



■ Left, Tayto Park's new Dino Dash rollercoaster. Below, the Unesco World Heritage Site at Brú na Bóinne is over 5,000 years-old



■ There is plenty of fun to be found in Funtasia indoor entertainment centre, Drogheda



■ Jenny Lee and son Noah paddling along the Boyne canal in a traditional currach



■ The 18th century Oldbridge House on the banks of the River Boyne is home to the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre

NUTRITION with Jane McClenaghan

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Picnics popping with flavour and nutrition



SPENDING time in nature is the perfect antidote to stress. Studies show that it can lower blood pressure and stress hormone levels, balance and reset our nervous system, and support immunity and improve mood.

As it is now officially summer and with a holiday feeling this weekend, it's time to dust off your barbecue, roll out a picnic mat and get out into the great outdoors. Whether you are camping, caravanning or meeting mates for a picnic, eating outside is one of the joys of summer.

With June comes a new crop of seasonal fruit and vegetables that taste lighter, fresher and more like summer.

Even though we might still get days that feel a little chilly, it is time for salads and eating alfresco. Just bring a raincoat and an extra layer, and you'll be grand. If your regular barbecue consists of burgers and a bap, but you are looking for some healthier choices that will leave you feeling energised and refreshed, then I have some ideas I think you will like. With just a little prep, some creativity and planning, your picnic will be popping with flavour and nutrition.

If you are cooking for friends and family, ask them to bring something for the table. It might be a salad, some healthy nibbles or a light dessert. Get everyone involved and share the prep.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Seasonal vegetables are bursting with flavour, so they don't need a lot to make them into something special. Right now we have courgettes, beetroot, peppers, scallions, new potatoes, interesting salad leaves, peas and radishes in season. Grilled courgettes, peppers and aubergines are so tasty on their own, or with a light dressing using some olive oil, lemon juice and chopped parsley. Try grating raw beetroot into salads, or pimp up your potato salad with some sun-dried tomatoes and capers alongside the essential scallions for a

Mediterranean twist on a local summertime favourite.

MIX SWEET AND SAVOURY

Try adding strawberries, some fresh mint and a handful of toasted hazelnuts to a green salad, top with feta, or serve alongside some chicken for a complete meal. Melon, summer raspberries or rhubarb are in season too and can be added to salads for a tasty twist.

HEALTHIER BARBECUES

Go for marinated chicken, grilled fish or lean meats with salads if you want a decent dinner that will leave your feeling more energised and less bloated than the usual barbecued fare. Pack half your plate with seasonal salads or grilled vegetables, choose your lean meat or fish of choice, and add a herby dressing or pesto for an extra punch of flavour.

HEALTHIER PICNIC FOODS

If you are popping out to buy something for a picnic, there are some decent ready-made foods that will work a treat. Pick up some dips (houmous, tzaziki, salsa) to have with a selection of chopped vegetables (sugar snap peas, carrot sticks, celery, peppers). Look out for healthier alternatives to crisps like a bean-based snack (brands like Graze and Noisy Snacks are not bad), or some root vegetable crisps. Falafels with houmous can make great finger food, or can be popped into a wholemeal pitta pocket for a healthier alternative to a sandwich.

A SEASONAL AND LIGHT DESSERT

Finish off with the best that summer has to offer. Local strawberries served with some fresh cream (ditch the sugar), or swap your cream for Greek yoghurt for a healthier twist. Let's hope we get the weather we are expecting. Enjoy your holiday weekend.

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