

The  
*summer*  
OF THE  
**PICNIC  
CLUB**

*For a warm-weather twist on a DINNER PARTY,  
these PORTLAND FRIENDS take it outside.  
Here's their step-by-step to EATING IN THE PARK.*

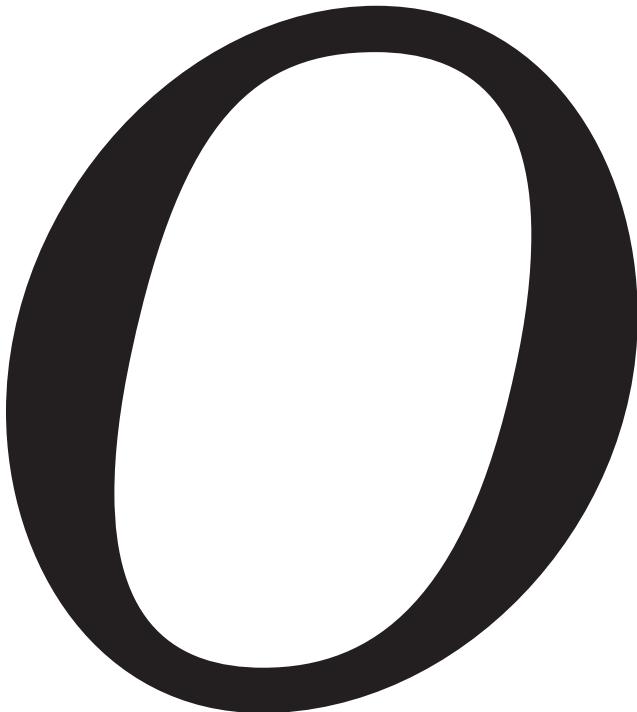
BY MARNIE HANEL | Photographs by TARA DONNE





## Scout your spot

We hold our picnics in a different Portland park each month. (This one was at Cathedral Park.) After winding up in a few less-than-choice locations within a park—like next to a pack of unicyclists—we began sending one person to grab a spot 30 minutes ahead of time. When the rest of us get there, we set up a buffet table and spread blankets on the grass.



**OF ALL THE GREAT MEALS** I've eaten in our food town, some of the best have been at picnics. Everything tastes better outside. In fact, my friends and I are so enamored with picnics that last year we formed a club around them: the Portland Picnic Society.

The club started at the suggestion of food writer Jen Stevenson, who was looking for a way to gather friends without the pressure of having to read a book or cook a big meal. When she mentioned meeting in a different park one evening each month throughout the summer, we jumped at the idea. The concept is simple: Each member brings a dish, a bottle of wine, and her own glass. We meet. We eat. We often attract groupies. (A stranger always asks for a plate.)

For most groups the planning would end there, but because we're all passionate about food, that's just the beginning. Before each club, emails ping-pong across the city as we plan a menu of bites and salads, and divide the supplies. One of us scouts the location. Two people bring the blankets plus bags for recycling and trash. I bring the plates. And we often wear bright picnic attire, although we've never discussed that.

## MORE IS MORE

Is it overdoing it to bring fresh flowers for the table or a croquet set? Probably. And that's how we like it. A barbecue is casual; a picnic is fancy. It also looks better on Instagram (#pdxpicnic).



**We meet. WE EAT.  
WE OFTEN ATTRACT GROUPIES.**

## Keep it real

We favor a picnic of the *Downton Abbey* variety—with real plates, serving pieces, and cutting boards. (Plus, after our first meeting, we were racked with guilt over using disposable dishes.)



## BOOZE!

Our picnics wouldn't be complete without plenty of rosé or a premixed cocktail. Before you uncork, suss out your park's open-container policy.



