

Life



BLUE SKY DINING

Food in the great Aussie outdoors

FOOD. WINE. GARDENING. FASHION. MOTORING. STARS

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A movable FEAST

Alfresco dining can be as exciting as it is practical. Four favourite foodies serve up some inspiration

It's the time of the year when the dining table just seems wrong ... unless it's hauled on to the terrace or into the garden under the trees. But why not take your food even further into the great outdoors? The long, languid days of January are just made for alfresco grazing on the beach, in the park, at a casual pool party or just hanging around your favourite breezy bar.

Not content to simply pack the same old salad sarnies or throw the usual snags on the barbie (though, ahem, there's nothing wrong with that), we asked four of our favourite foodies — experts in the kind of nosh you can hold in one hand — for some tips and inspiration. *Et voila*: an imaginary folding table laden with delights, from bloody mary oyster shooters and pork pies to banh mi and beef tagliata.

And please turn the page to read a handful of their favourite recipes. Now get out there ... and don't forget the bottle opener!

DAMIAN SANDERCOCK

Co-owner, Piper Street Food Co, Kyneton, Victoria

I grew up eating outdoors. My parents ran the restaurant at Waterfall Gully National Park in South Australia, so my sister Bec and I had a lot of freedom to explore the surrounding park.

Most of our meals were eaten there — whether it was a Sunnyboy "borrowed" from mum and dad's kiosk, a finger bun from the Balfour's delivery man or our favourite: one of mum's traditional English pork pies.

I still love eating outdoors — in fact the inspiration for Piper St Food Co was an alfresco lunch in Paris when my wife Bryanna and I travelled around Europe in 1999-2000. We lived in the Latin Quarter and spent our days wandering through markets and laneways brimming with saucisson, hares, terrines and cheeses. Charcuterie is the best picnic food. All the hard work has been done for you, it's eaten cold and it travels well.

When I'm picnicking with my family (we have five kids aged 13, 11, nine, seven and five) it's all about lots of shade, a cricket set, plenty of cold water, paper towels and a simple menu. Pork pies (recipe Page 4) are obviously a family favourite. We also pack sauce gribiche, apples, cheddar, pickles and maybe a bottle of ale or a rose. And we make sure we have a bottle opener.

The Botanical Gardens in Kyneton are a favourite picnic spot — lots of room for cricket, and the river winds through it.

There's plenty of shade from the ancient oak trees and it's close to work if we need more rillettes or pate. I still



have a soft spot for the Adelaide Hills: we used to have big family get-togethers in the beautiful Belair National Park.

And this month, when we take the kids for a break closer to home in Bright, I'm planning a picnic by the Ovens River.

For a picnic

Always remember to take:

- A sharp knife for apples, whittling, cheese and terrines; and a corkscrew. I like the Opinel — they even make a cheese knife with a corkscrew in the handle
- Paper towel or a tea towel. Good for cleaning up, wrapping knives or glasses, wearing as bibs
- Plenty of cold water
- A bag to carry all your rubbish

ALEX HERBERT

Chef and curator of Giant Picnics at Barangaroo, Sydney

Picnic

- Take a large spread of food to share. Always take a few clean containers for the leftovers ... and pillows
- Terrine, country style and chunky, with loads of cold butter and sourdough bread
 - Yoghurt and harissa chicken legs, barbecued
 - Freshly cooked king prawns
 - Old-fashioned potato salad with dill and sour cream
 - Tomato, oregano and onion salad
 - Iceberg lettuces freshly washed and really cold and ready to be sliced on the spot, with salad dressing added at the last moment
 - Warm garlic bread in foil
 - A big cheese like Holy Goat La Luna, and fruit
 - A mixture of cupcakes: chocolate and carrot and walnut with cream cheese frosting

Beach

Prepare ahead — something that's all wrapped and ready to go means no sand in the mix. If you can't do fish and chips I'd go poached flaked salmon and coleslaw in soft buttered rolls, fresh and cold straight from the Esky in foil packages.

Pool party

- Canapes are great. Small things you can graze on all afternoon between dips and sips. You don't want to eat a heavy meal and swim. Try:
- Mini soft tacos with crab, chilli, coriander, cucumber and avocado
 - Asparagus and cucumber sandwiches
 - Chicken chipolatas with aioli
 - Thai betel leaves in piles with a bowl of spiced minced pork, shallots, mint, coriander and sweet fish sauce. Get people to help themselves
 - Fresh fruit from a big, really big champagne bucket with ice
 - Mango cheeks and shards of watermelon, cherries

ROBERTA MUIR

Sydney Seafood School

I love eating outdoors. We have a long table in the garden that seats 18 and this is where we do most of our summer entertaining — Christmas lunch and



Damian Sandercock



Alex Herbert

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Snack food from Andrew Blake's book *Blake's Feast, Life in Food*; Roberta Muir, left; Andrew Blake, above;

BRADEN FASTER

New Year's Eve dinner in our garden have become quite a tradition.

