

food news

by Tanya Wenman Steel

Picnic Purveyors

Since the word *picnic* entered the English language in 1748, little has changed with this alfresco meal—except now you can have the food delivered to your doorstep. These three purveyors pack a perfect picnic (now say that five times fast):

Dorothy would have traded her sequined shoes at any point along the Yellow Brick Road for Balducci's Summer Crème de la Crème basket. Inside are smoked salmon, a vegetable terrine, truffle

Linzer cookies. Serves four to six, \$100. There's also a Styrofoam cooler brimming with an olive-scallion-anchovy calzone, a sun-dried tomato-pesto torte, roasted peppers, peasant bread, smoked chicken breast, and rice salad with artichoke hearts, olives, and pignoli. Serves four to six, \$100. Call 800/225-3822.

Although its stores are based in Washington, D.C., Alexandria, Virginia, and Baltimore and Bethesda, Maryland, Sutton Place Gourmet provides a taste of southwest France in its D'Artagnan basket. You'll want to spend a year in Provence after feasting on rich duck rillettes, cassoulet, mousse foie gras, smoked magret (duck breast), and a duck terrine. Serves four, \$99. For those who aren't daffy over duck, Sutton Place also sells baskets filled with Grafton Cheddar, Brie, pâté, cured olives, crackers, and assorted fruits. Serves four, \$65; 800/346-8763.

For an all-American picnic call Gifts to Go in Charlotte, North Carolina; its wicker basket contains Washington State smoked salmon, flaky cheese straws from Little Rock, Arkansas, a piquant Texas pâté with spicy black beans, and roasted pecans, crackers, and chocolate chip cookies, all made in the South. Serves two to four, \$35; 800/951-4438.



Balducci's summer baskets are delicious meals wrapped in wicker, while the S&S cheesecake (below left) needs no adornment whatsoever.

Say Cheesecake

Añiconados will feel their pulses race with the news that the best of this creamy delight can now be shipped in time for their picnics.

S&S must stand for Sensational and Superlative cheesecake; in a recent comparative tasting, Diversion staffers judged it the best by far. This slightly tangy, clean-flavored creation from the Bronx is so creamy it's a wonder it holds its shape. A seven-inch cake is \$20, available through Morey & Dorey; 800/822-5369.

Eli's Chicago's Finest Cheesecakes have always gone over in a big way—most notably the 2,000-pound Red, White, and Bill cake served at the Inauguration. Eli's is also big on variety, with 50 imaginative (albeit smaller) versions, but our favorite is its original plain cheesecake, sweet and dense

with an old-fashioned cookie crust and a hint of vanilla. A nine-inch cake costs \$27; 800/999-8300.

"The Nathan's hot dog of its race" is how one of our editors described the cheesecake from Junior's, the venerable Brooklyn restaurant. Everyone will appreciate this rich and tangy classic, with its unique layer of sponge cake. For nonpurists, there are chocolate variations. An eight-inch cake is \$29.95; 800/958-6467.

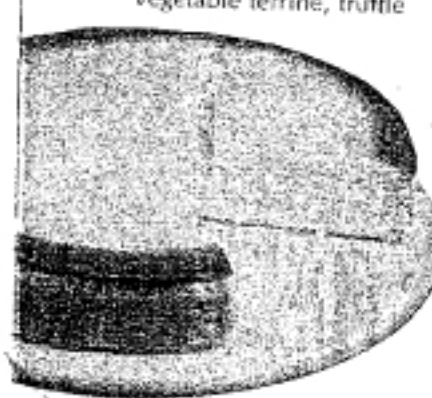
For those who must have their cheesecake with a gilded (chocolate) lily, Granny's Cheesecakes makes an ebony-and-ivory ruffle version, an artful amalgam of cheesecake, bittersweet chocolate mousse, and dark chocolate ganache. (Other innovative and traditional combinations are available.) The seven-inch creation sells for \$34.95; 718/894-3494.

—LAURA VITALE

TERRY ROBARDS' WINE OF THE MONTH

Many consider fresh, fruity Beaujolais the ultimate picnic wine because this high-spirited French red pairs well with virtually everything. Almost any Beaujolais from 1988 on will do, as the Beaujolais district has experienced seven consecutive harvests of superior quality. The best are the *crus* Beaujolais, those from the ten villages that include Fleurie, Moulin-a-Vent, Brouilly, and Morgon. A Louis Jadot 1993 (\$8) is widely available and great for alfresco meals.

OUR
cake



mousse, smoked chicken breast, sausage, Brie, peppercorn mustard, crackers, chocolates, a traditional Italian cake, and sparkling cider. Serves four to six, \$245.

Balducci's has also created two spreads specifically for the beach, where the salty sea air invigorates appetites. The first is a large canvas tote bag that holds mozzarella, a mixed olive salad, Genoa toast, prosciutto bread, salami, roasted peppers, prosciutto di Parma, a mascarpone torte, and