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U.S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, July 10, 1933

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Low-Cost Family Meals, Cooked Outdoors." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Holiday fun without expense. That's what many families are asking for this summer. One good answer is family picnics. These outdoor suppers or dinners cost no more than staying at home--often less. They can be very easy to prepare and very inexpensive since so many low-cost foods are especially adapted to campfire cooking. A good picnic meal saves fuss and fuel in the hot kitchen and offers fun for the whole family--if you plan it well.

Most people take picnics too seriously. They go in for fancy preparations, fussy cooking, spreading innumerable sandwiches, hunting the ideal spot, packing, unpacking, repacking. That's hard work, not fun. Everybody gets tired out, especially mother. But just to pack up and go out when the spirit moves you, carrying your supper provisions along, then to cook and eat simple food outside with everybody helping--that's the proper kind of a picnic. Be a gypsy in summer ready to set forth and cook a gypsy meal in the open at any time.

If you have a place in your cupboard just for your picnic equipment, you'll have everything ready when you want to pick up and leave at a moment's notice. Keep a set of utensils just for gypsy meals, nothing else. Picnic equipment is very simple. For eating, you need plates--paper, wood or metal, just so they're waterproof; cups that won't collapse; forks and spoons; screw-top jars, big and little, for carrying sugar, butter, salad, or cut-up fruit and vegetables; and some sort of tight containers for salt and pepper. For the picnic cloth, oilcloth is a good choice. It is inexpensive, doesn't need laundering and is always ready to go. A friend of mine uses an oilcloth square with weights sewed in the corners so no breeze will carry it off. And she has a set of oilcloth pads for the picnickers to sit on. Better use oilcloth that is not too slippery, or at least use the rough side.

Now for the cooking equipment. That is also very simple. You may have enough extra utensils in your own kitchen to dedicate to campfire use this summer. Otherwise the five-and-ten-cent stores can supply most of your needs-- a substantial kettle in which to cook the whole meal if you want to, a good-sized skillet, a coffee pot, a long-handled fork for toasting, cooking spoons, one good sharp knife to use for whittling kindling or carving a loaf of bread; a bottle and can opener all in one--that's about all you need for preparing any outdoor meal. Often you don't want that much. For example, if you are going on a walking picnic, the less equipment you have to carry the better. Many a good outdoor meal has been cooked on sticks and stones. Long pointed sticks of green wood make excellent utensils for roasting meat. And clean, smooth, flat stones often make good open-fire griddles.

If you want to cook a meal in the open without being bothered with pots and kettles, why not feature a broiled meat concoction like kabobs? Perhaps you've had a dish called "shish kabobs" in an Armenian or Turkish restaurant. These are very easy to cook over the campfire. They're a favorite with almost any boy in scout ranks. Because kabobs originated in the part of Europe where lamb is the chief meat, they are usually made of lamb. Lamb shoulder is the most economical cut for the purpose. A medium-sized shoulder will provide enough meat for eight or ten people. Ask the butcher to remove all bones from the shoulder and cut the meat into pieces about one and a half inches square and an inch thick. The meat in the well-fleshed part of the shoulder is usually very tender, so is best when cooked rapidly.

Now get out some long pointed sticks of green wood or some long firm wires and string the meat, bacon and onion slices alternately on them, like a string of beads. One picnic authority says to pierce a piece of piece of meat and slip it on, then add a square of bacon, then a slice of onion and then repeat until you have a good-sized serving on your roasting stick. Now sear the meat quickly over the hot coals. Then prop your stick over the fire and let your kabob finish roasting slowly until it is done, turning it now and then to cook evenly. The secret of a good kabob is having good, hot coals. When done, season the meat with salt and pepper and serve at once, still on the skewers. Some people prefer to eat hot kabobs in buttered picnic rolls like a meat sandwich. By the way, be sure to have the butcher save the bones and other parts of the lamb shoulder not suited to kabobs so you can use them to make lamb broth or stew for another meal.

The kabob idea will apply to other kinds of meat also. You can broil small pieces of steak or veal or lamb kidneys between bacon on a skewer in just the same way. To go with the kabobs potatoes, either sweet or white, baked in embers or hot coals are delicious.

The real woodsman often lets nature provide his cooking griddle. He chooses a thin, flat rock, one that won't crack and burst when heated, rubs it off clean and then lays it at the edge of the fire to heat. When bacon will sizzle on it, he broils his bacon directly on the stone. Or he uses it to cook steak or meat patties or even his bacon and eggs.

The menu today is an inexpensive, easy meal cooked out of doors. Here it is: Broiled kabobs or meat patties, cooked either on a hot stone or in your campfire skillet; Potatoes baked in embers; Soft rolls, buttered at home; Whole tomatoes washed, chilled and carried in a jar to eat like apples; Crisp chilled cucumber or raw carrot sticks to eat with salt; for dessert, Chilled watermelon or other fresh fruit in season; Cookies, Campfire coffee; and Milk for the children. Once more that low-cost family menu: Broiled kabobs or meat patties; Potatoes baked in the campfire embers; Buttered soft rolls; Whole tomatoes; Cucumber or raw carrot sticks; Fresh fruit and Cookies for dessert with Coffee and Milk to drink.

Tomorrow: "More Ways to Save Fabrics."

