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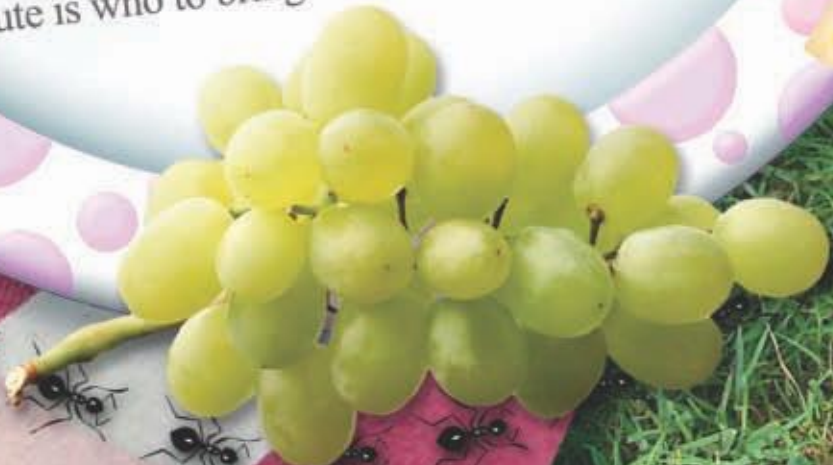
\$5.95 WWW.MY-TABLE.COM

Picnic



 With our generous spring rains and Houston's efforts to be greener, leafier, prettier and all around less-concrete-and-gray, you may have noticed how beautiful – and popular – our local parks have become. We encourage you to get outside in Houston (maybe in the cool morning or dusky evening, and obviously in the shade) and enjoy your tax dollars at work. Dining alfresco is fun beyond the patio or balcony.

Slip into something made of linen, pack a cooler of light bites and break bread beside a body of water, overlooking an outdoor stage or, perhaps, underneath one of our city's impressive oak trees. Since the scorching heat only occasionally spares the city, pre-plan your picnic with our suggestions for where to go and what to pack. The only thing you'll have to decide last minute is who to bring along.



Loves me...

Perfect

Beautiful Places

*** Houston. Under construction since 1836 ***
While recent parks department construction has been spearheaded by Houston's efforts to be a more enjoyable green space, it means there might be a few orange barrels in the background of your picnic selfies. High temperatures might seem daunting but don't shy away from the shade of thousands of newly planted trees. Or consider a picnic brunch before the heat of the day pushes you back indoors. Don't forget to pack sunscreen and bug spray. Turn the page for destination recommendations.

Grab & Go

Leading a troop of kiddos on your picnic? Make it easy on yourself with pre-cut, pre-sliced and keep it fork-free. Thinking of a romantic date for two? Luxurious dining doesn't have to be limited to an upscale restaurant. Here's a tip: Just add caviar. Whether you're using a good ol' Igloo to tote your vittles or a fancy basket, be sure to pack a few napkins and a coldpak. Turn the page for inspiration for putting together your feast.

Lug & Chug

Staying hydrated is crucial, especially if you're planning on dining alfresco after kayaking the bayou or taking an outdoor yoga class at Discovery Green. Keep in mind that if you're going to be playing in one of the City of Houston parks mentioned in Beautiful Places that alcohol is generally prohibited. Where can you enjoy a picnic and your own cocktails? Miller Outdoor Theatre – check their summer performance and movie screening schedule at milleroutdoortheatre.com. You can pack adult drinks in your picnic basket (remember, no glass containers) and, performances are free. See our drink suggestions on the next page.



PICNIC PERFECT

by Taylor Byrne Dodge & Becca Wright

Beautiful Places

REMINDER: Most city parks don't allow glass containers or alcohol, so be sure to check online before you leave home.

BUFFALO BAYOU PARK, which runs along the bayou between Allen Parkway and Memorial Drive, is in the midst of an awesome redevelopment. Some sections (e.g. from Sabine to Montrose) are newly open along the waterway, and there are new pedestrian bridges over the bayou where none existed before. You can even cross Memorial Drive to the police memorial via a new bridge. If you stroll the winding walkways, we guarantee you will find a nice picnic spot with a skyline view of downtown Houston. Eleanor Tinsley Park,

which is part of Buffalo Bayou Park, is the site of the city's official Fourth of July celebration "Freedom Over Texas." Further east, don't overlook the waterside development that runs along Buffalo Bayou in the shadow of the Wortham Theater Center.

