

# HOWto | Plan a corporate picnic

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**Y**our employees work hard all year. Why not reward them for all their efforts with a day at the park?

A corporate picnic is an opportunity for employees of all levels to bond and have fun in a relaxed setting. But while attending a company picnic should be fun, planning one is hard work.

Start with a budget. The budget will set the stage for all the decisions that you will make.

For instance, the budget may dictate whether the picnic will be for employees only, or if spouses, children and significant others can also be included.

Choosing the location, too, is a decision that should be made early in the plans. Public parks with picnic facilities are popular choices. In Suffolk County, the Suffolk County Department of Parks and Recreation handles permits and bookings centrally. In Nassau County, you should contact the individual park of your choice. Particularly for large groups, Eisenhower Park is a very popular choice.

Keep in mind that if you hold the picnic on a Saturday or Sunday, employees may have to cancel social commitments in order to attend. Especially if employees are not invited with guests, the company picnic should be planned for a weekday, so that it will not

cut into anyone's family time. The upside is that there is generally greater site availability during a weekday afternoon. To help boost attendance, don't plan the picnic during any peak vacation periods at your company.

If the budget is tight, it can be a potluck affair, or you may want to pick up hot dogs, hamburgers, veggie burgers and side dishes and fire up the grills. Keep in mind, however, that if you go this route, someone will have to do the grilling. You might consider hiring an individual to do the cooking and cleanup, so that everyone can enjoy themselves.

If you opt for a catered affair, many parks require that you work with one of their approved caterers. **Caterers will be able to advise you on the appropriate amount of food per number of guests, and they will be able to suggest dishes that are crowd pleasers. Menu items can be adapted to your budget, as well. Be sure to include some vegetarian options for non-carnivorous colleagues. If you choose the caterer first, he or she can recommend various locations, which might include private facilities or beaches.**

County parks allow alcohol to be served at group picnics. However, some companies may shy away from including alcoholic drinks on the menu because of liability issues.

To ensure a fun time, make sure to arrange for a full schedule of activities, games and raffles. You can choose a picnic site that's near softball fields, volleyball courts or other athletic facilities. If employees' children will be invited, be sure you're situated near a playground. You might want to have face painting, a bounce house or other children's activities on-hand, as well. To create the soundtrack for the event, consider hiring a band or disc jockey, or, if the budget's tight, bring your own portable stereo and CD's.

Be sure to personally inspect any facility before you commit to it. It's a good idea to visit at the time of day that your event will occur, to see if the sun will be beating down on the picnic tables. Be sure to ask caterers and other professionals that you hire what their cancellation policy is in case the event must be postponed because of the weather.

Build excitement for the picnic with personal invitations that capture the spirit of the event. Don't just send an e-mail. You may want to mark the occasion with company T-shirts, Frisbees or other useful party-favors that will spread the company spirit.

If it sounds like too much work to fit into your schedule, consider hiring an event planner to handle all the details for you. Event planners know all the ins and outs of planning a successful party, and they know where the best locations are.

## THE CHECKLIST

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**Keep in mind that if you hold the picnic on a Saturday or Sunday, employees may have to cancel social commitments in order to attend.**

**Some companies shy away from serving alcoholic drinks because of liability issues.**

**It's important to plan activities. Choose a picnic site that's near softball fields, volleyball courts and other athletic facilities.**

**Be sure to personally inspect any facility before you commit to it.**