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An elevated Mother's Day picnic

By *Stacey Stein*

Most mothers have been putting in loads of overtime this past year, earning a well-deserved bonus. Which is why those closest to Mom might want to consider kicking things up a notch this Mother's Day. While a spa day may have to wait until next year, a thoughtfully planned Mother's Day picnic is a fun way to spend this special day and there are several creative spins on this idea.

"A picnic is a different way to celebrate and you can do this in any style you like," says registered dietitian Shannon Crocker, adding that family members can pack up the food and head to the park or have a backyard picnic.

If the word 'picnic' conjures up images of soggy sandwiches served on flimsy paper plates accompanied by sad juice boxes, think again. "A picnic is informal but you can still have elevated food options," says Crocker. She suggests keeping things classy by using real cutlery and glasses from home instead of disposable tableware.

With that in mind, here are a few ideas you can share with your family (hint, hint) so they can start planning the perfect Mother's Day picnic.

Picnic concept: Brunch and mimosas

The idea

A sophisticated outdoor brunch featuring a signature drink for mom (no PB&J sandwiches here!)

The food

Wraps are a nice alternative to the more pedestrian sandwich. Crocker suggests a Waldorf chicken salad wrap, using this [make-ahead Waldorf salad](#) recipe (for the cheese, she recommends using [Black River Cheese's 1-year aged cheddar](#)). To avoid any sogginess, pack the ingredients separately and then assemble the wrap at the park.

Several sides work well with wraps. Pair hummus with seasonal veggies like asparagus, mini tomatoes, sweet peppers and English cucumber (green house grown at this time of year), or make this crowd-pleasing [grilled potato salad](#).

For dessert, these [pecan shortbread cookies](#) are made with whole wheat flour, making them perfect for guilt-free indulging. Fruit and picnicking are pretty much synonymous – elevate your fruit tray with this creamy [chocolate almond dip](#).

The drink

An elegant picnic brunch deserves an elegant drink and a special mimosa made just for mom fits the bill. Combine Prosecco with some orange juice or grapefruit juice (keep chilled in a cooler pack) for the perfect sweet finish to a sweet day.

Picnic concept: A sophisticated charcuterie board

The idea

A grazing board jam-packed with a variety of elegant, delicious nibbles redefines the traditional picnic (and is sure to score big points with mom.)

The food

The basic building blocks of a charcuterie board are crackers and breads, cheeses and meats. Impress mom by making your own [shortbread crackers](#) – for visual interest mix these on the board with breadsticks and baguette slices. Next, add in some cured meats, like salami and prosciutto, and then layer in various cheeses – [Black River Cheese's maple Cheddar with cracked pepper](#), [smoked Gouda](#), and [2-year aged Cheddar](#) all pair well with the meats and will lend the board a nice variety of flavours. Finally, round out your board by adding in roasted nuts, pickled green beans or asparagus, a pot of raspberry jam, some honeycomb (delicious on the cheeses) and some fruit (grapes or berries) along with pieces of dark chocolate.

For dessert, put together a sweet board featuring various fruit (berries, grapes, and peach slices all work well), chunks of different types of chocolate (white, dark and milk chocolate), and these hearty [almond butter and flaxseed cookies](#).

Not sure how to assemble a charcuterie board and where to position the cheeses? [These instructions](#) provide some guidance.

The drinks

Cheese and wine is a classic pairing. Here are a few recommended wines to go with the cheeses:

Cheese	Wine
Black River maple cheddar with cracked pepper	Zinfandel
Black River smoked Gouda	Shiraz
Black River two-year aged cheddar	Chardonnay

Picnic concept: An English tea party

The idea

Take the British tradition of afternoon tea to the great outdoors and let mom revel in a beautiful day set against the backdrop of nature.

The food

A traditional afternoon tea features an assortment of sweet and savoury foods. Scones are standard afternoon tea fare – try making this [cranberry version](#) and serve with whipped cream, assorted jams, and this [chai lavender honey butter](#). Afternoon tea sweets shouldn't be too cloying and should pair well with tea. These [butter tart shortbread bars](#) and [empire cookies](#) will both work nicely.

Quiche is a perfect savoury offering – you can make mini versions of this [smoked chicken and asparagus quiche](#) (bonus: asparagus is in season in May) by baking them in a muffin tin.

Complete your afternoon tea set up with [Black River Cheese's cheddar cheese with honey](#) and some fresh strawberries served with Gay Lea whipped cream.

The drinks

It goes without saying that the main drink for this picnic will be tea. If the weather is warm, bring iced tea in a cooler (iced green tea mixed with lemon and fresh mint makes for a refreshing drink). In cooler climates, you'll probably want to go with a warm tea drink. Crocker suggests an earl grey tea latte – make ahead of time by heating up four cups of milk until warm, then add two earl grey tea bags, simmer on the stovetop (on the lowest heat) for about four minutes and then pour into an insulated container.

Picnic planning 101

Before you pack up your food and head outside, here are a few tips to help ensure your Mother's Day picnic is a success:

- Pack perishable food items that need to be refrigerated (like whipped cream, cheeses and meats) in a cooler
- Leave the plastic cutlery and paper cups at home. You're going for an elevated event – bring real cutlery and (carefully packed) glasses. And bring a nice tablecloth to spread across the picnic table.
- Bring games! Crocker notes that the great thing about a picnic celebration for Mother's Day is that the food is *part* of the event instead of the sole focus. You can play games like lawn darts, Frisbee, catch, or whatever other outdoor games your group enjoys.