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Perfect Picnics – Frugal Food Safety Tips

By Cyndi Roberts

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Summer is finally here and for a lot of us that means heading out to the lake or to the park for a picnic with friends or family.

Unfortunately, if we're not careful when we plan, transport and serve that picnic, our outing might not end up happily.

Here are some tips to remember when planning an outdoor meal:

1. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Bacteria multiply quickly at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees. Foods that have been kept at unsafe temperatures are a prime source of foodborne illnesses.
2. Plan ahead and try to take foods that don't spoil so quickly. At any rate, don't eat anything that's been sitting out for more than an hour, especially if the temperature is over 80.
3. Try to take only the amount of food that will be eaten, so there will be no leftovers.
4. Pack your food with ice or cold packs in an insulated cooler. Place foods that will be eaten last in the bottom. You can make your own blocks of ice by freezing water in milk cartons or other plastic containers.

Place ice blocks or cold packs between containers of food, never just place containers of food on top of ice.

5. You might want to bring 2 coolers -- 1 for drinks, because it will be opened more often, and 1 for the food, that can be set in the shade and kept closed until needed.

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6. If you're planning to cook hamburgers at the picnic site, shape your meat into patties and freeze before putting into the cooler. Take along a meat thermometer to be sure you cook the meat to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees.
7. An extra zip-top bag full of ice can be placed in the top of the cooler. The extra ice will come in handy for the trip home. If your day is a long one, and the ice melts the cold water can come in handy, also.
8. Carry your cooler inside your car, instead of in your hot trunk and be sure to place it in a shady spot and maybe even cover it with a blanket when you reach your destination. Open it only when necessary.
9. Instead of bringing whole jars of condiments, pack what you will need into smaller plastic containers.
10. Bring lots of clean utensils for serving as well as eating. Pack pre-moistened towelettes and paper towels for easy cleanup.
11. And remember this rule from the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding leftovers: When in doubt, throw it out!

Cyndi Roberts has been happily married to her best friend for 34 years and is a proud mother of 3. In her newsletter, "1 Frugal Friend 2 Another" she uses her years of experience as a wife, mother and chief budget officer to help others learn how to "live the good life...on a budget!" To subscribe, visit her online at

Food Safety 101

By News Canada

(NC)—Bagged lunches are healthy, economical and nutritious. But they also pose the threat of hosting harmful bacteria, unless food is handled and packed properly. Use the following tips as your study guide for "Food Safety 101":

- Spill-proof, seal-able bags are a must for transporting and storing food safely. Stock up on these items to keep leftovers ready for the lunch box.
- Preparing lunch the night before is a great time-saver. Store lunches safely in the refrigerator overnight.
- Prepare a clean surface for lunch packing. Wash your hands, utensils and counter with hot, soapy water to destroy bacteria.
- Sandwiches are a popular lunchtime staple: look for lunchmeat with a reputable brand name to ensure food safety. Maple Leaf, for instance, has made food safety a top priority and is committed to

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providing customers with the highest standards of food safety assurance.

- Consider using an insulated travel bottle. It will keep leftover soup, chili or stew safe and hot until you're ready to enjoy it.
- Look for a freezer gel pack and an insulated lunch box. These items will keep foods like sandwiches cool until lunchtime, preventing bacterial growth.
- Store your lunch in a refrigerator at work or school, if possible. If not, avoid leaving your lunch in direct sunlight or near any heat source.

Congratulations, you are now a "Food Safety 101" graduate. You are certified to pack safe bagged lunches, and to teach your favourite students about the importance of food safety. For graduate-level food safety tips, visit

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