The trick to keeping it as stress-free as possible is all in the planning. Well ahead of guests arriving, I arrange stacks of plates, cutlery, serviettes and rows of glasses, stock the sink with ice, beer, wine and soft drinks and line up the Aperol and Campari ... then when guests arrive we put out a few platters of food, fire up the barbie and relax.

Picnic

For tuna (or salmon) tartare on croutons: combine diced sashimi-grade tuna or salmon with chives, salted capers, black pepper, grated lemon zest and creme fraiche (this travels well in a plastic container in an Esky). Spread on croutons made from slices of sourdough baguette brushed with olive oil and crisped in the oven — also easy to transport in a plastic container.

Beach

Finger food's best for the beach and Vietnamese rice paper rolls are easy to prepare ahead of time and transport well, with a small plastic tub of dipping sauce. And who doesn't love cold chook?

My steamed chicken with spicy slaw (recipe Page 4) was inspired by a classic way of poaching whole fish — basically you pop it in the pot, bring it to the boil, take it off the heat, cover it and walk away until it cools down ... by which time it's perfectly cooked. It gives a more succulent result than any other method I know.

As poached chicken can be a little dull on its own, I added a spicy coleslaw to liven things up. A loaf of crusty bread doesn't go astray either.

And the leftover stock is the perfect base for a delicious soup.

Pool party

Next time you fire up the barbie, think Italian! Beef tagliata with salsa verde (recipe Page 4) is quick and versatile. And the salsa verde is a great sauce to have in your repertoire. It's delicious drizzled over just about everything — prawns, poultry and vegetables as well as steak.

For bloody mary oyster shooters, take along a Thermos of bloody mary mixture (10 parts tomato juice to 1 part — or more — vodka with a splash of worcestershire sauce and lemon juice and a dash of tabasco sauce, salt and pepper) and container of freshly shucked oysters. On arrival, decant to a jug and arrange oysters on crushed ice. Pour shots of bloody mary and top each one with an oyster.

Bottoms up!
sydneyfishmarket.com.au
Roberta's blog: food-wine-travel.com

ANDREW BLAKE

Co-owner, Blakes Feast Catering, Melbourne

Anything with kids requires adaptability. Fire up the barbecue and give the kids mini dogs made with quality chipolatas and perhaps a homemade barbecue sauce. For the adults it has to be banh mi: crusty Vietnamese rolls, pate, grilled pork belly (pre-roasted and crisped on the barbie), pickled slaw, cucumber, chilli, coriander and hoisin or sriracha. Win-win!

Picnic

I love a long, lazy afternoon spread. Charcuterie to start, including duck liver parfait, chilli-pickled vegetables and sourdough baguettes. Then some king prawns (peeled at home) with wasabi mayo, followed by shimeji mushroom and taleggio mini tarts. Go a som tam salad with shredded grilled fish and some barbecue lamb cutlets with tzatziki. A nice oozy French brie and condiments is a great finish.

Beach

You need something portable that avoids a potential wind gust/sand disaster. How about simple or extravagant salads, individually packed in noodle boxes or plastic containers. Think barbecue chicken, Cypriot grain salad or kipfler potato, home-smoked salmon, grilled corn, coriander and chipotle. If you do a leaf-based salad, pack the vinaigrette separately for last-minute dressing.

Pool party

Has to be ribs. Get good meaty baby back ribs (I get mine from Son Butcher in Victoria Street, Richmond) and do them properly.

Remove the membrane and give the ribs a good dry rub. Sit for a couple of hours and then smoke (indirectly if possible) over wood or charcoal. Low and slow is the mantra here. The temperature should be somewhere between 107C and 120C and should take four to six hours. Brush with a homemade barbecue sauce and caramelise on a barbecue before serving. These are so worth the trouble and will blow any oven-braised or electric smoker ribs out of the water.

For everything you will ever need to know about ribs and brisket, go to amazingribs.com.

FANTASTIC ALFRESCO RECIPES — PAGE 4

FAVOURITE OUTDOOR EATERIES

DAMIAN SANDERCOCK
Hanging Rock Cafe, Kyneton: Sit in the shadow of this incredible formation. Good regional menu, coffee and wines. Great walks and space to relax.
Major Tom's, Kyneton: The town's best burgers and courtyard. Great live music and margaritas, too.
Sarti, Melbourne: A hidden, shady courtyard offering great value Italian food in the CBD.
Opera Bar, Sydney: The ever-impressive Opera Bar (pictured) is very hard to go past for that view, the service and a dozen oysters and glass of champagne.

