SUNNY SIDE UP: TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF SUMMER

Food

No matter where your summer fun takes you, these Red, White and Blue-ers are an easy treat with patriotic flair!

Fun

Encourage an imaginative act of kindness by making "Messages in a Bottle."

Conversation

Help your family dig deeper into this month's celebrations, going beyond the fireworks and cookouts to the meaning of the day.

thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/marching-toward-spring-tips-conquering-cabin-fever

Summer is finally here! If you've been waiting with breathless anticipation for warmer weather, vacations and good old-fashioned family fun, you're probably thrilled to turn the calendar page to July. But all this downtime and change of routines from the predictability of the school year can lead to cranky kids, boredom and burnout.

It's sad but true: There really can be such a thing as too much of a good thing -- too many S'mores, too many late nights catching fireflies, too many day trips and picnics and too much activity crammed into the summer days as we all try to make the most of them. Learn how to keep a sunny outlook this summer with these tips:

1 Take it outdoors.

There's nothing more summery than eating outside! You can pack a traditional picnic and head to the backyard or a local park, encourage the whole family to play with their food using the bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables available, or keep things simple and sweet with a new weekly tradition:

The "Walking Dessert."

With the pressures on family time mounting, my wife and I are always looking for ways to stretch out our time together around family dinner. During the summer that means a walking dessert – usually ice cream cones or popsicles, but anything that fits into a cup will work. My wife started the walking dessert because I couldn't get home in time for dinner and as means of stretching the meal until I arrived, she would take our restless kids on a walk.

Walking dessert accomplishes many things: It get us exercising; it redirects the urge my kids have to get up from the table; it provides new things to look at and talk about; and after sitting all day in an office (then in my car for the hour-long commute), it offers an alternative to sitting again for a long time at the dinner table. Walking dessert is also a physical way of talking together, side by side, which for me (and perhaps for you?) is actually more comfortable than sitting across from someone.

2 Use summer as a skill-builder.

Use summer as a skill-builder. We wouldn't want you to forego cloud gazing or beach combing to cram in every teachable moment you can. But summer is a great time to help kids pick up new skills that contribute to their independence and confidence,which can translate to smoother school years come September. Pick one or more days during the week when your kids can take charge of some of the tasks for dinner, from washing and sorting for little ones to chopping and sauteing for tweens and teens.

3 Prioritize.

It's tempting to say "yes" to every opportunity for summer fun, but sometimes too many summertime plans can make your "down time" feel as overscheduled as the most hectic school days! If your family is starting to burn out, keep the schedule sane by making a "family fun" jar: Have each member of the family write (or draw) things they really want to do on slips of paper and add them to a jar throughout the week. One day each week, bring the jar to your dinner table and let a designated family member pull a slip (or let each person pull one). Whatever is selected goes on the calendar; the rest remain for another time. With older kids, incorporating a discussion about why one activity should be chosen over another can be a good lesson in negotiation and planning.

FOOD

Red, White and Blue-ers

These cute grilled skewers are a fun and easy dessert for summertime – and especially good for Memorial Day or July 4th cookouts, because of their color combination! You can substitute bananas for the marshmallows if you want an all-fruit skewer, but we like the classic flavor of a toasted marshmallow to bring a little extra dose of sweetness and nostalgia to our picnics.

Red, White and Blue-ers

Instructions:

1. Combine blueberries, water, sugar, and lemon juice in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil; reduce to a simmer and cook for 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the berries have broken down and the sauce is syrupy. Remove from the heat and set aside.
2. Preheat a grill to moderate heat.
3. Thread strawberries and marshmallows onto skewers in an alternating pattern.
4. Brush the grill grates lightly with oil to ensure that the skewers won't stick.
5. Grill the skewers for about 2-4 minutes, turning frequently, until the marshmallows are lightly toasted but not falling apart and the strawberries are slightly softened.
6. Drizzle the warm skewers with blueberry sauce and serve.

Ingredients

24 strawberries, hulled

12 marshmallows

1 1/2 cups blueberries, fresh or frozen

1/2 cup sugar

1 cup water

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Vegetable oil, for greasing the grill

FUN

Message in a Bottle

Encourage an imaginative act of kindness by making "Messages in a Bottle." Collect empty bottles (wash well!) and have family members write kind notes to friends and neighbors. Stuff the bottles and leave them anonymously on doorsteps or in mailboxes with a note that says "Messages from a friend to brighten your day! Fill this bottle for another, then give it away!"

Cut Line

Messages from a friend to brighten your day!
Fill this bottle for another, then give it away!

The Family Dinner Project Printable Recipe for Conversation:

1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper **2.** Cut along red cutlines **3.** Fold along brown fold lines **4.** Have a great conversation!

Cut Line

FRONT

RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

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Fold Line

Celebrate July 4th

- Why do we celebrate the 4th of July?
- Do you think you have too much freedom, or not enough? If you could be free to do anything you wanted all day, what would you do?
- Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "With freedom comes responsibility." What do you think that means?
- Do you know anyone, in real life or from history, who has fought for freedom? What do you admire about that person?
- Imagine you were helping to create a new, independent nation. What kinds of rules do you think would be important to have for all your citizens? What kind of government would you want to set up?

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RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION.

BACK