

#151 - The Lazy Genius Eats Outside

Hello, friends! Welcome to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 151 - the lazy genius eats outside. If you're listening to this in real time amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, breaking things up a bit, getting into the fresh air, all of that sounds really good right about now. But regardless of what big things are happening in the world, eating outside is something we like, that seems easy, but somehow we don't do it very much. Any time I share something about eating outside, there are always questions about how to do it. People let the how stop them, and I don't want that to be the case. So that's what today's episode is. Let's Lazy Genius eating outside.

We're going to go through four different categories: convenience, cooking, comfort, and clean-up. Yes, they all start with C. You're welcome.

First up, convenience. Eating outside does feel a little inconvenient sometimes. You have to take the food a farther distance. There are so many trips, you don't actually have anywhere to eat... the list can feel surprisingly long. Let's make this process of taking dinner outside more convenient. Do you know why a picnic basket is such a great invention? Everything is in it. You've got the blanket, but inside most picnic baskets come with plates and forks and a corkscrew. You have a limited amount of space where you can put your food. You just carry it with you and set up a meal. You can do the same thing for eating outside, even if you're just walking out your back door.

Try gathering your own picnic kit. Make sure everyone has utensils and stuff that they'll need. Choose dishes that won't break. Sunglasses are even a nice touch if you're eating on a sunny day. Grab blankets to put on the grass or a wipeable tablecloth to put on an old picnic table on your porch. Put stuff in an actual picnic basket, even a laundry basket. Or put everything on a big platter or cookie sheet and carry it all out at once.

Again, think about what goes in a picnic basket. Picnic baskets don't have fine china or anything breakable on purpose. Don't assume that because your trip is shorter that you can take your regular table stuff outside. That's what makes the process inconvenient. So gather your own picnic kit.

Second part: cooking. Another way to have fewer trips and less mess is to have fewer dishes which means you need to think critically about what meals work better outside. Think about recipes or meals that don't need to stay at a certain temperature. It's okay if they get cold or sit for a minute while people are gathering together or running around playing tag in the middle of the meal. It's also important to remember that not everything works great outside. Spaghetti might be an example, especially if you don't have a table to sit at. Grownups might be able to hold the bowl and do the thing with one hand, but asking a kid to sit on their butts on the grass and eat spaghetti without making a huge mess is a mildly ridiculous request. And if you're a parent who gets frustrated by that kind of mess, skip the spaghetti and the anger.

Meals we like to eat outside - anything that's typically served at a cookout or barbecue depending on what part of the country you live in. Obviously burgers and hot dogs, barbecue chicken and ribs, grilled foods you eat with your hands. We also like bowls of food - soup and bread, rice bowls, anything in a bowl. Basically you serve the food from the kitchen, and everyone takes their bowl out to wherever you're eating. That's another place we get stuck is we think we have to serve everything outside too. Nope. Fix your plate or bowl in the kitchen and just carry it out. Much easier. I will also advocate avoiding anything that requires a knife and fork. Single utensil meals are best, especially if you're sitting on a blanket on the ground.

Third is comfort. Eating outside is lovely, but it can also be uncomfortable. If you just sit straight on the driveway, that's not cushy or nice. Even things like direct sun and shade matter. So think about comfort. Grab patio furniture cushions and take them to another part of the yard. Use more than one blanket on the ground to make it more cushy. We like to use a waterproof blanket on the grass and then put actual soft blankets on top of that. Just don't choose something you don't mind getting food spills. And think about the temperature and where the shade and sun are. Again, very simple, but sometimes we skip eating outside because we sat directly in the sun even on a mild day and it was uncomfortable. Think about the comfort you need for your home, and tend to it. It'll make a difference and make eating outside more attractive.

And the fourth thing to consider is clean up. You likely already chose meals to make this a little easier, but the thing that's tough about clean up is all the pieces to carry inside. How can you make that process a bit easier? The sheet pan or basket helps. Load everything on to or into one thing and carry it inside. Using dishes that aren't fragile helps the piling, too, because you're not afraid of breaking something. Paper plates are obviously an easy solution here too if that's your thing so you can just throw stuff away. Even if you don't have paper plates though, bring a little trash bag outside with you. There's always some trash from the meal, and by gathering it up while you're still outside makes the clean-up process easier once you're back inside. If you've listened to my episode on cleaning the kitchen, you know about the dishes zone and the fridge zone. Basically, the basket or sheet pan or platter is your portable dishes zone. Carry all of that inside in or on one thing and put it on the counter. Then go back outside and get the ketchup and the little trash bag and whatever else. Consolidating the stuff in whatever ways you can makes the process, both visually and practically, a lot easier.

And that's it! Again, I know this feels really simplistic, but sometimes we need things broken down into the easiest parts. To have a pleasant experience eating outside, consider these four things that matter for the process: convenience, cooking, comfort, and clean-up. Make choices in those four categories that support the meal being a pleasant one. It's likely that you subconsciously tend to two or three of these, but it's that fourth one that keeps the experience from being pleasant. Maybe it's comfort. It's just never very comfortable eating outside because you don't have a place to. Think about that one thing then, and your experience will likely change quite a bit.

If you have ideas on how to eat outside with more ease and fun, please share them in the comments of this post or on Instagram and use the hashtag #lazygeniuspicnic. Maybe this week we can all try and picnic collectively. If you do, tag me. I'm @thelazygenius. Go eat outside. We need outside time. We need those old ways and old pleasures of picnics and going slow. Hopefully this is a good reminder to enjoy the process of eating outside, and even though it's still worth doing when it's not super convenient or comfortable, tending to those things could turn the experience into something you'll do a lot more.

Okay, that's it for today. Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week.