



PLANNING A WHISKY PICNIC

Whisky is more than a pleasant picnic drink. Six recipes for a whisky-based al fresco menu; wait till you see what's in the fried chicken!

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There's nothing quite as indulgently perfect to a whisky lover than that first snap of real chill in the air, beckoning you to call an end to leaf-raking, build a fire, and settle in for a glass of your favorite single malt while the whipping wind does its best outside. Right then, at that moment, a picnic is likely the last thing on your mind.

But before you get too settled down with that long-winter's dram, we'd like you to think ahead a little, to those skin-warming days in the not-so-distant future: a blanket on the ground, the feel of the sun on your shoulders, the sound of the breeze in the trees, and a requisite wicker basket packed full of irresistible *al fresco* edibles. Because with a little planning right now while you're hunkered down indoors, when spring arrives you'll have the ultimate whisky picnic down to sheer perfection.

According to the *Encyclopedia of American*

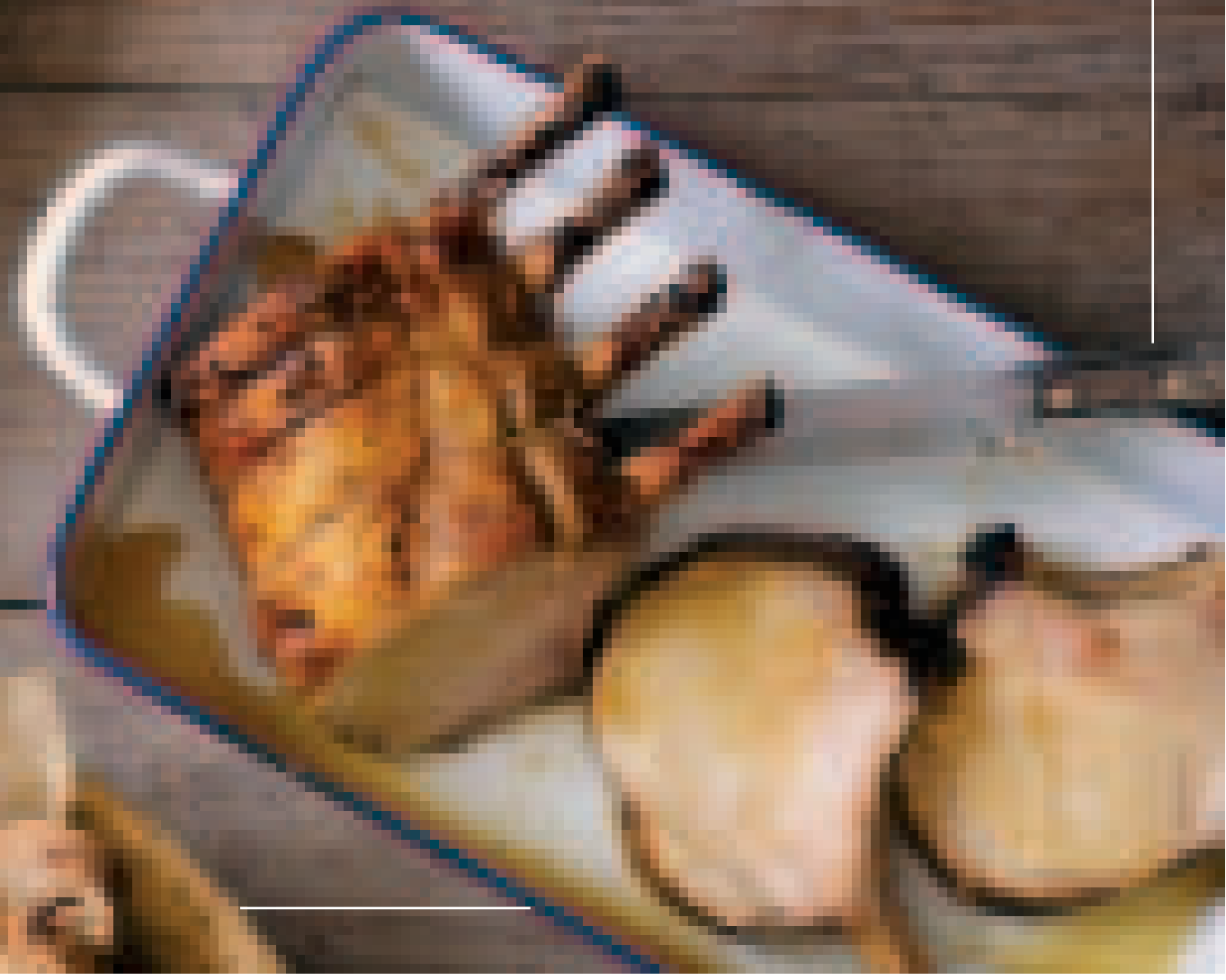
Food & Drink, the word is derived from the French *pique-nique* and began to appear in our lexicon and in our kinder-climate dining rituals around 1748. Around that time, we began gleefully packing up heaping hampers of cold meats, salads, and beverages by the jug, and we haven't stopped since. Up until now, however, the contents of that jug only crossed the plate if it was knocked over by an accidental bare-footed kick. We think we can do a little better than that.

