

[Brandywine Table]

Tailgating

FROM TEA SANDWICHES TO S'MORES
TO COCKTAILS, LET YOUR
IMAGINATION RUN WILD AT
YOUR NEXT TAILGATE GATHERING

Laura Muzzi Brennan

WHERE THERE'S A PARKING LOT AND A SPORTING event, there's a tailgate. As we head into late spring and summer—the season of steeplechases, the Triple Crown, track invitationals and baseball tournaments—there are plenty of opportunities to stake out a parking space or patch of field and throw a party.

Tailgating in America dates back at least to 1869 and the first college football game, a matchup between Rutgers and Princeton (Rutgers 6, Princeton 4). But some food historians claim it goes back even further—to 1861's Battle of Bull Run when Union supporters rooted for their soldiers as they picnicked on the sidelines.

Modern-day tailgates still have that sense of occasion and camaraderie, but the beauty of today's party is that there are more ways than ever to put on a great spread—ranging from silver-platter formal to aluminum-foil casual.

When you don't have the time or desire to cook, enlist the help of a local caterer. Places like Wayne's A Taste of Britain provides tea sandwiches that are so popular at formal tailgates. Every year, warehouse stores (think Costco) as well as large grocery stores offer more and more variety when it comes to party platters of apps, sandwiches and desserts.



Another option is to take the hybrid approach: mix store bought and homemade for dishes tastier than the sum of their ingredients. Go ahead and jazz up your homemade guacamole with a few spoonfuls of lobster salad from a gourmet fish market. See that tomato pie in the grocery store? Cut it into bite-sized pieces, top with homemade olive tapenade and call it an appetizer.

Of course, if you're entering a tailgate competition, you'll want to do your own cooking so you can wow the judges with your interpretation of the tailgate theme. "Game of Thrones" is Willowdale Steeplechase's theme this year. At Radnor Hunt Races, it's "Old McDonald had a . . . (Phil in the blank)" in honor of Phil McDonald, who chaired the tailgates for many years. Prediction: these themes are sure to get creative juices flowing and yield some terrific dishes.

If you simply want to serve food that appeals to nearly everyone, bring your grill. Hamburgers and hotdogs have long been the bread and butter of tailgate chefs. Just remember to check the rules of the tailgate site for location of your grill and the types of fires permitted. And always think about positioning the grill so smoke blows away from your guests. For other tips on happy tailgating, see the sidebar.

No matter who wins the race or the game, cheers to the beginning of tailgating season!



Tailgating at Winterthur Point-to-Point



Don't want to DIY? Pick up goodies at Taste of Britain.

Chicken Shawarma

Similar to a gyro, shawarma is a popular Middle Eastern street food. It's made from meat marinated in a spice blend that usually includes cumin, paprika, turmeric, cinnamon and red pepper. The meat is grilled on a rotisserie, then sliced and served in a pita with garlicky white sauce. Not too long ago, you had to make your own spice mix or go to a Middle Eastern grocery, but now the mix is going mainstream with spice manufacturer McCormick offering an organic version in its gourmet line.

Note: Chicken and onions can also be cooked on separate sheet pans in a 350° oven. You won't get the grilled flavor, but the taste is still really good!



- 2 lbs. boneless skinless chicken thighs
- 1 tsp. kosher salt plus more to toss with onion
- Pepper to taste
- 2 Tb. lemon juice (juice from 1 medium lemon)
- 5 Tb. olive oil, divided
- 1–2 Tb. shawarma seasoning (Check directions on your spice jar or packet for ratio of seasoning/#of chicken thighs)
- 4 medium onions, peeled and sliced into ¼–½” discs
- Lemon wedges
- Serving options:
- 3 whole pitas or 6 C. rice
- Labneh (a tangy, thick strained yogurt) or hummus, optional

Trim fat or extra skin from chicken thighs and sprinkle with 1 tsp. salt and pepper to taste. In a large bowl, mix lemon juice, 3 Tb. olive oil and shawarma seasoning. Place chicken in bowl and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 3 hours or overnight.

When ready to grill, toss onions with salt, pepper and 2 Tb. olive oil. Place onions in grill basket.

Sear chicken on both sides over high heat to get those lovely grill marks. Then, move chicken to medium heat and close cover. Cook for approximately 3 minutes on each side. Remove from grill when internal temperature of thickest part of thigh reaches 165°. Place on a platter, squeeze lemon over, and tent loosely with aluminum foil.

Cook onions over medium-high heat until tender and a bit charred. You can cook them with the cover on or off the grill. Make sure to stir them frequently. The size of your grill basket will determine cooking time of onions.

Tips for Happy Tailgating

- Tailgating is every bit as competitive a sport as horse racing. If you want to become a champion of the parking lot, follow these 10 tips from our favorite tailgaters and tailgating cookbooks.
- 1. Know the basics of food safety. Most foods can sit out for 2 hours, but when the temperature hits 90 or above, put food away after 1 hour.
 - 2. Pack clear recycling bags as well as trash bags. It's no fun to separate trash and recycling after a party.
 - 3. Use large pieces of ice so drinks don't get diluted quickly.
 - 4. Play games like cornhole and washer toss. They require little set up and are great for all ages.
 - 5. Make it easy for guests to find you. Tie a bunch of balloons to your cooler handle or tent post and keep your cell phone handy.
 - 6. Travel with the cooler in the back seat, if possible, and bring plenty of reusable ice packs or bags of ice.
 - 7. Keep easy-to-forget items in a tailgate box. A bottle opener, toilet paper, wipes and hand sanitizer are essential.
 - 8. Bring a few extra gallons of water to pour over coals.
 - 9. Pack some extra food. You never know who's going to wander over.
 - 10. Make your mother proud: leave your tailgate site cleaner than you found it.

