



Pointers on Keeping Picnic Foods Safe

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Hawaii's year-round good weather makes almost everyone want to do things outdoors, including, of course, cooking and eating. Foods normally cooked in the kitchen are grilled outdoors, or they are cooked, taken outside, and eaten *al fresco*.

The problem is that people aren't the only living things that like warm weather. Microorganisms that can make you sick also find the temperatures favorable. These organisms can't be seen with the naked eye, and that makes them tricky—and dangerous. So, when you make a picnic, make it safe. Here are some pointers on how to handle picnic foods safely, using the Hazards Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) method:

Start with a plan—

a successful picnic is well organized

- Begin by creating a menu, from appetizers to desserts, that caters to everyone—kids and adults alike.
- Don't consider perishables if they can't be kept in a cooler! Bring only foods that can withstand the rigors of travel.
- Check your picnic equipment, utensils, and supplies to be sure they are the right things for the job. Having the right number of the right tools will help keep your picnic foods safe. Your hands are tools, too. Take along soap or detergent for washing them and your equipment.

Organize your shopping list after your menu is set

- List dry foods, produce, refrigerated items, and frozen foods separately—and in that order.
- Shop the way you listed: dry foods first, then produce. Buy refrigerated items and frozen foods last. Put them in your shopping cart in that order.

- Buy only food that your market has stored properly. That means chilled if the packaging says “Keep Refrigerated” and frozen if the package says “Store Frozen.” Buy only as much as you will need for the picnic.
- Prevent cross-contamination of foods. Keep raw meats separated from cooked items in your shopping cart. Raw food carries both “good” and “bad” microorganisms, and you don't want bad ones to transfer to your cooked foods.
- Handle foods delicately, even if they are canned or packaged. Watch out for tears in wrappers and dents in cans. If the packaging is compromised, so is the safety of the wrapped food.

Get foods home and put away quickly

Don't stop to run a quick errand because it's on your way home. Stopping will warm up refrigerated and frozen foods to temperatures that are hospitable for microorganisms and that help them multiply. If you must stop, take along an insulated cooler in which to store refrigerated and frozen foods.

Preserve freshness—use perishables promptly

The better in quality your food is, the safer it will be. If there are no “use-by” dates, wrap the food properly, label it, and note the date you bought it. Use it right away!

Pack your picnic goodies safely

- Wash your hands in hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before you handle any food. Rinse with clean water and dry with a disposable paper towel.
- One day in advance, pack such dry foods as snack chips, noncream-filled pastries, cookies, nuts, and candies. Keep them at room temperature in a picnic basket with the tablecloth, paper goods, eating utensils, serving utensils for cooked foods, etc.

- On the day of the picnic, perishable foods such as macaroni salad, musubi, and dipping sauces can be prepared ahead safely with proper handling. Chill all ingredients in the refrigerator before using. Chill the cooler with ice while you prepare the foods. Mix chilled ingredients using clean utensils, then wrap them well or store in suitable containers. Keep in the pre-chilled cooler with enough ice or ice packs to keep them under 41°F (5°C). Other perishables such as washed fruits, vegetables, and garden salads may also be stored in this cooler.
- Ice used in drinks is a food. You can keep it in the same cooler, but you must bag it separately from the ice you use for cooling.
- Use another cooler for raw foods only. Pre-chill raw foods in disposable plastic bags or other suitable containers. Make sure you have sufficient ice or ice packs to keep the foods under 41°F. Be sure to pack separate cooking and preparation utensils that you will use *only* for raw foods.
- Do not partially cook some foods, thinking it will save you cooking time at the picnic site. This practice actually encourages the rapid growth of organisms that can make you sick.
- Raw foods to be cooked at the picnic site (hamburger, steaks, marinated chicken pieces) should be packed

last and only just before leaving for the picnic. Cook them first at the picnic.

Choose your picnic site so that your cooking equipment is in a clean area, away from combustibles such as dry grass and branches. Keep coolers and the picnic table in the shade.

Cook raw foods thoroughly

Hamburger should not have any pink color in the middle. Meat is done when it's brown or gray inside. Poultry juice should be clear. Fish will flake with a fork.

Serve cooked foods immediately

- Keep hot foods hot (over 140°F, 60°C) and cold foods cold (under 41°F). Don't leave the perishables out of the cooler for more than two hours. Avoid unnecessary opening of coolers.
- Marinades used for raw foods should not be used as dipping sauces for cooked foods unless you boil the marinade first—the organisms from the raw foods could be transferred to the cooked food you're dipping.
- It's best to discard perishable picnic leftovers. If you must take them home, cool them immediately in small, shallow containers. Reheat leftovers to over 165°F before serving.