

Dear Party Guru: With the warm weather here, we'd love some suggestions for dining *alfresco*?

The Guru Responds: There are so many ways to enjoy cruelty-free cuisine while getting our daily dose of vitamin D (from the sun, that is). Be sure to include the pooches, when possible.

Splendor in the Grass

Nothing says summer like a picnic. The food options are endless, especially since you don't have to worry about everything spoiling as quickly as when you use egg- and dairy-based products. Emphasize what's in season, and don't forget the condiments and compostable plates, cups, and utensils. Keep the menu simple and fresh:

*Toss penne pasta with raw veggies, toasted pine nuts, fresh basil, balsamic vinegar, and a little extra-virgin olive oil.

*Combine spinach leaves with fresh raspberries, sunflower seeds, and mandarin orange slices in advance, and toss with seasoned rice vinegar just before serving.

*Make a Thai-inspired slaw by mixing purple and green cabbage, grated carrots, red onions, scallions, fresh parsley, and peanuts with a marinade of orange juice, seasoned rice vinegar, maple syrup, and finely chopped ginger.

*Spread Focaccia bread with pesto, and add grilled veggies (eggplant, zucchini squash), thinly sliced tofu, roasted red peppers, fresh tomatoes, and basil. Drizzle with balsamic vinegar.

Moonstruck

You don't have to wait for the annual Shakespeare in the Park festivals to picnic outside (but it's a great excuse!). Throw a blanket down on your balcony, patio, or lawn, and snuggle up with your honey by the light of the moon. Open a bottle of wine or sparkling juice, and enjoy organic strawberries dipped in melted chocolate, which you can keep warm with a portable butane stove.

Into the Woods

We all need to move more, and the trails are beckoning. Before you venture out, be sure to bring water (in a stainless steel thermos) and easy-to-carry energy boosts, such as nuts, dried fruit, veggie jerky, and the old standby: peanut butter & jelly sandwiches on whole wheat bread.

Let's Play Ball!

Just because I've been to only one baseball game in my lifetime, I do know the difference between a touchdown and slam dunk! The bottom line is: the food at stadiums is a changin', so if you don't want to bring your own, many ballparks offer lots o' veggie fare – from soy dogs and burritos to French fries and pretzels. Check out soyhappy.org for a veg guide to ballparks.

Colleen Patrick-Goudreau is the founder of Compassionate Cooks (compassionatecooks.com), has appeared on the Food Network, and is the author of [The Joy of Vegan Baking: Compassionate Cooks' Traditional Treats and Sinful Sweets](#).