Our 100-year-old **HERMANN PARK**, near both Rice University and the Texas Medical Center, is making a strong comeback since the 2011 drought. Several new features are being unveiled in 2014, including the McGovern Centennial Gardens set to open in October. For an extra-beautiful picnic, pick a spot with a view of the pond or the serene Japanese Garden. If you bring children, there are plenty of activities like riding the Hermann Park Railroad or weekend pedal-boating. Don't forget that the Houston Zoo *does* allow coolers (but no glass, alcohol or plastic straws, please).

On the east side of downtown in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center, enjoy an alfresco breakfast, lunch or dinner on the modern **DISCOVERY GREEN**. This 12-acre park hosts countless events and activities, such as concerts,

group exercise classes like yoga, hoop-dancing and zumba, kayak classes, recycling, festivals and movie nights on the lawn.

MENIL PARK, located on the lawn of the Menil Collection at 1533 Sul Ross in the Montrose area, is a discreet showcase of the neighborhood's fascinating eccentricity. There are works by Michael Heizer, Max Neuhaus, Tony Smith and Mark di Suvero installed on the lawns perfect for provoking picnic conversation. And you're just steps from the Menil Collection, Rothko Chapel and Cy Twombly Gallery. Like so many other parks listed here, the Menil campus is undergoing major renovation and replanting this year.

GERALD P. HINES WATERWALL PARK is the iconic Galleria-area landmark, a must-visit for out-of-towners. Lit at night, the waterwall makes a gorgeous setting for a romantic dinner alfresco, which will have to be enjoyed sans wine because the area doesn't allow alcohol.

RIVER OAKS PARK, also known as Pumpkin Park, is the public park on the southern edge of River Oaks at 3600 Locke Lane. It is an intimate space with picnic tables and grand oak trees that scatter the sunlight. If it's too busy for your liking, the tony River Oaks neighborhood has three other tiny public parks on Lazy Lane, Del Monte and Chevy Chase.

Its downtown location might be the reason it's underutilized for picnics, but with a close-up view of the City Hall architecture, the beautifully restored Julia Ideson Library across the street and the peaceful reflection pool, a meal on **HERMANN SQUARE** has an air of simple elegance. And as Hermann Square is a Free Speech Location, feel free to eat and speak as you please. But note: The reflection pool is also undergoing reconstruction as of May 2014.

Pick up your picnic goodies — perhaps from Revival Market — find a parking spot on one of the side residential streets and then stroll down the lush median strip of **HEIGHTS BOULEVARD**. It goes on for blocks and offers historic markers and changing art exhibits. The bungalows and architectural grande dames that line the boulevard conjure a small town of 100 years ago.

Grab & Go

The prepared foods section at **CENTRAL MARKET** can be overwhelming, but in the best way possible. Your options are nearly endless. Pick up a pint of pimiento cheese and tarragon chicken salad (1); order fresh sushi rolls and a side seaweed salad; or perhaps stand in the made-to-order sandwich line for conveniently wrapped hot sandwiches. (We recommend the California Connection — turkey, caramelized onions, pesto, chipotle mayo and melted provolone on sourdough bread — which easily feeds two.)

Before heading to meet your picnic posse, pick up some

healthful sandwiches and sides at **LOCAL FOODS** (two locations now). The truffled egg salad sandwich has a cult-like following, and the crunchy chicken sandwich will satisfy a fried-chicken craving. Home-style desserts are conveniently cut into bars; we love the blondies (butter-scotch brownies) (2).

RELISH FINE FOODS' takeaway is similar to Central Market's prepared foods section but on a far more manageable scale. Among the local artisan products they carry are Houston Dairymaids cheeses, Slow Dough breads and Grateful Bread cured meats. There are also plenty of sandwiches to order like the roast beef, a BLT with beefsteak tomatoes, the white cheddar grilled cheese or the turkey melt with caramelized coriander onions. Pick up a half dozen of the sticky brown butter rice crispy treats, too.

