

PICNIC LIKE A PRO

Summer's here, which means long, languorous Sunday afternoons on a picnic blanket under the trees at Kirstenbosch or Emmarentia Dam. But how do you choose the best kit for the job? Here's how to pack right.

Build your own picnic kit

Is it better to put your own picnic set together, or will a ready-made one do the trick? After trawling the aisles of many different outdoor stores, we've decided that if you put a kit together from scratch, you'll end up with something that will last longer and work better. Here's how to do it.



1 CANE BASKET

Hand-woven by blind people in Worcester, this basket is spacious, sturdy and aids a good cause. It doesn't feature any of the tethers or compartments that the ready-made kits have, but in a way this makes packing your picnic easier. Carry the dry stuff in this basket and your food in a separate cool bag.

Price: R275 from the South African Institute for the Blind
☎ 023 347 2745;
🌐 blind-institute.org.za

2 PLATE, BOWL & TUMBLER

You can usually rely on Mr Price Home to stock decent stuff at a good price, like this plate, bowl and tumbler. This particular "Shosholoza" motif might have sold out by the time you get to the shops, but you can be certain there'll be something just as colourful in its place.

Price: Plate R12; bowl R12; tumbler R16
🌐 mrpricehome.com

3 CUTLERY SET

With four robust stainless steel knives, forks, spoons and teaspoons all housed in a durable roll-up pouch with individual slots for each item, this Campworld cutlery set is just the thing for picnicking or camping.

Price: R160 🌐 campworld.co.za

4 WINE OPENER

With the proliferation of screw-top wine bottles, corkscrews are becoming less of a necessity. However, if you're a purist who enjoys the ritual, you can't go wrong with this "Serious Cook" opener from Woolworths. It'll open a beer bottle, too.

Price: R70 🌐 woolworths.co.za

5 UTILITY KNIFE

Some of the ready-made kits include knives with sheaths, but they're all quite flimsy and would shy away from a hunk of cheddar, let alone a raw tomato. This Scanpan Spectrum knife is the real deal, and it's inexpensive too.

Price: R89 🌐 yuppiechef.com

6 NAPKINS

Whether you opt for cloth or paper napkins, you'll definitely be able to find something that adds colour and doesn't cost an arm and a leg at Mr Price Home. If you go for paper, remember not to litter!

Price: R16 for 20 paper napkins; R12 per cloth napkin 🌐 mrpricehome.com

7 CHOPPING BOARD

I'm amazed that none of the ready-made kits features a knock-off of this Joseph Joseph Slice & Store chopping board. The stainless steel knife is stowed inside and is kept in position with a locking catch. The board itself is made of high-quality polypropylene, which is very durable but won't blunt the knife blade. This gadget is so cool it might migrate from your picnic basket to your kitchen!

Price: R190 🌐 yuppiechef.com



8 BOTTLE TOTE

Not only will this neoprene tote made by Built keep your wine or juice cold, it will also prevent breakages en route. And, unlike most other coolers, you don't have to remove your bottle of Two Oceans from its carrier to top up mother-in-law's glass. If the bag gets smeared with camembert you can wash it in the machine.

Price: R145 🌐 kalahari.com

9 WINE GOBLETS

These Campworld stainless steel goblets are almost Shakespearean in looks, and they'll probably last as long as the Bard's verses have. They might lose some of their lustre with time, but they definitely won't break, nor will they leach any funny chemicals into your wine. Pricy, but you get what you pay for.

Price: R60 per 275 ml goblet or R260 for a set of four in a case 🌐 campworld.co.za

The ready-made alternatives

Even if the quality of some ready-made kits isn't great, you can't deny that their cunning use of space is convenient. If you're not going to picnic very often, buying one of these is a wise choice: It might not last forever, but you won't have the hassle of having to source all the individual bits and pieces.

WOOLWORTHS PICNIC SET

Not only does this kit look good, it's actually pretty well-made. The bag is rugged and carefully stitched, and the zips seem to be durable. It's also PVC-free. The stainless steel cutlery (with plastic handles) is better than the stuff you'll find in the other kits and the corkscrew is as good as one you've got at home.

The plates are a bit small and the chopping board is tiny, but if either of these were any bigger the bag would be unwieldy. The salt and pepper shakers are a nice touch, as are the cloth napkins. The wine "glasses" are pretty tacky, though. The real selling point is the effective use of space. All the utensils fit into a small compartment at the back of the bag, leaving a relatively sizeable insulated storage area, plus an insulated side pouch that holds a standard bottle of wine.

Unfortunately this is only a two-person kit. If you want to cater for the kids and gran, you'll have to buy a second one. **Price:** R250 woolworths.co.za



READER'S DIGEST PICNIC KIT

This isn't intended to be an all-in-one picnic kit, rather a supplementary hamper for people who are into alfresco eating. It includes a clever salad bowl, a foldable chopping board with a knife, and a recipe book.

