

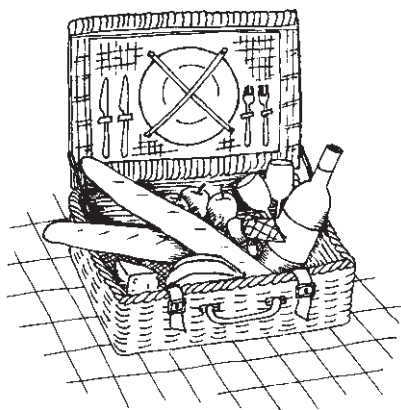
# picnic food

sanchia lovell

summersdale cookery



# *Picnic Food*



*Sanchia Lovell*

summersdale

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*For Lindy and Haakon Lovell*



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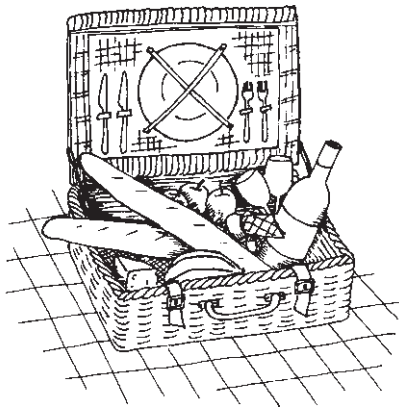
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# *Concerning Picnics*





## *The History of the Picnic*

Picnics. No one can forget the excitement of a picnic as a child, the preparation and anticipation, the pleasant novelty of eating outside – or the numerous fictional images that we amass throughout childhood and adulthood. A picnic can be many things to many people: a much needed break from travel, a refuelling amidst work, a romantic tryst, or a simple celebration of friends and food. The common factor is that most of us retain a soft spot for picnicking, and it is this which ensures its enduring appeal.

The word ‘picnic’ first appears in France in the late sixteenth century as ‘pique-nique’, meaning ‘a fashionable social entertainment’ in which each guest brought a contribution to the feast. However, the term was only adopted in England after 1800, and gradually developed a broader meaning encompassing any kind of portable meal or excursion to the countryside where friends might meet and share provisions. Although alfresco dining has obviously taken place throughout history (before battles, at Tudor hunting parties, and between bouts of work in the fields) the idea of the picnic really came into vogue in the early nineteenth century amongst the French and English aristocracy, who regularly indulged in servant-attended formal picnics with table and chairs, fine china and glassware. Queen Victoria herself is rumoured to have dabbled, delighting in nothing more than a good spread on a tablecloth in her extensive grounds with a number of staff, some cold game pies and a few parasols. With the exception of some serious strongholds of tradition such

as Glyndebourne and Henley, where the impeccably correct English picnic lives on and thrives, today's picnics tend to be casual affairs and are ever more popular. Whether as an indulgence for its own sake or to mark a special occasion, there are few things more pleasant than devoting a lazy day to eating and drinking in a beautiful setting and in good company.

## *The Ethos of the Picnic*

The Rat reappeared staggering under a fat, wicker luncheon basket.  
[...]

‘What’s inside it?’ asked the Mole, wriggling with curiosity.  
‘There’s cold chicken inside it,’ replied the Rat briefly;  
‘coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkin saladfrenchrollscreessand  
wichespotted meatgingerbeerlemonadesodawater—’

‘O stop, stop,’ cried the Mole in ecstasies: ‘This is too much!’

‘Do you really think so?’ inquired the Rat seriously. ‘It’s only what  
I always take on these little excursions; and the other animals are  
always telling me that I’m a mean beast and cut it VERY fine!’

– *The Wind in the Willows*, Kenneth Graham

A picnic should involve some level of gluttony, and I’ve got to admit to having no shame whatsoever. I do recall a picnic of such excess on a European train that sidewise glances rapidly became incredulous as self-denying fellow travellers looked askance at our bottle of wine, shifting away from the pungent aromas of our mature cheeses and individual cans of tuna. We ate on blithely. Another occasion found me in the foyer of a hotel awaiting a lift to the beach (the chosen picnic scene of the day), receiving a quite genuine enquiry as to whether ‘the party are checking out?’ We responded, of course, that the luggage surrounding us was, in fact, our lunch.

Suffice it to say that when it comes to picnics, as with most things in life, doing things by halves – ‘cutting it fine’ – is not an option. So, if you do feel a little sheepish at the amount you’re taking with you, pack up a bit more and you’re probably getting it right.

## *Settings*

The alm uncle rose and went to the hut, but immediately came out again, bringing a table, which he placed in front of the bench.

‘There, Heidi, now bring out what we need to eat,’ he said. ‘The gentleman will have to make the best of it, for if our cooking is plain our dining room is all that could be desired.’

‘I think so, too,’ replied the doctor as he gazed down into the valley bathed in sunlight, ‘and I accept your invitation, for everything must taste good up here.’

– *Heidi*, Johanna Spyri

It is a well-known fact that everything tastes better in the open air, and better still in the face of a beautiful view. So, whether riverbank, beach, woodland glade or camomile lawn, it is well worth taking the trouble to find a good spot even if it means going off the beaten track a little, and getting a bit hungrier on the way. I have to admit to an irrational hatred of the evenly spaced, regulated ‘picnic area’, and would always advocate driving or wandering down a winding lane to the refrain of: ‘Here? ... Here? ... Well, what about here then?’ until you find your ideal setting.