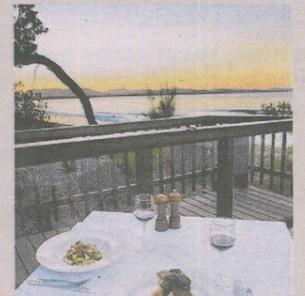


ROBERTA MUIR
Pilu at Akuna Bay, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park: Sardinian chef Giovanni Pilu has just taken over the function centre at the marina and is opening every Sunday for lunch with a \$65 set menu of antipasto and three shared courses. Giovanni's home-style Italian menu and the stunning views of Pittwater from the outdoor deck are just what I want for a long, lazy Sunday lunch.



Chiosco by Ormeeggio, Mosman, NSW: Great casual Italian food ideal for sharing on a marina overlooking Middle Harbour (with chef Alessandro Pavoni, pictured). Sydney in summer doesn't get much better than this.
Efendy, Balmain, NSW: Although this Turkish restaurant is housed in a lovely old two-storey house, it also has a large, shady courtyard at the front, perfect for alfresco dining — especially when they set up the charcoal grill in the courtyard to cook kebabs for lunch.

ANDREW BLAKE



Byron Beach Cafe: For breakfast with champagne (pictured).
Sailor's Thai, Sydney: Lunch on the rear landing (pineapple curry of mussels is amazing).

PERFECT FOR PICNICKING

Italian steak, French sauce and a north England pie ... all for an Aussie summer

BEEF TAGLIATA WITH SALSA VERDE

Roberta Muir

In Italy, steak is usually served sliced into strips — bistecca tagliata (tagliata meaning “cut”), which I think looks much more appealing than a big slab of meat on the plate. It's often served with a salad of rocket and shaved parmesan but any salad works well. Some recipes marinate the steak while others don't, and any cut can be used. The key tricks are allowing the meat to come to room temperature and getting your pan or grill good and hot before cooking it, then setting it aside to rest after it has been cooked to allow the fibres to relax and the juices to spread evenly throughout, ensuring that it's tender and juicy — the rest is up to you. I've added one of my favourite condiments, salsa verde, but you could just as easily serve it with a good drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a lemon wedge.

Serves 4

4 x 250g sirloin steaks

Extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

Salt flakes, to taste

Salad, for serving

Crusty bread, for serving

Salsa verde

2 firmly packed cups parsley leaves

4 cloves garlic, chopped

2 tablespoons capers in brine, rinsed

7 anchovy fillets (see notes)

2 tablespoons lemon juice

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

Remove steaks from the fridge 30 minutes or so before cooking, to bring them to room temperature.

Meanwhile, make salsa verde: combine all ingredients in a food processor. Set aside.

Heat a barbecue or chargrill pan.

Drizzle steaks well with oil, rubbing it all over both sides. Sprinkle both sides generously with salt.

Cook steaks for about 3 minutes each side for medium-rare, or to your liking.

Place steaks on a warm plate, cover loosely with foil and set aside to rest for 5 minutes.

Cut steaks on the diagonal, against the grain, into slices about 1cm thick.

Arrange on plates, drizzle with a little salsa verde and serve with salad, bread and extra salsa verde on the side.

Notes: A small tin of Ortiz anchovy fillets (47.5g) is the perfect quantity for the salsa verde recipe.

STEEPED CHICKEN WITH SPICY SLAW

Roberta Muir

Serves 4

1 x 1.8kg chicken

1 brown onion, chopped

1 carrot, chopped

1 stalk celery, chopped

Stems from 1 bunch parsley (leaves reserved for slaw)

1 fresh bay leaf

1 teaspoon black peppercorns

1 tablespoon salt flakes

Spicy slaw

¼ savoy cabbage, dark green outer leaves and thick central stem discarded

8 green onions, finely sliced

1 bunch parsley, leaves finely chopped

¼ cup finely chopped dill

¾ cup whole-egg mayonnaise

2½ tablespoons harissa

2 tablespoons lemon juice

Salt flakes, to taste



Roberta Muir's beef tagliata with salsa verde; below, steeped chicken

Cut chicken in half, remove excess fat from neck and rinse cavity to remove any excess blood and remaining offal. Place in a large saucepan with onion, carrot, celery, parsley stalks, bay leaf, peppercorns and salt. Add enough cold water to cover, cover with a lid and bring to the boil. Skim to remove any froth that has floated to the top, cover, remove from heat and set aside for 1½ hours or until cool.

