandwich. Pita breads make interesting pocket sandwiches for a variety of fillings. To avoid soggy pockets, consider carrying fillings separately and fill the pita on the spot.

Most picnickers, kids included, like the crunch of raw veggies which are easy to pack. Prepared salads, cheese and crackers are other favorites.

. For dessert, freeze individually packaged fruit yogurts before you leave. Packed in your cooler, they'll keep things cool until meal time when the yogurts will still be partially frozen for a frosty finish to your meal. Luscious fruits of the season - plump peaches, plums and berries - are another simple, delicious picnic sweet.

Presentation is as important as the food. Include bright, colorful cloth napkins and reusable plastic plates and cups. Do remember the essentials cutlery, blanket, insect repellent and a garbage bag for the final cleanup.

Sultry summer days increase thirsts, so be sure to bring along abundant chilled beverages like naturally refreshing and cooling

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TODAY'S

Iced Tea. It's inexpensive, easy to make ahead and fote to your picnic site. Keep a jug in the fridge for a quick, cooling sip then pout it into a thermal jug with a few frozen tea cubes to keep it cool for picnics.

There are a number of ways to make and enjoy Iced Tea. Always use good quality tea. Try the newer, flavored teas when making Iced Tea for something just a little different. Followt these easy directions from the Tea Council of Canada.

Classic Leed Tea

The traditional way to make Iced Tea begins with double strength hot tea. Be sure to use fresh cold water brought to a full boil. Cover and brew 3 to 5 minutes. Strain or remove tea bags and pour over ice in tall glasses. Garnish with lemon slices and mint leaves and sweeten to individual taste.

To make a large quantity of iced tea, pour 4 cups boiling water over 8 tea bags. Cover and let stand 3 to 5 minutes. Stir and strain into a pitcher. Add 4 cups cold water. Pour immediately over ice in tall glasses, garnish and sweeten to taste, or chill until ready to use. Makes 8 cups.

Overnight Iced Tea Fill a pitcher with 4 cups cold water and add 8 tea bags. Cover and chill overnight. Remove tea bags, squeezing against side of container, then pour into ice filled . glasses. Makes 4 cups.

Sugar Syrup A sugar syrup is the best way to sweeten cold drinks as it dissolves easier than granulated sugar. Combine equal portions of water and sugar in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes. Let cool and store in a covered jar in refrigerator.

Tea Ice Cubes

Pour any leftover tea into ice cub trays. Freeze, then pop into a freezer bag. Use in Iced Tea drinks without diluting the flavor.

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