



Planning a Perfect Picnic

Picnics are a summertime staple but anytime is the perfect time to have one. Whether you grab a ready-made sandwich and plunk down on a patch of grass or pack a cleverly stocked basket with a bottle of sparkling cider for an evening concert, you'll enjoy a tradition shared by millions.

Picnics are supposed to be simple but even if you're planning a more upscale outing, remember these rules and you'll enjoy dining alfresco all the more so.

- Create a basic picnic bag or basket filled with the essentials and you'll be ready to go at a moment's notice. Essentials include: bug spray, sun screen, paper towels, hand wipes or hand sanitizer, garbage bag, bottle opener with a corkscrew, and a sharp knife. Pack lightweight, re-useable plates, cups and flatware, and cloth napkins. Find a sealed container that can hold your dinnerware; when you're done eating simply return the dirty dishes to the container for washing when you return.
- Pack foods in zip-style bags or sealed containers. Pack ice packs or put ice cubes in zip-style bags to keep your food from becoming soaked when the ice starts to melt.
- Bring a waterproof groundcover. Whether you re-use the grocery bag that your sandwich came in or bring along a blanket to spread under your spread, make sure there's a waterproof barrier between you and the ground.
- Generally, finger foods are more manageable than foods requiring flatware, but if you're hankering for potato salad, by all means, bring it on! And if you do bring potato salad...
- Don't spoil your day by food spoilage. Remember the two-hour rule—this is the length of time most perishable foods can survive without refrigeration—or one hour if the weather is extremely warm.
- Always wash your hands before preparing or eating food. Use those travel wipes or the hand sanitizer you packed if clean water and soap are unavailable.
- Most grocery stores carry a wide variety of ready cooked foods to make your picnic a snap to pull together.
- If you're toting raw poultry, meat or fish, make sure it is sealed and kept apart from other foods to avoid cross contamination. Raw poultry juices seeping into your produce can make for a deadly combination. And be sure to thoroughly cook your meats to destroy bacteria.
- If in doubt, throw it out. If you question the safety of any food, don't eat it.
- Follow an old camping rule to leave the area cleaner than you found it.
- For dessert, forget delicate sweets that can get crushed along the way. Take along something that can withstand jostling and temperatures, like this recipe for Perfect Picnic Popcorn Squares. The whole grain goodness of popcorn will give you an extra energy boost.

Perfect Picnic Popcorn Squares

1 cup light corn syrup
 ½ cup sugar
 ½ cup brown sugar
 1 cup reduced fat peanut butter
 ¾ cup raisins
 8 cups air-popped popcorn

Combine corn syrup, sugar, brown sugar, and peanut butter in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil over low heat, stirring constantly; boil 2-3 minutes. Remove saucepan from heat. Combine popcorn and raisins in large bowl; pour hot mixture over popcorn and toss carefully with wooden spoons to mix until well-coated. Spray 9 x 13-inch baking dish with cooking spray; press popcorn mixture into pan and cool completely. Cut into squares and serve.

Serves: 12