

DINING al Fresco



Today in America, we enjoy all kinds of food at a picnic, from a casual meal of grilled chicken and ribs, sandwiches, potato salad, watermelon, wine or beer to more elaborate ones that can include specialty cocktails, champagne, gourmet Brie cheese, strawberries, lobster, and clam bakes.

We like to have these meals at the beach, parks, and in our backyards. We tailgate and have picnics by the pool, on our lanais, and on docks. As our joy of dining al fresco continues, delicious food will always be the centerpiece of a successful picnic, but it is the special moments we spend outdoors with our family and friends laughing and enjoying life together that will be the most memorable.

A Tisket, a Tasket...

Choose the Perfect Picnic Basket



WRITTEN BY SAM SCHUNK
VENICE GULF COAST LIVING MAGAZINE

Imagine opening your window in the morning and discovering sunny, bright blue skies, cottony-soft clouds floating along the horizon, and temperatures that seem to beckon you to go outdoors. On days like this, there's only one thing to do: heed that call by heading to your favorite spot for a picnic! Before you go, though, you'll want to select the ideal basket for your excursion.

Traditionally, this would have meant bringing one constructed of wicker, willow, or similar woven material, since experts report that this type of tote has been used to port food from the very earliest times forward. Part of the appeal of these containers is that they are made of lightweight, yet sturdy materials, resulting in baskets that can easily go whatever distance is required. Also, since these bins range from smaller size totes to larger ones that resemble luggage trunks, finding one suited to your needs can be a simple task.

According to historians, the picnic baskets that we are more familiar with today, which come complete with placeholders for dishes, silverware, glasses, and napkins, actually began to appear at the very dawn of the 20th century. In addition to providing all the dining ware you could desire, today's white wicker and willow baskets may also include martini glasses, barbecuing tools, compartments for your wine bottles, and even fold-out tables. These totes come in sizes perfect for an intimate tête-à-tête for two or for a party of six. If you like the romance of this more traditional style but want something slightly different, you can opt for an oval-shaped shoulder bag or a cute little square bamboo box.

The picnic basket has continued to evolve over the last 100 years. New materials have been introduced for producing these totes, which has added numerous innovative features such as water-resistance, easy cleaning, foldable storage, and more. For instance, nowadays you may opt for the convenience of a more modern nylon and plastic bag, which offers abundant storage and, with some models, the ease of rolling wheels. Ideal for outings for a large group, this style of basket is typically well insulated, helping to keep your goodies cool. In addition to having plenty of room for your potato chips, soda, and other tasty treats, these larger bags can often accommodate up to four place settings and a cutting board. Some styles may even have pockets or slots for all the accoutrements you'll need, such as a cheese knife, corkscrew, and stopper, so you can wine, dine, and enjoy the good life, wherever you go!

A more recent style that is ideal for a day at the beach is the handy polyester canvas picnic bag. Lightweight enough that it can be strapped to your bike, this model is perfect for pedaling over to your favorite spot, ensuring you get some extra sunshine. When you reach the shore, instead of using a picnic blanket, you can simply unroll a towel, open your tote to access all your

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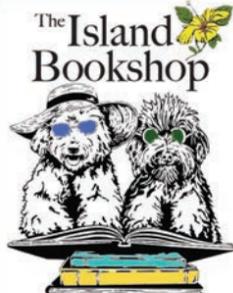
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food and drinks, and enjoy the seaside ambiance. With its water-resistant exterior, this type of bag is ideal for afternoons spent watching the waves. Adding to its convenience, it can easily be rinsed off and folded for storage after your fun in the sun.

Since many people appreciate the adventure of striking out on your own path, insulated backpack picnic baskets were recently introduced. Made of sturdy canvas, these durable cases come complete with pockets and pouches for transporting everything from wine bottles to all your food and drink. With features including chopping boards, silverware, tablecloths, and even a picnic blanket, it can easily be packed with all the necessities for a meal that can feed four people, making dining along the trail a breeze.

Another innovative style is the collapsible picnic basket with an expandable top. Perfect for a campout, it offers enough space to pack all that you need for making s'mores or having a weenie roast. The zippered compartment can also accommodate plenty of plates, cups, napkins, and other utensils. Pair it with some coolers full of ice for keeping your drinks extra cool, and you may find you have everything covered for your peaceful weekend retreat.

Through personalization, your picnic basket can be as unique as you are. Some retailers offer embroidery services so your name can be stitched onto your tote, ensuring that you always return home with your bag. Totes may also feature the flag of your homeland or perhaps a country you've always wanted to visit. Fans of collegiate athletics or professional NFL teams may appreciate the baskets that are emblazoned with their favorite sports team's emblem. Available in a wide range of sizes, it's easy to find one large enough to fit all the goodies they need, making it both functional and a great way to show their team spirit.

Whether you prefer the old-fashioned romance of a traditional woven basket or enjoy the modern conveniences of a newer style of tote, plenty of options are available. Just select the style of basket you like, pack it full of your favorite treats, load up your car or bike, and go!



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