The cool bag is pretty but a bit annoying to open as the handle gets in the way of the zip. The salad bowl is ingenious: Not only does the lid clip on securely, but it also has hollows to store the servers. And, the base of the bowl unscrews to reveal a refillable ice brick that will keep your salad from wilting when

outside. The chopping board allows you to dice and dump – it forms a chute when you squeeze the handles – and the knife comes with a protective sheath.

The recipe book is decent, with ideas for sandwiches, salads, quiches, dips and desserts. **Price:** R350 (plus R50 delivery) readersdigestdirect.co.za

CAPE UNION MART PICNIC BASKET

The best thing about this four-person picnic set is the basket. It looks elegant and it's well constructed, too. The inside is lined with tasteful material; the clasp secures easily and there are even "guy ropes" to ensure that the lid doesn't flop to the ground when the basket is open.

But once you're done admiring the basket, there's not much else to impress. The plates are fine and the glasses are standard-issue

plastic. The cutlery is also fine, but the bright blue handles look a bit cheap and the corkscrew isn't as good as the Woolies one. There's no chopping board, no salt and pepper shakers, or a defined place to stash the cutlery.

The cool bag can be carried in or out of the basket, which is handy, but it's not the best cooler ever made. All told, this kit is definitely more about appearance than performance, but it might be worth buying for the basket alone.

Price: R550 capeunionmart.co.za



PICNIC SOURCE COOL BAG

This four-person kit comes in a soft cool bag with a rigid skeleton, which means that boiled eggs and crackers will be safe if you sit on the bag by mistake.

The knives, forks and plates are stored in the lid, which leaves a huge amount of space for your food and drink. Bearing this in mind, the over-the-shoulder strap seems a bit puny for what might become a very heavy bag. Luckily there are also tog-bag-style handles that look a bit sturdier.

The plates are plain white plastic

– a bit bigger and nicer than some of the others. There are cloth napkins and a smallish tablecloth, which is a nice touch. The cutlery, glasses, corkscrew and chopping board are all standard issue, but the sharp knife doesn't come with a sheath, so be careful.

Due to its size, this kit could carry enough fodder for a family of six (you'd just have to buy the extra place settings) but it seems a bit overpriced.

Price: R700

sportsmanswarehouse.co.za

PICNIC ACCESSORIES

TANGLED TREE WINE

The plastic bottle that this wine comes in not only weighs less, it also won't break, no matter how badly you pack your picnic basket. And if you recycle, it's better for the environment, too. Tangled Tree comes in various red, white and rosé varieties.

Price: R36 tangledtree.com



PICNIC SOURCE PICNIC MAT

This mat looks a bit bland but it's eminently functional. The side you sit on is made from some kind of fuzzy polar fleece and the underside is plastic, so grass and dust won't stick to it. It also folds into itself to form a zip-up carry bag, but be warned: You'll need some mad origami skills to get it back in.

Price: R250

sportsmanswarehouse.co.za



CADAC COOL BAG

This 12-can cool bag is a lot smaller than the ones that are part of the ready-made kits, which is a good thing. It's unnecessary to carry everything in a cooler, just the stuff that needs to be kept cool. This one is well-made and affordable, although the shoulder strap is a bit short.

Price: R70 cadac.co.za



gomag.co.za

CAPE UNION MART HAMMOCK

Everyone loves a hammock. This one is made of lightweight parachute material and folds up into a bag the size of a juvenile dassie. It also has clever metal hooks that allow you to loop the ends around two trees. Unfortunately, the ropes attached to the hooks are about the circumference of your knee, which means you'd have to find very slender trees.

Despite this oversight, it's a great product.

Price: R200 capeunionmart.co.za



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WISH LIST



Astronomy made simple

Tired of the madding crowd? Well, you could go away for the weekend. Or you could look through a telescope and travel a million miles in an instant. **The Celestron SkyProdigy 130** is so advanced that even Geoffrey Boycott's gran could find Alpha Centauri!

What is it? It's a telescope with a 130mm aperture, which finds any star for you (just choose from the drop-down menu) and aligns itself automatically. All you have to do is carry it out onto the stoep!

Why would you want it? Because the moon and the stars are more interesting than *Isidingo*. In days gone by, not only were telescopes staggeringly expensive, they were also difficult to understand. Scopes that find stars for you have been around for a few years now, but the Celestron's self-aligning technology sets it apart.

The experience is surreal. You stand around chatting while the scope does its thing, whirring and spinning on its little motor, and then, when prompted by the computer, you look through the eyepiece and get whisked off to Saturn.

The verdict: Eight grand is a lot to spend on something that might just end up gathering dust. If you're new to astronomy, maybe start with something smaller and cheaper (the moon is magnificent even through a pair of binoculars).

Also, make sure you have somewhere to use it with an unobstructed view of the sky and no street lights: I had some problems getting it to find stars from my suburban garden.

Price: R8 000 from G&L Agencies (☎ 011 792 1097;

🌐 glagencies.co.za)

– Nick Dall