

An Independence Day Picnic

In the 1840s, Independence Day was one of the most important American holidays. Families and friends gathered for militia musters and patriotic readings, and many people enjoyed picnics. Try this menu out for your next Fourth of July Celebration!

Fried chicken
Cold boiled ham
Hard boiled eggs
Biscuits
Pickles
Fried pies
Watermelon
Lemonade



You can purchase most of these foods readymade, or you may try out the following recipes with help from an adult. Remember that picnic food should be kept cold, and should not sit out for more than 2 hours.

Recipes

SHORT BISCUIT.

Rub half a pound of butter into a quart of flour, sprinkling in a salt-spoonful of salt. Make it into good common paste with cold water, knead it well, and beat it till very smooth, with a roller; then roll it into a sheet about half an inch thick, cut it into small round cakes with a biscuit cutter. and bake them in a

- 4 cups of flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- Cold water

Biscuits – Modern adaptation

No baking powder, yeast or eggs make these biscuits rise. Instead, you beat the dough to make it tender. The result is more like a soda cracker than the soft, fluffy biscuits we are familiar with today.

You'll need:

- 2 sticks of butter

Mix together the flour and salt. Cut the butter in with a knife or work lightly with the finger tips, until the lumps of butter are about the size of peas. Add enough cold water to make a stiff dough. Beat the dough with a rolling pin or mallet until the dough blisters. Roll the dough to about ½ inch thick, and cut with a biscuit cutter. Prick the center of each biscuit. Bake at 350 degrees for about half an hour, or until golden brown.

Fried Chicken – Modern adaptation

This recipe is best attempted by an experienced adult cook.

You'll need:

- 3 pounds frying chicken, cut into serving pieces
- Salt
- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 teaspoon white pepper
- Shortening or oil

Wash the chicken pieces under cold running water. Drain, but do not dry. Sprinkle liberally on both sides with salt.

Place the flour, pepper, and 1 teaspoon salt in a medium-size brown paper bag. Add chicken; close top of bag and shake so all pieces are coated evenly and well. Remove chicken pieces and shake to remove excess flour.

Place melted shortening or oil 1/4-inch deep in a 10-inch skillet. Place over highest heat for a few minutes, until fat is crackling hot. Carefully place chicken pieces in skillet side by side, fleshy side down. Cook rapidly a few minutes, making sure pieces have a firm but very light brown crust on the bottom. Turn each piece as it reaches this stage until all are turned. Reduce the heat to quite low and cover skillet. Cook 40 minutes.

Remove cover and turn heat up once more to highest level. Turn each piece as the bottom becomes golden, but not too brown, and quite crisp. (The top surface of the chicken pieces will have a rather soft look when the cover is removed, but a couple minutes turned over will change this to desired golden crispness.) Remove chicken pieces; drain on paper towels. Serve with Chicken Cream Gravy. Serves 4.

CHICKEN CREAM GRAVY

- Cooking fat from chicken
- 3 tablespoons flour
- Ground black pepper
- 2 dashes Tabasco Hot Pepper Sauce
- 2 cups milk

Pour through a sieve, the fat left in the skillet after frying chicken. Return 2 to 3 tablespoons of fat to the skillet, along with the brown particles remaining in the sieve. Turn the heat to high; add the flour and stir, picking up browned bits remaining in the skillet, until flour is medium brown; then turn heat off. Add a generous sprinkle of black pepper and the Tabasco. Pour in milk all at once; turn heat to medium-high and stir constantly until gravy thickens. The consistency should be similar to that of heavy cream. Makes 2 cups.

FRIED CHICKENS.

Chickens are nicest for frying when they are about half grown. Cut off the wings and legs, separate the back from the breast, cut it across, and split each piece, divide the breast, clean the giblets, and rinse them all in cold water; season them with salt and pepper, dip them in batter, and fry them a yellowish brown in lard, which should be boiling when the chicken is put in. Thicken the gravy with brown flour, chopped parsley, pepper and cream; serve up the chicken, and pour the gravy round.

From *The Kentucky Housewife*
Lettie Bryan, 1839

From <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SOUTHERNCOOKBOOK/message/108?source=1>

Fried Pies – Modern adaptation

You'll need:

- 1 8 oz package of dried peaches or dried apples
- 1 cups water
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 batch of your favorite pie or 1 10-oz can refrigerated flaky biscuits
- vegetable oil, for frying

FRIED PIES.

Fried pies made be made of any kind of nice fruit, having prepared it in a proper manner, but dried fruit is preferable to green. Stew it tender, mash it fine, and season it to your taste with sugar and spices. Roll out a sheet of plain or standing paste, nearly one fourth of an inch thick cut it in as

Combine peaches and water in saucepan; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer for 30 minutes or until tender. Cool. Mash slightly if necessary. Stir in sugar and butter; taste and add sugar if necessary. Set mixture aside.

Prepare batch of pastry and cut out 3 inch circles. Place about 1 tablespoon fruit mixture on half of each circle. To seal pies, dip fingers in water and moisten edges of circles. Fold in half, making sure edges are even. Using a fork dipped in flour, press edges firmly together.

Pour oil to a depth of 1/2 inch into a heavy skillet. Fry pies in hot oil (375 °) over medium-high heat on both sides until golden, turning once. Drain well on paper towels. Sprinkle with sugar while still warm. Yield: About 20 small pies.

VARIATION 1: Canned biscuit dough

Use canned flaky biscuit dough instead of pastry. Roll each biscuit into a 5 inch circle on a lightly floured surface. Place about 2 tablespoons of fruit mixture on half of each circle. Proceed as above. Yield: 10 small pies

VARIATION 2: Baked, not fried

After sealing the turnovers, prick them with a fork. Bake in a 375° oven for 15 minutes.

Adapted from <http://southernfood.about.com>