If you're making pita sandwiches, cut each pita in half and heat over the grill. Fill with chicken and onions. Top with labneh, hummus or both. You can also serve chicken and onions over rice.

Makes 4–6 servings. Recipe can easily be doubled or tripled.

A Yankee's Take on Pimento Cheese

It seems that every Southern cook has a pimento cheese recipe in their arsenal. Even though I'm a mid-Atlantic native, once I took my first bite of this versatile spread, I knew I had to add it to my culinary repertoire. It can be stuffed into celery or tomatoes for a quick appetizer, dolloped



on a hamburger, served with crackers or spread on white bread for a tea sandwich with zing. Recipe adapted from Queenreyney.

- 3 C. shredded extra-sharp cheddar cheese
- 8 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 6 Tb. mayonnaise
- ¼ tsp. onion salt
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- 4-oz. jar chopped pimentos, drained
- Hot sauce to taste

Either with a mixer or by hand, mix cheddar cheese, cream cheese, mayonnaise, onion salt and garlic powder until combined. Stir in pimentos. Add a few drops of hot sauce to start. Taste and then add more if desired.

Refrigerate for a few hours to let flavors develop. Taste again and adjust seasonings.

Makes approximately 3½ cups.

S'mores Cake

When you don't want to haul a grill to your tailgate but still want to satisfy your smores craving, this recipe is your ace in the hole. And don't worry—it's plenty gooey. To give it a grown-up twist, top with a scoop of coffee or caramel ice cream. Adapted from Debra Moxham and Carla Finn's Nantucket Beach Picnics cookbook.



- 1 C. all-purpose flour
- 1½ C. graham cracker crumbs
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- ½ heaping tsp. kosher salt
- 1 C. firmly packed brown sugar
- ½ C. butter, softened
- 3 eggs, room temperature
- 1 C. whole milk

Cookbooks for Getting Your Tailgate On

In the March and April columns, I highlighted two local cookbooks—Radnor Hunt's *The Fox's Kitchen* and Steve Poses' *At Home*—and both have recipes that would be great for tailgating. Here are more titles to inspire your pre-race/game celebrations.

Appetizers at Devon

Fan Fare: A Playbook of Great Recipes for Tailgating or Watching the Game at Home, Debbie Moose

Guy on Fire: Grilling, Tailgating, Camping and More! Guy Fieri

The Official SEC Tailgating Cookbook, Southern Living

John Madden's Ultimate Tailgating

The Deen Brothers Get Fired Up: Grilling, Tailgating, Picnicking and More

Spread Formation: Tailgating and Home Recipes from College Football Greats, Loran Smith

- 1½–2 C. milk or dark chocolate chips
- 1½ C. mini marshmallows

Preheat oven to 350°.

Line the bottom and sides a 13” x 9” baking pan with parchment paper. (The cake will be easier to lift out if you line one sheet lengthwise and one sheet width-wise and use sheets that are big enough so they fold over the sides of the pan. This also saves you from washing the pan!)

In a medium bowl, stir together the flour, graham cracker crumbs, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

In a large bowl, beat the brown sugar, butter and eggs together until well combined. Add the milk and the flour mixture and beat until well combined. Fold in ¾ C. or more chocolate chips (depending on your love of chocolate) and spread in pan.

Place on center rack of oven and bake for 25 minutes until a knife comes out clean.

Distribute the mini marshmallows over the top of cake and return to the oven for 2 minutes until marshmallows soften. Using a knife or spatula, gently spread the softened marshmallows to “frost” the cake. You might tear up little bits of cake, but don't worry about it. S'mores are messy by nature.

Scatter remaining chocolate chips (¾ C. or more depending on your taste) over frosting. Allow to cool completely in pan.

When ready to serve, lift parchment paper out of pan and cut into 12–16 bars. Drink with lots of milk.

Makes 12–16 servings.

Cucumber Tea Sandwiches

You can tweak these sandwiches in many ways. Try mixing a few tablespoons of minced or shredded carrots into the cream cheese. You can also add snipped dill or parsley to the mix or make triple deckers by using a slice of wheat in addition to the two slices of white. For a round tea sandwich, use a biscuit cutter.



8 oz. softened cream cheese
 ¼ C. minced scallions (white, light and dark green parts are fine)
 Scant ½ tsp. garlic salt (more to taste)
 2 tsp. mayonnaise
 1 large English cucumber or any cucumber variety with small seeds
 Pinch of salt
 12 slices sturdy white or wheat sandwich bread*

*Pepperidge Farms or Whole Foods 365 Brand works well.

With a fork or hand mixer, mix the cream cheese, scallions, garlic salt and mayonnaise together. (A food processor makes a smoother spread.) Refrigerate for an hour or more to let the flavors bloom.

Thinly slice the cucumber (about ⅛") and toss with a pinch of salt. Place in a colander and let sit for 10 minutes. Pat with a paper towel to remove moisture.

Spread each slice of bread with a thin layer of the cream cheese mixture.

Arrange cucumbers overlapping slightly on one slice of bread and top with another to make six whole sandwiches.

Place uncut sandwiches in an airtight container. Cover with wax paper. Moisten a paper towel (it should not be wet, just damp) and place over the wax paper. Cover with lid.

Refrigerate for a few hours. Chilling the sandwiches makes it easier to cut them.

Using a serrated knife, remove crusts and cut into quarters—either squares or triangles. Before serving, take the chill off sandwiches by letting them sit for a few minutes at room temperature under a moistened paper towel.

Makes 24 tea sandwiches. ♦

Laura traces her love of all things culinary to the first time she leafed through her mother's Betty Crocker's Cooky Book—which still occupies a place of honor among her 700+ cookbooks. A passionate supporter of local food, she co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.



For more great recipes visit
CountyLinesMagazine.com