The folks behind **REVIVAL MARKET** have a deep appreciation for fine cured meats, so head here if looking to build the perfect picnic charcuterie plate. Or instead order to-go one of the meaty lunch sandwiches, such as the lamb pastrami on a pretzel bun or the grass-fed roast beef sandwich on a challah roll.

TRADER JOE'S sells Trader Joe's-brand lunch items that are pre-packaged, reasonably priced and often unexpected. For example, there are egg white salads (such as spicy ranchero), jerky of all types (including wild salmon and buffalo) and an assortment of unique salads (like the roasted butternut squash, red quinoa and wheatberry salad). You'll leave with an unconventional picnic spread, to say the least: Our latest visit netted a packaged Asian salad, box of assorted nuts, bag of dried apricots and milk chocolate English toffee rolled in chopped almonds.

If you're planning a picnic with the ladies who lunch, order in advance from **TINY BOXWOOD'S**. Each meal will be nicely packaged in its own white box. The summer salad with grilled chicken, spiced pecans, blue cheese, sliced apples and apple cider vinaigrette is crisp, tangy and light enough for a picnic in July. This is a one-stop shop if you order the soft, gooey chocolate chip cookies and freshly made mint lemonade — except for a trip to the liquor store to make that lemonade “adult.”

Choose **WHOLE FOODS** if you want to create a picnic spread of organic goodies. The by-the-slice pizza options are surprisingly delicious. If looking for a more traditional picnic spread, there is egg salad, potato salad and plenty of chicken salad varieties. The Sonoma chicken salad is a favorite — a simple salad with moist chicken breast, crunchy pecans and sweet grapes.

Looking for more picnic panache? Check out my-table.com for some playful extras — where to picnic, what to load on your iPod — we've included online.





Lug & Chug

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA SOFIA MINI BLANC DE BLANCS (3) Many places where you might like to dine outdoors — lakefront property, boats, around your pool — are better off without glass containers. Avoid the problem and pick up a pack of this surprisingly good canned bubbly. It might be the first time you sip sparkling wine through a pink straw, but we doubt it will be the last. \$18.99 for a 4-pack.

BOX WINE We're just going to say it: Box wines have gotten much better in recent years. They are also lightweight, which makes them worth considering for taking along on a picnic. Two we especially liked — **BLACK BOX MERLOT** (3L, \$16) and **BANDIT CALIFORNIA PINOT GRIGIO** (1L, \$9) — were both better after having a little time to breathe in the glass.

SPARKLING WATER You need to stay hydrated in the heat, and effervescence will add a bit more pizzazz to your picnic than will plain old still water. Some of our favorites include **LA CROIX COCONUT** (\$3.98/12-pack of cans), **PERRIER PINK GRAPEFRUIT** (\$1.69/25 fl. oz. bottle) and **TOPO CHICO LIME** (\$0.69/11.5 fl. oz. bottle). Don't forget

you can always add vodka.

CAPHIN COFFEE PRODUCTS (4) We like to think Houston does everything better, including these locally made Vietnamese iced coffees, which are bottled and ready to be added to your picnic cooler. (\$4.75/ 16 fl. oz. bottle at Mercantile)

Handy Picnic Picks

CUPPOW JAR DRINKING LID (5) Turn your mason jar into a spill-free travel mug perfect for pre-mixed picnic cocktails, fruit-infused water or fresh lemonade. \$8.99, cuppow.com

CUPPOW BNTO JAR DIVIDER (6) This small cup sits on the rim of your mason jar and divides your salad and dressing, chips and guacamole, peanut butter and celery, yogurt and granola, etc. \$8.99, cuppow.com

GOVINO WINE GLASSES (7) Shatterproof, reusable, stemless wine glasses and Champagne flutes that are perfect for picnic dining. \$12.95 for a 4-pack, govinowine.com

Have you tasted Lafayette?

Lafayette is a foodie's paradise. The epicenter of Cajun, Creole and so much more. The gateway to world-famous, Louisiana seafood — caught fresh daily in the Gulf of Mexico. A multitude of amazing chefs creating taste-tempting dishes. You gotta get here and taste what you've been missin'.



GET THE RECIPES AND TRIP INFORMATION

tastelafayette.com





Fried Oyster PoBoy