Packing a whisky-centric cooler full of culinary treats requires a little preliminary practice and, truly, not much more than some think-outside-the-bottle spirit, and perhaps a few good recipes and tips from those in the know. The first and most important: "Alcohol is volatile and flammable! Always use caution. When adding whisky to a pan, do it off the flame," says Sother Teague, chef and owner of

the bar Amor y Amargo in New York. What else? "Second, whisky tastes great in a glass, as the distiller intended, but typically needs to be cooked a bit to taste great in food. Cooking off the alcohol burn will result in a better tasting finished product."

Teague, who was the research and technical chef for Alton Brown's Food Network hit, "Good Eats," also has a bit of advice on which whiskies are the best to cook with: "ALL! I mean, mind the budget here as far as quality goes, but by all means, cook with rye, bourbon, scotch, Canadian, Irish. Any whisky you like to drink will be delicious in the foods you like to eat." True enough, in our recipe below for

Whisky relaxes at this picnic, and all the food is whisky-soaked. Even the cocktails are a very drinkable surplus 'glaze' from the Gingered Gold Rush Pork Loin, lower right.



Peat's Fried Chicken, a little Laphroaig goes a long way.

Or, perhaps, a tiny bit more than a little. Teague, who is also working on a book and web series on dishes he's developed based around cocktail recipes, says when it comes to serving dishes cold or at room temp, generosity can be a good thing.

"If you're going to serve a dish cold and want the whisky to stand out, dial it up a bit more than you think necessary during the cooking. It's best to 'overseason.' Cooler temperatures in the food result in less ability to pick up the flavors therein," he offers. "Consider taking a pour of your favorite whisky and putting it in the freezer overnight. Taste it side by side with whisky that's on your bar; it's so cold that it's literally numbing your tongue and desensitizing your taste receptors. Also, aroma is lost in colder items, and aroma constitutes 90 percent of flavor."

With that in mind, let's fill your basket with some whisky-centric ones. If you can't wait till summer to try these, just spread a blanket on your living room floor and pretend.

High West Saloon Popcorn

"As the saloon opened its doors, we knew we needed a snack to place on the bar," says High West distillery owner David Perkins. "It had to be crunchy. It had to be salty. And sweet, that too! Chef James's [Dumas] wife, Kris, came across a spiced caramel popcorn recipe." With a few 'food-group' add-ons, like the bacon, cashews, and bourbon, Perkins says, they'd found the perfect snack: equally nice for bar or picnic noshing.

Ingredients:

- 5 cups sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup corn syrup
- 12 oz. raw popcorn
- 1 cup heavy cream
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Ancient Age bourbon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chai concentrate
- 4 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 12 oz. diced bacon
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups cashews
- 1 Tbsp. salt
- 1 tsp. cayenne

Preheat oven to 350° F.

In a medium pot, combine the sugar, water, and corn syrup and cook over medium heat until it turns golden brown. When it's reached this point, add the vegetable oil into a large, heavy-bottomed pot with a tight-fitting lid; place on medium-high heat. Add the popcorn, and agitate by hand until popping ceases. Dump into a bowl immediately and set aside.

When the syrup turns dark, golden-amber, add the chai concentrate and whiskey. Heat to a light simmer. Add the cream to the caramel mixture (be careful; the cream will erupt if poured in fast) and stir until combined.

In a separate pan, cook the bacon without oil until it is crispy. Transfer to a paper-towel lined plate to drain, then break into bits.

In a large bowl or pot, mix the popped corn and bacon. Add the salt and cayenne pepper. Drizzle in the caramel sauce. Pour the mixture on two jelly roll pans and place in the oven for 5 minutes. Cool on a rack. Some of it will be chunky; that's okay! Makes about 8 cups.



Gingered Gold Rush Pork Loin

Teague based this cold pork-chop dish on the cocktail known as the Gold Rush, a mix of bourbon, honey syrup, and lemon juice. “Here, I’ve added fresh ginger juice to make it snappy for a pork picnic dish. You can make double the amount of the glaze and before cooking it, reserve half in a thermos. Just add ice when you get to your picnic site, shake, and enjoy.”

