Just in time for Mother's Day and bridal-shower season, we've created a menu that's a little bit French, a little bit girly, and incredibly easy to put together. Make the components of our pretty, tartlike coconut cookies up to two days ahead, then fix the salads and the sandwiches on the morning of your picnic. Bring along flowers, a blanket, and some crisp wines, and you've got an alfresco party.

California Niçoise Sandwich

Inspired by the classic French salad, this fancy tuna sandwich takes a Western turn with sourdough and avocados.

PREP TIME: About 30 minutes
MAKES: 6 servings
NOTES: We love this sandwich on crusty sourdough, but it can be a bit messy to eat. For a tidier bite, try soft Italian-style bread. Make up to 3 hours ahead; keep well chilled until ready to serve.

- 1 baguette-style loaf, about 20 inches long and 3 to 4 inches wide
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon peel
- 2 cans (6 1/2 to 7 oz. each) oil-packed tuna, drained
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon
- 1 1/2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced radishes
- 1 medium tomato, thinly sliced
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, sliced into thin rounds
- 1/2 avocado, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup chopped pitted kalamata olives

1. Slice loaf in half lengthwise. Scoop out about 3/4 of the bread from the top and bottom halves to create pockets; discard scooped-out bread.

2. In a small bowl, whisk together the mayonnaise, garlic, and lemon peel. Spread generously over inside of loaf's top half.

3. In a medium bowl, stir together the tuna, tarragon, vinegar, and salt and pepper to taste. Spoon into bottom half of loaf.

4. Top tuna mixture with radish slices, then the tomato, eggs, and avocado slices. Spoon olives over all and top with the other loaf half. To serve, slice into 6 equal portions.

Per serving: 495 Cal., 51% (252 Cal.) from fat; 25 g protein; 28 g fat (4.7 g sat.); 35 g carbo (2.7 g fiber); 881 mg sodium; 92 mg chol.

Potato Salad with Artichokes and Asparagus

Creamy, zingy, and a great accompaniment for grilled sausages or burgers.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 35 minutes
MAKES: 6 servings
NOTES: Make up to 4 hours ahead; keep well chilled until ready to serve. Stir in asparagus just before serving.

- 8 ounces asparagus, ends trimmed, spears cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 pounds red thin-skinned potatoes, cut into 3/4-inch-thick chunks
- 2 strips thick-cut bacon, chopped
- 2/3 cup chopped shallots
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons plain yogurt
- 1 1/2 tablespoons coarse-grain mustard
- Salt and pepper
- 1 can (14 oz.) artichoke hearts, drained and cut into quarters
- 2 tablespoons capers, drained
- Rosemary sprigs (optional)

1. Bring a 4- to 6-quart pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add asparagus and cook until barely tender when pierced, 3 to 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer asparagus to a bowl of ice water to cool. Pour off ice water and set asparagus aside. Add potatoes to boiling water and cook until tender when pierced, 8 to 10 minutes. Drain in a colander; set aside.

2. In a medium frying pan over medium heat, cook bacon until it is just beginning to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add shallots and rosemary and cook until shallots are translucent, about 4 minutes. ▸ 140

Picnic tips

Here's how to keep your picnic safe and stress-free.

- **Wrap it right.** Set a wooden cutting board on a big sheet of plastic wrap and place the sandwich (which you can cut in half to fit) on the board. Wrap it and the board snugly lengthwise with a double layer of the plastic, then widthwise with another double layer, then with a layer of aluminum foil (for insulation). Unwrap on-site for a nice presentation and easier serving.
- **Pack smart.** Layer the food cooler's bottom with cold packs or ice in heavy plastic bags, then top with the most perishable food (the sandwich, lemon curd, and potato salad). Top with more cold packs or ice, then add less perishable food (raspberries, green bean salad) if there's room.
- **Keep it cool.** Below 40° is the rule for safety. Make sure your food is cold *before* it goes into the cooler. Return leftovers to the cooler immediately and bring a separate container for drinks to keep people from constantly opening the food cooler. Perishable food left out for more than an hour in temperatures 90° or higher should be thrown away; if the temperature is lower than 90°, the food can stay out for up to 2 hours.
- **Stay dry.** Use plastic sheeting under your blanket.

FOOD STYLING: VALERIE AIKMAN-SMITH; PROP STYLING: NATALIE NOELEN