

Outdoor Picnic Safety

With warmer temperatures upon us, being outdoors is a great way to spend time with friends and family, especially at a picnic!

Having a picnic is a fun way to change up your mealtime. However, the Texas heat can wreak havoc if food is not handled or cooled properly. To prevent contracting food borne illnesses the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service recommends taking precautionary measures when preparing your picnic meal:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water before handling any food. Make sure to scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Make sure all food preparation areas are clean or sanitized.
- Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods to keep them out of the temperature danger zone (40-140 °F). This is the temperature at which bacteria thrive and multiply.

Safely transporting your meal to the picnic is just as crucial as the preparation process. Often, people pack too much food, resulting in leftovers. To prevent this, pack just enough food that will be eaten. In the case that there are leftovers, make sure they are stored properly and do not reach temperatures between 40-140 °F. Once a food item has been used, return it to the cooler immediately to keep it cold – food that remains out of the cooler for more than an hour needs to be thrown away, especially in weather above 90 degrees.

Packing coolers with ice and using separate coolers for drinks and perishable items will help to keep foods from reaching temperatures within the danger zone.

Don't forget to use clean hands when handling and serving the food, as well as putting it away once you are finished. Valdez recommends washing your hands with soap and warm water before coming into contact or consuming any food. If there is no access to water and soap, use hand sanitizer as an alternative.

For some, being safe when picnicking might be easier than deciding what to eat. Luckily, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Dinner Tonight has some picnic-friendly recipes that are sure to be a hit at your next picnic! The Pomegranate Fruit Salad, Watermelon Salad, and Black Bean Salsa with Pineapple are perfect if you are looking for something light, fresh and easy to store. You can find the full recipes at: www.dinnertonight.org.

When searching for picnic recipes to try, Valdez says to stay aware of foods that must be kept cold. Those include:

- Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cooked beans or sandwiches/salads made with these foods
- Lunch meat
- Cheese
- Salad dressing/mayo
- Milk
- Pudding
- Cut fruit
- Cut vegetables
- Cooked pasta

- Cooked rice

When planning your next picnic, keep food safety at the top of your priority list, but also have fun and be creative! Picnics are a wonderful way to enjoy nature, try new foods and spend time with loved ones.