

It's Time to Picnic

By C. Nicki Krom



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Pack your basket; It's time to picnic - here's where to shop

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By C. Nicki Krom

With summer heading into full swing, it's high time to dine outdoors.

Armed with a picnic basket and an appetite, I roamed Bellingham in search of the perfect a la carte lunch. Picnic preparation is a delight downtown with so many purveyors offering palate-pleasing selections. Here are just a few of my favorite places.

COMMUNITY FOOD CO-OP/ THE SWAN CAFÉ

I easily could build an entire picnic at the Community Food Co-op. Instead, I thought I'd start at the co-op and its Swan Cafe deli for antipasti, cheeses and produce.

I began in the produce aisles, where I settled on two crisp granny smith apples. For a simple, sophisticated snack, dust sliced apples with cracked black pepper.

Fruit in hand, I wove through the Co-op's aisles toward the Swan Cafe.

Its deli case features more than a dozen salads, at least half of which fit vegetarian and/or vegan diets. Bowls the color of mint, egg yolk and lavender are filled to the brim with tempting combinations of fresh, organic ingredients whenever possible.

I opted for the wild rice and kale salad seasoned with red pepper, green onion, canola and olive oil, lemon juice, sea salt and black pepper.

For finger food, try the co-op's small six-variety olive bar. I'd recommend the calabrese olives seasoned with orange and fennel or the Greek mix, featuring kalamata olives and seasonings.

Cheese was last on my list. I circled the display, tempted by Grace Harbor Farms goat cheese and tarragon-crusteD chevre, but I finally decided on the triple-cream brie for its creamy flavor and spread-ability.

AVENUE BREAD AND DELI

I prefer bread over crackers for cheese pairings, and Avenue Bread and Deli bakes my favorite loaf in town: rosemary.

The crunchy crust gives way to a tender, white center peppered with fragrant rosemary. I often serve this bread at home with roasted garlic and, of course, brie.

Avenue hand-shapes and bakes each loaf daily in a French stone-hearth oven. At 7:30 in the morning, when the shop opens its doors, doughy aromas and humid warmth fill the shop.

Eleven loaves are available daily, with one or two specialty loaves also for sale.

For outdoor dining, a great bet is Avenue's seeded baguette, coated with a mix of poppy, sesame, sunflower and fennel seeds.

In addition to breads, Avenue offers tasty sandwiches, from-scratch soups, specialty salads and baked sweets.

THE VINES/DU JOUR BISTRO

For some of us, no picnic is complete without vino.

The Vines, a wine shop that doubles as Du Jour Bistro, is a short jaunt from Avenue Bread.

Vines features wines from Washington state, Oregon, California, Australia, New Zealand, Italy and Spain, as well as sparkling, port, sherry and dessert wines.

I asked Kristen Kirk, The Vines' day manager, for a few popular reds and whites.

Kirk recommended the 2002 Waterbrook Melange at \$11.95 a bottle. Melange is a red table wine made from a mix of sangiovese, syrah, merlot and cabernet sauvignon grapes.

"It's a great bottle of red that will pair well with just about anything," Kirk said.

For easy picnicking, Kirk also recommended the screw-top 2002 Water Wheel Memsie from Australia at \$10.70 a bottle. The full-bodied wine blends Shiraz, malbec and cabernet sauvignon grapes.

For white-wine lovers, Kirk suggested the 2002 Greenstone Point Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand at \$9.80 a bottle. O'Reilly's 2003 Pinot Gris from Oregon also is high on Kirk's list of popular wines at \$10.70 a bottle.

"It's a really nice, good white wine for summer," Kirk said. "It's very drinkable, crisp and refreshing."

A red-wine person myself, I took Kirk's advice and purchased a bottle of the picnic-friendly Water Wheel Memsie to share with friends.

MOUNT BAKERY

For the sweet stuff, I stroll to Mount Bakery.

The chef (artist) Olivier Vrambout creates sinfully luscious pastries, tarts, cakes and the like each Tuesday to Saturday morning using ingredients from local businesses and organic produce from local farms.

As the selections change regularly, each day's offerings are sure to surprise patrons.

Although the chocolate almond chambord torte and crème brulee looked amazing on my visit, I needed something portable. Vrambout described my chosen dessert, which lacks an official title, as ginger molasses cake layered with organically grown strawberries and whipped cream drizzled with a raspberry reduction.

Petite, as well as beautifully prepared and presented, the little cake topped the last remaining space in my picnic basket.

Eager to enjoy the hand-picked lunch, I walked to the trail that links downtown with Boulevard Park. Twenty minutes later, I was breaking bread, spreading cheese and crunching on apples with friends while the sun set.

The Fine Print: I dine on my own dime. The opinions herein are mine alone, not The Bellingham Herald's. Agree? Disagree? Please drop me a line at cnickikrom@hotmail.com.

Ingredients

Community Food Co-op/The Swan Cafe

Location: 1220 N. Forest St.

Phone: 734-8158

Hours: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily

\$

Menu items sampled:

Granny Smith apples (per pound), \$2.49

Wild rice and kale salad (per pound), \$5.99

Triple-cream brie (per pound), \$11.99

*Note: Nonmembers pay a 6.5-percent surcharge for all grocery and cafe items.

Avenue Bread and Deli

Location: 1313 Railroad Ave.

Phone: 676-9274

Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Saturday.

\$

Menu items sampled:

Rosemary bread, \$3.49

The Vines/Du Jour Bistro

Location: 1319 Cornwall Ave., No. 102

Phone: 714-1161

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday; 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

\$-\$\$\$

Water Wheel Memsie, \$10.70

Mount Bakery

Location: 308 W. Champion St.

Phone: 715-2195

Hours: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday

\$

Menu items sampled:

Ginger molasses cake with local strawberries, whipped cream and raspberry reduction, \$3.50

TIP: Grilling for friends and can't seem to finish that Rainier Ice? Combine 'em with Capt. Steve's Beer Can Chicken Roaster, a Florida man's "invention" that "inserts" a can into a cooking bird for added "flavor." Seriously: www.beercanickenroaster.com.

PETE KENDALL HERALD PHOTO

The Vines/Du Jour Bistro recommends a bottle of Water Wheel Memsie, a red wine, for your next picnic.

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