Glaze ingredients:

- 4 oz. bourbon
- ½ cup honey
- ¼ cup dark brown sugar
- 2 oz. fresh-squeezed ginger juice (juice shops are a great source)
- 2 oz. fresh-squeezed lemon juice

In a small sauce pot, combine ingredients and bring to a simmer for 5 to 8 minutes, reducing by half to make a glaze.

Pork ingredients:

- 1½ pounds bone-in pork loin (with four or five bones)
- 1½ Tbsp. Kosher salt
- 1 Tbsp. coarse ground black pepper
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- vegetable oil

On the stovetop, preheat a heavy pan (preferably cast iron) that’s large enough to accommodate the loin over medium-high heat. Heat your oven to 350°F.

Combine the salt and pepper and rub all over the surface of the pork. Lightly coat the pork with all-purpose flour. Add oil to the pan and sear all surfaces of the meat to, as Teague likes to say, GBD (golden-brown delicious). Set the pork bone-side down in the pan, creating a natural rack for the loin. Spoon half of the cocktail glaze over the meat and cook in the oven until your meat thermometer reads 142°F. Pull the pork out of the oven and allow to rest. The temperature will carry several degrees as it rests. Add a little more glaze at this time.

Once the pork has cooled to room temperature, slice into chops. They should be pink and juicy. Resist the urge to slice before cooling lest you lose all that juice. Pack into a picnic container. In a separate, smaller container, pack up any extra glaze for dipping.



Duck Rillettes with Drunken Raisins

We can thank the French for coming up with the notion of spreadable meats, and rillettes—with their booze-fueled rich flavor—are not only a great grazing option for your picnic basket, they’re meant to be served cold or at room temp. Here, James Beard Award-winning chef Bradford Thompson of Heartwood in Manhattan’s Chelsea makes his with whiskey-steeped raisins for an extra kick.

Drunken raisin ingredients:

- 1 cup golden raisins
- 1 cup bourbon
- 1 Tbsp. bitters

In a small pot over high heat, bring the bourbon to a boil. Add bitters, pour over the raisins, and place in a jar with a tight-fitting lid until ready to use.

Duck rillettes ingredients:

- 3 1/3 cups duck confit meat (can be purchased at specialty stores)
- ¾ cup plus 2 Tbsp. duck fat, melted
- 2/3 cup of the drunken raisins
- 1 oz. sherry vinegar
- salt
- black pepper

Mix the duck meat in a large bowl with a wooden spatula until broken up but not pureed. Slowly add in the fat and continue to stir together until all the fat is added and well mixed. Mix in remaining ingredients and taste for seasoning. Refrigerate in an airtight container until ready to use.



Fried Chicken, for Peat's Sake

A picnic basket without fried chicken? Unthinkable. So we came up with this recipe for whisky and buttermilk marinated fried chicken. We tried three different versions: one with Wild Turkey, one with Drambuie, and one with Laphroaig. The latter won hands down. That smoky, campfire influence on the meat added a great bit of dimension to this usually one-note dish, and a little sprinkle of smoked salt played it up even more.

Ingredients:

- 1 3-4 pound chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- 1 1/2 quarts buttermilk
- 3/4 cup Laphroaig 10 year old
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 Tbsp. black pepper
- vegetable oil
- smoked salt (available at specialty stores and websites)

Wash and pat dry your chicken pieces and place them in a large bowl or deep, wide baking dish. In a separate medium-sized bowl, combine the buttermilk and whisky. Pour over the chicken, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate 12 to 24 hours.

When chicken is ready, pour oil into a deep-sided frying pan until it comes up about two inches and heat to 350°F.

Remove chicken from refrigerator and place in a colander in the sink to drain. In a bowl, combine flour and pepper. Dredge the chicken pieces in the flour mixture, shaking off excess. Fry the chicken pieces 6 to 8 minutes per side (allow more time for thicker, dark meat pieces like thighs), no more than two to three pieces at time. Transfer to paper-towel lined plate to drain and cool. Sprinkle with smoked salt to taste.

Bourbon Roasted Sweet Corn and Marinated Squash Salad

with Peaches and Buttermilk Cheese

This beautiful, fresh, summer-inspired salad is rife with the flavors of Kentucky, and that's exactly where it was created. Chef Andy McCabe of Rye in Louisville created this dish to be served cold or at room temperature. "Per-

fect for a picnic. Don't be afraid to try making the fresh buttermilk cheese. It is a really simple process," he says. "Make sure to use a high-quality malt vinegar. We use [one] made by our friend Bob Capsheaw right across the river in Indiana. For the whiskey, bar manager Doug Petry recommends Old Forester as Rye's house cooking bourbon because, "they are a local company, and the only company that is 100% a Louisville bourbon. The mashbill has a higher rye content than most bourbons, which gives a great spice on the finish, and the toffee and vanilla notes coming from the oak are prevalent on the nose and front of palate."

