

Picnics of yesteryear forgotten in the fast food century

By Ben T. Shomshor

In recent years, anthropologists (the plump, affable variety) have speculated that picnics first began when the noted Neanderthal—affable, but not so plump) Gork, loosely translated as Master-of-Antelope-braising-and-tuber-grating, took the young lady of his latest fancy on a hackberry gathering expedition.

In the course of the gathering, they made the momentous discovery that hackberries, when consumed in the open air, were an apt prelude to the beloved pre-Neanderthal games of Rolling-in-Leaves-with-One-You-Fancy and Bussing-Amongst-Bushes.

food review

Later millenia retained the essentials of the custom, namely food, open air, and a fancied one, yet refined and extended the variety of the essentials. Suddenly, the mid-twentieth century witnessed a rapid decline in the picnic. This decline appears to inversely relate to the availability of Hostess Twinkies and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Lack of appreciation

The picnic now is one of the most abused and underutilized occasions for sociable intercourse. While there is no lack of bushes for bussing amongst, nor of fancied ones, there is a lack of appreciation for food and drink suitable for a picnic.

The misconceptions about picnics which I come across most frequently include: Picnics should take place only on clear spring and summer days; Picnics should only be held in the specially constructed "picnic" area of a city or state park; and, picnic food should be sub-standard—either purchased at a fast-food outlet, or thrown together in unimaginative haste at home, immediately before leaving for the tryst. M. Pissaro would be aghast.

One of my more memorable picnics took place on a blustery day last autumn. On a Platte River sandbar, the fancied one and I enjoyed a modest lunch of Court Bouillon (carried in a Thermos), an Artichoke Pate served on pita bread, marinated beef strips, fruit cups with a spicy wine dressing, and brie. This was all washed down

with a chilled red wine of indeterminate character. We did not overlook such pleasant amenities as a table cloth, cotton napkins, and wine glasses.

Make a picnic spectacular

I do not suggest that this is the menu anyone else should use. Each picnic is, almost inherently, a unique experience. I do suggest that you use your imagination and talents to make a picnic spectacular to you and your fancied one.

The basic requirements of picnic food and drink are simple enough. The food must be portable, and amenable to advance preparation. With the exception of soups and drinks, it should be palatable at outdoor temperatures, and resist rapid spoiling. There are, fortunately, no guidelines for choosing the fancied one, or the location for a picnic.

If your appetite (culinary and otherwise) is whetted, but you don't know where to go from here, I would

suggest reading *The Picnic Gourmet* by Joan Hemingway and Connie Maricich, published in paperback by Vintage Books for a very reasonable \$4.95. Interspersed with reminiscences of classic picnics are numerous recipes for the most delectable of picnic fare.

A brief word about wine: red wines generally have as much personality as philodendrons or middle-aged accountants. The one place they seem to shine is on a picnic. Served lightly-chilled, a red wine can accompany almost any dish without harm. It is virtually impossible to damage in transport, and since it is useless on all other occasions, why not enjoy a dry red wine while picnicking?

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