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Tips to Enjoy Spring and Summer Outdoor Eating

By [Mary O'Hara, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist](#)

Picnic season is here and what a perfect way to get back out there after COVID to enjoy the warm weather! Important things to consider on your outing are seasonal vegetable options and safe food handling practices.

Shopping at local farmers' markets is a great way to help the environment. Farmers that sell at local markets reduce the amount of waste and pollution they create. Many of these farmers follow certified organic practices, which minimize the impact of synthetic pesticides and chemicals that pollute the soil and water. A growing number are also starting to use other low-impact practices, such as on-site composting, that help combat climate change and other environmental issues (1). Keep in mind, many farmers' markets also accept EBT cards.

Below are vegetables you may find in season now:

- Asparagus
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Celery
- Collard Greens
- Spinach
- Peas (2)

Foodborne illnesses are common, but largely preventable. You can get food poisoning by eating food that has been contaminated with a variety of bacteria. Adults aged 65 and older, children under 5 years old, those with weakened immune systems, and pregnant women are at a higher risk of getting a foodborne illness. People in these groups or their caregivers need to take extra precautions. Here are some tips to avoid foodborne illness:

- Wash your hands and surfaces often to help prevent food poisoning. Hands should be washed for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing food and before eating. Any utensils, cutting boards, and surfaces need to be thoroughly cleaned. Fresh fruits and vegetables are rinsed under running water.
- Bacteria can multiply rapidly if left at room temperature or in the "Danger Zone" between 40°F and 140°F. Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below, your freezer at 0°F or below. Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours. If the food is exposed to temperatures above 90°F, like in a hot car or on a picnic, refrigerate it within 1 hour. Frozen food should be thawed in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave, never on the counter at room temperature.
- Food is safely cooked when the internal temperature gets high enough to kill bacteria that can make you sick. Use a food thermometer to make sure your food is cooked to a safe internal temperature.
- Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs must be separated from ready-to-eat foods to reduce contamination and the spread of bacteria. Make sure to use separate cutting boards and keep raw meat away from other foods in your shopping cart and refrigerator (3).

Consider the following healthy recipe to enjoy on a picnic adventure in the park or backyard!

Basil Macaroni Salad (recipe adapted to serve 6 by the God's Love We Deliver chefs)

Ingredients

- Elbow macaroni ½ pound

For the beans:

- 12 ounce can Black beans, low sodium – drained and rinsed
- Thyme

For the dressing:

- Basil, fresh
- Garlic – 1 clove
- Mustard, Dijon 1 teaspoon
- Vinegar, apple cider 2 ounces
- 4 ounces olive oil
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- Honey- 2 teaspoons

For the vegetables:

- 1 teaspoon Olive oil
- 1 Red onion, raw – diced
- 1 Green pepper, raw, diced
- 1 Red pepper, raw, diced
- 1 Carrot, raw, shredded

Method

- Cook the macaroni and chill in fridge until ready to use.
- Toss black beans with thyme and chill in fridge, as well
- Blend all ingredients for the dressing and whisk until smooth- put aside
- In a skillet, heat olive oil and cook vegetables until they begin to caramelize
- Once the vegetables are cool, gently toss the ingredients together to evenly coat and enjoy!

Note: Make sure to keep salad refrigerated, especially if you are taking it out on a picnic.

Sources:

1. [Farmers Markets Promote Sustainability – Farmers Market Coalition](#)
2. [Seasonal Produce Guide | SNAP-Ed \(usda.gov\)](#)
3. [Four Steps to Food Safety | CDC](#)

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