Ingredients:

- 8 cups (about 10-12 ears) of fresh corn cut off the cob
- olive or vegetable oil
- 6 cups diced zucchini (about 5 medium sized)
- 1 Tbsp. kosher salt
- 2 Tbsp. good quality olive oil
- 4 oz. Old Forester (or a little more if you like)
- 1/2 gallon buttermilk (for cheese)
- 1 Tbsp. sorghum syrup
- 1/4 cup Bob's malt vinegar, or other high-quality malt vinegar
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 1 cup fresh peaches, diced to about the size of corn kernels
- 1 cup fresh basil leaves, torn into small pieces
- toasted pumpkin seeds
- salt

Place a large cast-iron skillet over high heat. Add enough cooking oil to cover the bottom of the pan. When the oil starts to smoke, add half of the corn to the pan. Be careful when adding the corn to the pan, especially if you are using a gas stove. Make sure to remove the pan from the flame so it does not flare up on you. Season the corn with salt and cover the pan with a lid. [Note: When cooking corn like this it likes to pop and fly out of the pan, a lot like popcorn.] Let the pan sit undisturbed on high heat for 45 seconds to one minute. Remove the pan from heat. Carefully add half the bourbon off the heat. Return the pan to the stove (the bourbon might flame up) and reduce the bourbon until it coats the corn. Place the corn on a baking sheet to cool and repeat the process with the other half of the corn.

Dice zucchini so that they are a size similar

to the kernels of corn. Place in a mixing bowl, add the salt and olive oil, and mix. Let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Place zucchini in a strainer and drain for another 15 minutes.

[Making the cheese is optional; feta is a good substitute.] Place buttermilk in a stainless steel pot. Over medium-high heat bring the buttermilk to a simmer. Remove from heat. The milk will have started to separate and curds will be forming around the outside of the pot. Gently stir the curds. Return the pot to low heat for 15 minutes, stirring two more times to break up the curds a bit. Strain through a fine mesh strainer or cheesecloth. Let drain for a few minutes and transfer curds to a baking sheet, then cool in the refrigerator.

Place sorghum syrup and vinegar in mixing bowl. Whisk to bring together and slowly drizzle in the olive oil. Season with a pinch of salt.

In a medium bowl, toss the corn, zucchini, and peaches in the sorghum-malt vinaigrette. Top with the fresh buttermilk cheese (or Feta) and toasted pumpkin seeds. Garnish with whole fresh basil leaves.



Bourbon Cherry Bread

"When baking with whiskey, I actually like to cook it down to burn off the alcohol and get a more concentrated flavor," says pastry chef Mark Fiorentino of New York's Heartwood. "For example, if I require a cup of whiskey, I'll simmer two cups and reduce it. This way I get that intense flavor without adding too much liquid to my dough." He also recommends soaking dried fruits in whiskey and folding them into the batter. "The fruit will absorb the

liquid and retain the flavor without affecting the water content of the dough."

Makes 1 Loaf

Ingredients:

- 1 tsp. dry yeast
- 2/3 cup cool water
- 1 1/4 cups bread flour
- 1/2 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 3/4 cup dried cherries soaked in bourbon

The night before making the bread, put the cherries and 1/4 cup of bourbon in an airtight container; leave at room temperature. The container can be shaken a few times to distribute the bourbon evenly over all of the cherries. (If there is still some liquid when the dough is being made, the whole cherry/bourbon mixture can be added to the dough.)

Preheat the oven to 475°F, with pizza stone inside if possible.

In the bowl of a mixer with the dough hook attachment, dissolve the yeast in cool water. Add the bread flour, whole wheat flour, salt, and sugar. Combine on low speed and mix for approximately 10 minutes or until the dough is smooth and pliable.

Remove the bowl from the mixer and add the cherries, working them in by hand until they are fully incorporated into the dough. As they mix in, the dough will get sloppy and actually resist taking the cherries. At that point, let the dough rest for about 5 minutes then continue kneading the dough with the cherries in by hand. This process can be repeated 3 or 4 times to ensure the cherries distribute evenly throughout the dough and the gluten structure remains intact.

Remove the dough from the mixer and form it into a ball. Let the dough rest for 1 hour, covered with a damp cloth. Shape the dough into a loaf, or if you prefer, into a ball again. Let it rise until doubled in volume, again covered with a damp cloth.

Slash the top of the dough with a razor blade. Place the dough on parchment paper and slide onto the baking stone (if using), or directly onto a jelly roll pan sprinkled with cornmeal. Spritz the interior of the oven (and the bread) with some water before closing. After another minute, spritz again with water. This ensures a crisp crust. Bake the loaf for about 35-40 minutes or until a rich, deep golden brown color. ■