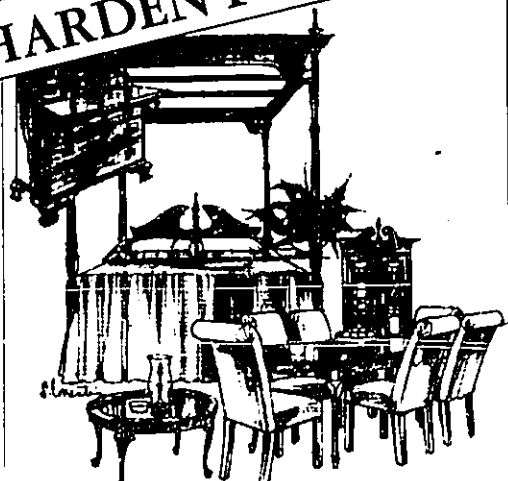


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## INVITING IDEAS

# Keep romance alive with picnic for two



RUTH  
MOSSOK JOHNSTON

Planning a romantic date as well as keeping the romance alive in relationships is an ongoing challenge. While new relationships have that "freshness" - interesting, fun, and creative ideas can certainly provide your date with the feeling you really care.

I often think about when I first met

David, my husband - we met by chance when I was looking to buy a small historic home in downtown Franklin. David was standing out on the street with one of his children looking at some horses, I rolled down the window of my car and asked if there were any houses for sale in the neighborhood. David answered my question, and the next thing I knew, I was looking at his home, his paintings, and talking about life, past loves, and both of us being single. Pretty romantic... well, I never did buy the small house down the street, and the outcome 17 years later, is history.

There was one date David planned, that was probably the most memorable - he asked me to go on a picnic for two - granted, he is an artist, and probably more creative than some men out there, but I thought this was really romantic. The weather did not cooperate, so we did this "picnic for two" - indoors. In the kitchen of his historic home appeared a beautiful antique basket and a red checkered cloth covering a small early tap table. The table was set with Bybee blue and white sponge-ware pottery, clear wine glasses filled with red wine, and cloth napkins - under my plate was a love note - who could resist? At this point, it really didn't matter what was for lunch, but I do remember - in that wicker basket was: French bread, chilled shrimp cocktail, sliced fruit, and a chocolate torte. None of this food was prepared by David's hands, but it couldn't have been more perfect.

A picnic for two does set the stage for romance - take this idea and expand on it, make it specifically "yours." Picnics don't have to be at lunchtime - a picnic at dusk "teatime" would be lovely, or try a candle-lit midnight picnic. Keep in mind the aspect of romance. David's little note was the perfect final touch!

Edith Stovel (Dee Dee Stovel) has written a neat little book called "Picnic! Recipes and Menus for Outdoor Enjoyment" (copyright 1990 by Storey Communications). Dee Dee's book is in its thirteenth printing, and has delightful recipes and ideas for all kinds of picnics, not necessarily romantic picnics for two - but there are ideas for that too. "Picnic!" includes more than 25 carefully orchestrated picnic menus

and over 120 recipes for \$9.95. With Dee Dee's kind permission, I am including two recipes from her book.

### FRESH TOMATO ASPIC WITH LEMON DILL SAUCE

#### Ingredients for Aspic:

2 tablespoons unflavored gelatin  
2 tablespoons cold water  
1/2 cup boiling water  
2 cups tomato juice  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1/2 teaspoon finely cut fresh dill  
1 cup seeded and chopped tomatoes

#### Ingredients for Lemon Dill Sauce:

1 tablespoon finely cut fresh dill  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
3 tablespoons mayonnaise  
1/4 cup plain yogurt

In a small bowl, dissolve the gelatin in the cold water. Add the boiling water and stir until gelatin is totally dissolved.

Add the remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour the aspic into two 1/2-cup molds and one 1-quart mold and chill for 2 hours. Cover the two small molds with aluminum foil and pack in your insulated bag when it is time to leave.

To make the sauce, combine all the ingredients in a small bowl and gently whisk until they are just combined. Pour about 1/4 cup of the sauce in a small jar with a tight-fitting lid and chill until time to put in your insulated bag. Chill the remaining sauce in another container to serve with the larger mold later.

Preparation time: 15 minutes, chilling time 2 hours. Serves 8.

### CHOCOLATE-DIPPED STRAWBERRIES

1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips, melted (Do not let the chocolate get hot, around 110 degrees F. is perfect. A microwave oven is useful for this step)

2 tablespoons melted butter  
3 tablespoons Grand Marnier liqueur  
1/4 cup Confectioners' sugar  
1 tablespoon water  
Selected large fresh strawberries, washed and patted dry

Combine the chocolate, butter, and Grand Marnier in a small bowl and whisk together.

Add the confectioners' sugar and water and continue whisking until smooth.

Dip the strawberries about three-quarters of the way into the chocolate. Let them drain on wax paper and sit until the chocolate has set. Pack them carefully in a small-lidded tin, lined with wax paper. They don't keep for long - make them the day you plan to have your picnic. Yield 1 cup. Preparation time: 30 minutes.

Ruth Mossok Johnston is an author and food columnist who lives in Franklin. To leave a Voice Mail message for Ruth, dial (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1902.