At every gathering, I discover a new food or recipe from my friends' offerings. Mona Johnson works at the Portland Farmers Market, and her tuna Niçoise salad, packed in tiers of a tiffin tin, seems uniquely designed to show off produce. Cookbook author Andrea Slonecker tests her recipes on us. Lila Martin, who works in travel PR, brings a locally made cheese. Spirits publicist Katie Burnett is a magician with a cocktail shaker. Brenda Crow, who runs a specialty-foods website, makes whole-grain salads, while Jen is crazy for canapés. And Michelle Cairo has no choice but to bring a charcuterie board from her *salumeria*, Olympic Provisions; my husband counts on the leftovers. As for me, a journalist, I use picnics as a chance to explore a new subject. My hits have included *gougères*, a browned butter raspberry tart, and a Spanish tortilla. (My misses, an atomic pimento cheese.)

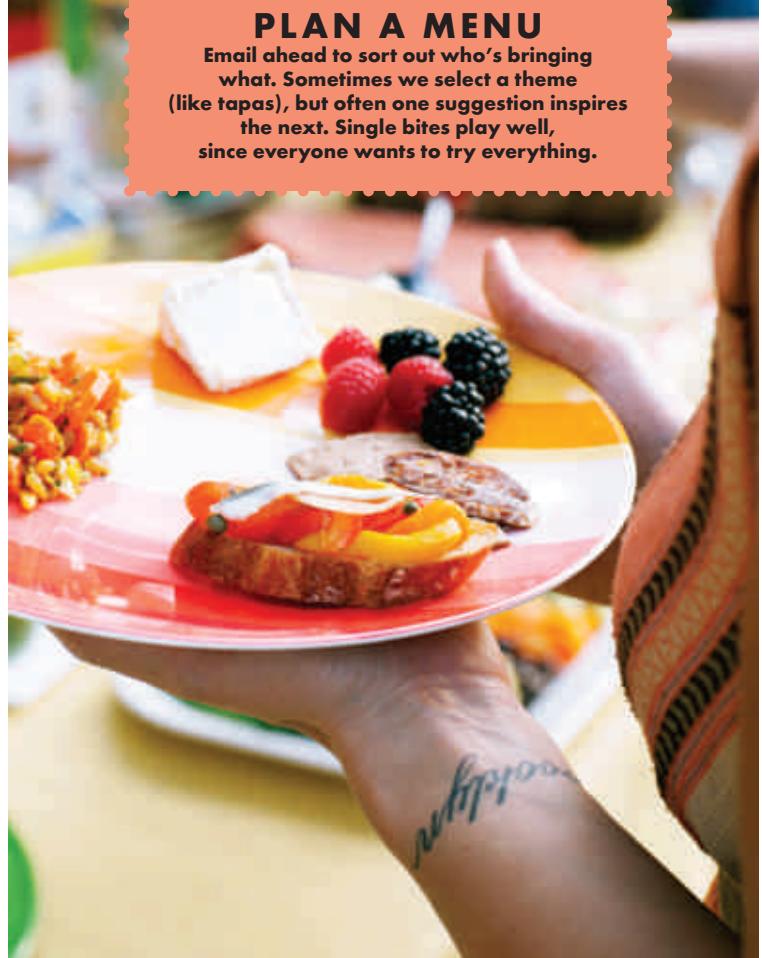
But our picnic club is about more than the food. On a warm day, when Mt. Hood is out and the crickets are just starting to chirp, there's nowhere I'd rather be than sitting cross-legged on a blanket, surrounded by friends. ☀



**PERFECT  
PICNIC RECIPES**  
for crostini,  
salads,  
and more:  
[sunset.com/picnic](http://sunset.com/picnic)

## PLAN A MENU

Email ahead to sort out who's bringing what. Sometimes we select a theme (like tapas), but often one suggestion inspires the next. Single bites play well, since everyone wants to try everything.



### **Keep a record**

After each picnic, I email the group to collect recipes for that evening's fare. Most replies begin, "I don't know if you could really call this a recipe, it's so simple..." But that's the joy of summer cooking: The ingredients do all the work. At the end of the season, we compile all the recipes.



*Styling by MIRANDA JONES*