

**Family Living Focus**  
by  
**Beth Van Horn**  
Centre Co.  
Extension Agent



**Packing A Picnic Basket**  
Summertime is picnic time-from backyard grilling to picnics at the neighborhood park, while hiking in the mountains, or while on camping or boating trips. Whether your picnic is an elaborate gourmet affair for 20 or a simple packed lunch for two, a little planning can make the event much more enjoyable.

The Picnic Cooler: When choosing a cooler, consider "cold retention power," cleanability, durability, weight, and cost. Foam chests are lightweight, low cost, and actually have good cold retention power, but they are fragile and may not last through numerous outings. Plastic, fiberglass, and steel coolers are more durable and have excellent cold retention power. However, once filled, larger models may weigh 30 to 40 pounds. Because of their durability, some end up being used well past their prime. If the inside of the cleaned cooler has a nasty odor, it's time to discard the cooler.

When packing your cooler, layer with ice and food, and top with a tablecloth wrapped in a plastic bag. Putting the tablecloth on top helps to insulate the cooler, plus, when you arrive at the

picnic site, it will be the first thing you unpack.

**Suggested Picnic Foods:** Fresh, whole fruit generally packs well. Oranges, bananas, apples, and grapes are great to take along on picnics. Be sure apples and grapes are well washed ahead of time.

Ice water is a priceless luxury, especially when picnicking at a remote location on a hot day. For a convenient source of ice and water, fill a clean plastic container three-fourths full with water, cap tightly, and freeze. The container makes a great ice pack and provides cold drinking water as the ice melts.

If your picnic cooler will not keep foods at refrigerator temperatures (40 degrees F or below) until you're ready to eat, choose less perishable ingredients, such as peanut butter, jelly, salami, pressed luncheon meats, and hard cheeses, for sandwich fixings. Take mayonnaise and mustard in individual packets to spread on hard rolls, tortillas, or bread. Complete your picnic with fresh or dried fruit, raw vegetables, chips, and cookies for dessert.

Once you're through eating, return leftovers immediately to the

# Why Does Swiss Cheese Have Holes?

Why does Swiss cheese have holes?

That's easy. The culprit is *Propionibacter shermanii*.

All cheese is made with the help of bacteria, or more specifically, a bacteria-based culture. These "starter organisms" are added to milk and are one of the major factors that help determine the type of cheese that you end up with.

For Swiss cheese, *S. thermophilus* and *Lactobacillus* start the process, producing acid and

using lactose from milk as an energy source. Then the mixture is placed in a warm room, which favors the growth of *P. shermanii*. That uses the lactic acid to produce carbon dioxide and propionic acid. Carbon dioxide makes the holes by expanding into bubbles of gas, and propionic acid helps produce Swiss cheese's characteristic flavor.

The size of the holes can be controlled by varying several factors: acidity, temperature and curing time. Because of this, food scientists say cheese-making is a combination of art and science. It takes a certain expertise to get conditions "just right."

Knowing how to control hole-size is important: Until recently, the holes in Grade-A Swiss cheese had to be between eleven-sixteenths and thirteen-sixteenths of an inch in diameter (that's almost precisely three-quarters of an inch, about the size of a nickel). However, standards are changing: Modern processing equipment, designed to slice cheese at a rate of 1,000 slices a minute, often tears up large-hole

Swiss cheese. That prompted regulators to re-think the strict standard. Now Swiss-cheese holes can be as small as six-sixteenths (that's three-eighths) of an inch and still be classified as Grade-A.

All processors have to do is refrigerate the cheese sooner, stopping the bubbles from getting too large before they burst.

Baby Swiss cheese is made from the same type of bacterial culture, but cheese-makers adjust the curing process (acidity, temperature and time) to end up with a milder cheese with smaller holes.

Ohio is the nation's top producer of Swiss cheese, making about 64 million pounds annually. An ounce of Swiss cheese contains about 8 grams of fat, a little over 100 calories, and about 275 milligrams of calcium. And, if you want to sound like you know a thing or two, the holes in Swiss cheese are properly called "eyes."

Chow Line is a service of The Ohio State University. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

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