

A Perfect Picnic
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For Print April 27, 2011

What could be more fun on a beautiful spring day than a picnic in the park? As the weather turns warmer, the green grass and the shady spots under the trees beckon everyone to relax and enjoy an outdoor meal. Packing a delicious picnic lunch for any age group can be simple, and following a few simple rules about food safety ensures the memory of the picnic will not be marred by upset tummies.

To begin with, remember the basics. Be sure to thoroughly wash your hands before starting food preparation. Keep the countertops and cutting boards clean, too. Fresh fruits and vegetables taste even better when eaten at a picnic, but do not forget to rinse all produce under cold, running water for at least 15 seconds to clean it. If possible, rub the outside of the product lightly while the cold water runs over it. Do not forget that banana. Yes, the skin of the banana may harbor bacteria that can be transferred by hand to the next finger food to be eaten. Pack clean fruit and veggies in clean containers or wrap well.

Some sandwiches may be prepared the night before the picnic and frozen. However, lettuce, tomatoes and other vegetable toppers do not freeze well, so pack these separately. Dry snacks, such as chips and pretzels, may be packed in zip type plastic bags, or reusable containers. When packing food, check the containers and the lunch box or basket that will carry the picnic food. All of these should be kept quite clean.

Keep the food cold by including an ice pack or some frozen cartons of juice. Do not heat up the picnic food by leaving the basket in the sun while you wait to eat. Bacteria grows best between 40° and 140°, so keep the scrumptious food cold enough to stay safe. Beverages can be frozen ahead of time or brought along in a thermos to keep cold or hot.

Butterflies belong at picnics, and the following recipe for Celery Butterflies will make the first picnic of spring very memorable.

Celery Butterflies

2 celery ribs
1 eight-ounce jar cheddar cheese spread
8 large twist pretzels broken pretzel pieces
12 raisins

Cut celery ribs in half crosswise. Fill with cheese. Stick a twist pretzel onto both long edges of celery to form butterfly wings. Use broken pieces to make antennae at one end. Place 3 raisins down the middle of the cheese for decoration. Serves 4.

University of Illinois Extension

To ask questions about food preservation methods, call the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and

activities, including the free public classes on food safety and pressure canning, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/.