Meanwhile, make spicy slaw: finely shred the cabbage and place in a large bowl with the green onion, parsley and dill. Shake mayonnaise, harissa, lemon juice and salt together in a screwtop jar. Pour mayonnaise mixture over the salad and toss well to combine. Set aside.

Remove chicken from stock and set aside. Strain stock, discarding solids, cool and freeze to use as chicken stock for another dish.

Cut chicken into pieces, spread spicy slaw on a platter, arrange chicken on top and serve warm or at room temperature.

SAUCE GRIBICHE

Damian Sandercock

A Gallic sauce made to go with charcuterie, particularly cold pressed tongue. But this sauce — made with dill, tarragon, mint and a chopped boiled egg, capers and cornichons — goes with everything. Try it on green beans or a potato salad. Great with fish and chicken and salad sandwiches.

185ml canola oil

3 eggs

¼ bunch dill

¼ bunch parsley

¼ bunch tarragon

¼ bunch mint

35g capers (salted, soaked, rinsed and drained)

45g cornichons

1½ teaspoon mustard (Dijon)

30ml vinegar

Boil eggs in the usual manner. Once cooked refresh under plenty of cold water. Peel and separate yolks from whites.

Pick herbs into a bowl and steep in water to remove any dirt. Strain and spin in a salad spinner and lay on tea towel to dry.

In the meantime, with a sharp knife finely chop cornichons and capers together and place into a bowl big enough to accommodate all ingredients. Repeat this process with the whites of the egg and then the yolks, followed finally by the herbs (which should by now be fairly dry). Place these in the bowl with the capers cornichons and mustard, vinegar and oil. Stir to combine. Taste and add salt and pepper as required.

PORK PIES

Damian Sandercock

A classic northern English staple that began life as a miner's lunch and evolved into a delicacy with a cult following. It's delicious, it's eaten cold and it travels well, so it's the perfect picnic pie. Just add cheddar, a pickle, a bottle of ale and a big shady tree.

Pork pie filling

1kg of pork shoulder

250g of finely chopped streaky bacon

250g of minced pork fat

12 sage leaves

2 large sprigs of thyme

1 teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of ground white pepper

½ teaspoon of ground mace

Cut 1kg of pork shoulder into small cubes, about half a centimetre across, and place it in a large mixing bowl. Using a sharp knife here is very important; this step can take a while.

Add 250g of finely chopped streaky bacon along with 250g of pork fat.

The balance of meats is important. The chunky shoulder adds texture, the bacon adds flavour and the minced fat keeps the pie moist.

Seasoning the filling.

Finely chop a dozen sage leaves and the leaves from two large sprigs of thyme and add them to the meat, along with a generous teaspoon of salt, a teaspoon of ground white pepper, half a teaspoon of ground mace. Mix everything together well.

Portion your filling into 12 balls of equal size.

Hot water pastry

600g plain flour

270ml water

210g lard

7g salt

1 level tbsp caster sugar

1 egg

Sift the dry ingredients into a mixing bowl with a paddle attachment.

Bring the water and lard to the boil in a saucepan.

Once boiled pour over dry ingredients, mixing on a slow speed until pastry just comes together. Add beaten egg and increase the speed for 60 seconds until the egg is fully incorporated. Remove the pastry from the mixer.

Flatten out to a disk; this will make it easier when rolling out the pastry later. Cover the pastry in cling wrap and let it rest for an hour in the fridge.

Roll out to the required thickness using minimal flour (if you use minimal flour there should be no need for an egg wash).

Cut out 24 disks: 12 large for the base and 12 smaller for the lids. Place one of your 12 portions of pork pie filling on to the larger disk, mould by hand crimping the pastry as you go forming the classic pork pie shape. Cook the pies at 210C for 20-25min or until it has a deep golden crust.

Leave the pies to cool before injecting the aspic stock jelly.

Aspic jelly

This recipe is taken directly from Jane Grigson's *Charcuterie & French Pork Cookery*. It is not the recipe we use at Piper St Food Co, however any good gelatinous stock will work.

1kg pork bones

Pig's trotter or veal knuckle

Carrot

Onion stuck with 4 cloves

Bouquet garni: bay leaf, thyme and parsley tied with a thread

Peppercorns

Lemon

This can be made the night before. Place bones and vegetables into a large pot, cover with water and bring to the boil. Place lid on pot and leave to gently bubble for 3 hours. Do not add salt.

After 3 hours strain liquid into a clean pot and boil until it reduces to about 550ml. Season with salt and pepper, and a little lemon juice. Leave in a cool place to set.

When pie is cool enough to add aspic, warm the jelly so it becomes liquid again.

We use syringes to inject aspic into our pies; however, you can use a small funnel.

