

BEACH PICNIC RECIPES

WEST COUNTRY PASTIES

The original lunchbox!

1 packet of shortcrust pastry
Egg to glaze

1 large onion finely chopped
150g potato, peeled and diced
150g swede, peeled and diced
500g beef steak, cut into 1cm cubes
Salt and pepper

Divide the pastry into 4 and roll out into 20 cm circles.

Mix the filling ingredients together in a bowl. Divide the mixture into four and spoon into the centre of each circle – season to your personal preference.

Brush the edge of the pastry circles with water then bring up the edges to the centre and pinch together to form a crust. Chill on a baking sheet in the fridge for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 180C, Gas mark 4. Glaze pastry with a beaten egg and bake for one hour until golden.

To appeal to children, you could easily make mini versions of this. And you can vary the fillings – try chicken and mushroom, cheesy potato and onion for vegetarians, or lamb and leek.

CHICKEN LICKIN'

Chicken is even more delicious cold than hot!

12 free-range chicken thighs

Juice of 2 lemons – Sicilian unwaxed if poss
4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed

3 medium eggs
Grated zest of 1 lemon
125g plain flour
2 tbsp finely grated parmesan

Olive oil for cooking

Marinate the chicken thighs in the lemon juice, oil and garlic, preferably overnight in the fridge.

Bring chicken up to room temperature before cooking. Beat the eggs and lemon zest together in a large bowl. Mix the flour and parmesan together and put on a large plate

Meanwhile heat the olive oil in the oven, preheated to Gas mark 6, 200C.

Dip the chicken into egg mixture and then the flour until evenly coated. Place the thighs in the hot oil and baste carefully before putting into the oven for 30 minutes, turning occasionally, until nice and crispy.

GLAZED SAUSAGES

No picnic is complete without cold sausages. But you must buy the best chipolatas from the butcher, with a high meat content. And to give them a kick, glaze them in the oven with a mixture of whatever you have to hand:

Runny honey
Soy sauce
Chilli jam
Redcurrant jelly

Add some grainy mustard or sprinkle with sesame seeds to give some texture.

Remember to include a jar of your favourite mustard for dunking.

DELI LOAF

1 large round Italian-style or country loaf
2 tablespoons pesto
1 pack buffalo mozzarella
1 jar marinated red peppers
1 jar sun-dried tomatoes
1 jar chargrilled artichokes
Salami
A few good black olives, stone and finely chopped

Cut off the top of the loaf and keep, then scoop out the insides rather like a pumpkin until you are left with a shell. Paint the insides with the pesto, perhaps thinned down with a little olive oil from the marinated vegetables. Slice up the vegetables if they are too chunky, then layer them up with thinly sliced mozzarella, salami and a sprinkling of olives until the shell is tightly packed. Put the lid back on and squash it down firmly before wrapping the loaf very tightly in cling film. Put your picnic loaf in the very bottom of the cooler with a chopping board on top so that it is weighed down by the rest of your picnic items. Don't forget to bring a sharp knife to cut into slices.

You can do many variations of this, depending on what is to hand and your preferences – simple tomato and mozzarella is good, interleaved with basil. Or a Greek salad variation – cucumber, tomato, feta and olives with plenty of flat leaf parsley.

SWEET TREATS

A good supply of sweet treats is needed to keep energy levels up, as well as a supply of fresh fruit.

WHITE CHOCOLATE AND CRANBERRY COOKIES

225g softened butter
200g light muscavado sugar
1 tbsp vanilla extract
2 eggs
300g plain flour
1 tbsp bicarb of soda
75g dessicated coconut
250g white chocolate
150g dried cranberries

Preheat oven to 180c/gas mark 4. Thoroughly grease 2 baking sheets.

Beat the butter and sugar until pale and creamy. Beat the eggs and vanilla together and gently mix into butter mixture until blended, then fold in sifted flour and bicarb. Mix in the coconut, chocolate and cranberries.

[NB you can vary the additions to these cookies. Try dark or milk chocolate with pecans, walnuts or macadamia nuts, dried cherries – even Smarties.]

Drop dollops of mixture onto the baking sheet, leaving room to spread. Bake for 15 minutes, keeping an eye that they don't catch. Cool before wrapping carefully in greaseproof paper.

ORANGE CAKE

This keeps deliciously moist – serve with some punnets of fresh raspberries.

1 orange
3 eggs
8 oz golden caster sugar
9 oz ground almonds
½ teaspoon baking powder

Boil the orange for an hour [keep an eye on it – I once forgot and ended up with a blackened saucepan] or cheat and zap it in the microwave for a couple of minutes until soft. Then whiz up to a smooth puree in the blender.

Whisk the eggs and sugar together until pale. Fold in the nuts, orange puree and baking powder, then pour into an 8' greased and lined spring-form cake tin.

Bake for 45 minutes at Gas mark 4, 180C. Cool and wrap in greaseproof paper.