





## Capturing Coziness *Through Picnics*

BY CHRISTEN HAMMONS

**T**he idea of a picnic is filled with romance and coziness. What could be lovelier than a delicious meal enjoyed outdoors in the fresh air? Simply the thought of a beautifully packed picnic basket is enough to make many of us swoon. Whether you're enjoying it with a romantic partner or a group of friends or even by yourself, a picnic is a wonderful way to make an ordinary occasion seem extra special.

Melanie Beilner has become something of an expert when it comes to planning picnics. She approaches them with a hint of nostalgia and inspiration that comes from her favorite movies, "Pride & Prejudice" and "Anne of Green Gables." She recalls many picnics from her childhood, but they usually just involved a blanket and a cooler of some kind and though they are happy memories, none looked like any of the gatherings in those movies.

Planning unique picnics for every season, including the colder autumn and winter months, has become a passion for Melanie. She works to carry out various themes, and even planned a year of picnics for herself in honor of her 40th year. You'll see that you don't need to do anything over the top for these picnics to feel extra special. She actually encourages others to take into consideration how much they can actually carry with them to the chosen outdoor space, and plan the components accordingly. »





Having a picnic in an apple orchard is a perfect thing to do in the autumn. Because the surroundings are so beautiful and cozy-feeling, you need very little to make a picnic stand out. A soft vintage quilt provides the perfect base for the entire picnic. Fresh flowers add romance to every situation, so be sure to bring a few of those along with you. Instead of packing disposable cups and plates, choose a few of your favorite dishes and teacups to bring along, tucking in a vintage hankie or two. Melanie suggests finding a nice collection of silverware at thrift stores to have on hand as well. Thermoses will keep your warm beverages hot until you're ready to sip them from a vintage teacup or mug. »



# Little Reveries

---

BY LORENA

**A** newly bloomed flower, fresh green grass, bees buzzing while performing their needful duty, trees with their majestic crowns guarding me from hot sun rays, a murmur of tranquillity coming from the refreshing nearby river, my favorite dress and a headband made of flowers, an old book with yellowed pages that has been loved by generations of my family, a trug with some fresh fruits, a blanket and some pillows and a canopy made of delicate white fabric ... these are a few much-needed moments of my everyday. The moments that can make today better than yesterday.

How often do you notice the simple, yet beautiful moments of your day? Those little joys that may seem insignificant or even taken for granted, those small moments that put a smile on your face and a flutter in your heart. We are used to living life in fast-forward, so much that we forget to breathe and just enjoy the warm air and the smell of a quiet day. I have many fond memories of simple beauties, and if by any chance, they are not captured on camera, they are tucked safely in a drawer of my soul.

I was different in the past, but time continues to flow forward and I realized I need to live, not simply exist. I began to look back to a simpler lifestyle and found inspiration in it, and now I try to find beauty in every aspect of the day. While that may not happen every day, just trying to seek it out makes my heart fuller.

They say “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder,” and I think it is successfully applied in many situations. It is all in how we approach things. For example, if I cannot go on a long walk somewhere, I can just sit in my grandma’s garden and imagine there is a magical gate that can transport me to a fairy realm. And suddenly, I see the garden through other eyes. I do not notice the bare batches of soil anymore, only flowers, butterflies and bees, and the lovely smell of basil. I now know my imagination can create its own magic, so I often find myself in a daydream and smile. »



...one of the third flight he... quiver be... eyes twinkling... Marcella laughed tranquilly: "If you speak upon the mic... neatly him... anxiously... M... —with a very... in what we... had taught... since... the... sat... our... our... at always fetches the... quite touch us in qual... other hillside. See! It... twenty-five acres plant... nches, there at the... Look down and along... park can show anything more beautiful... living... I have not seen it..."

...upon the mic... neatly him... anxiously... M... —with a very... in what we... had taught... since... the... sat... our... our... at always fetches the... quite touch us in qual... other hillside. See! It... twenty-five acres plant... nches, there at the... Look down and along... park can show anything more beautiful... living... I have not seen it..."

It is often said that, "At the end of the day your feet should be dirty, your hair messy, and your eyes sparkling," so if that is how you find yourself before going to bed, you lived a full day, even if it seems you did nothing. Though I am not able to lift and hold a watering can myself, I can still half-fill it while sitting on a chair. And if I place the watering can on my legs, soon small drops of water form, which then turn into a suave waterfall, and I feel so thankful. At the end of the "watering session" my feet are so dirty, but my heart is full and my face aching because of that giant smile. »



...one from which her uncle's gold had been slaw... story | **62** *vella* GRACE | SUMMER 2021 come to... sten to it?" Archer asked, as they set their faces... Marcella nodded. "If the rest are not to hear,"

...Archer, we will consider that—that you have not spoken... until you see and consult with your father."... A minute later he was alone. He trembled to the storm's fury... without in the least heeding it, so deep... was he wrapped in... perhaps the ou... "I have a st... night and list... houseward."

...eyes twin  
...a little  
...ord made it  
...said.  
...illside was  
...mother  
...ttened the  
...mornings  
...d over the  
...to you.  
...all the  
...will let  
...with the  
...of you  
...I was be  
...in Ne  
...tell you  
...wishes  
...lives



...en stolen  
...come to  
...their faces  
...t to hear.”  
...Archer, w  
...until you  
...A mil  
...without in





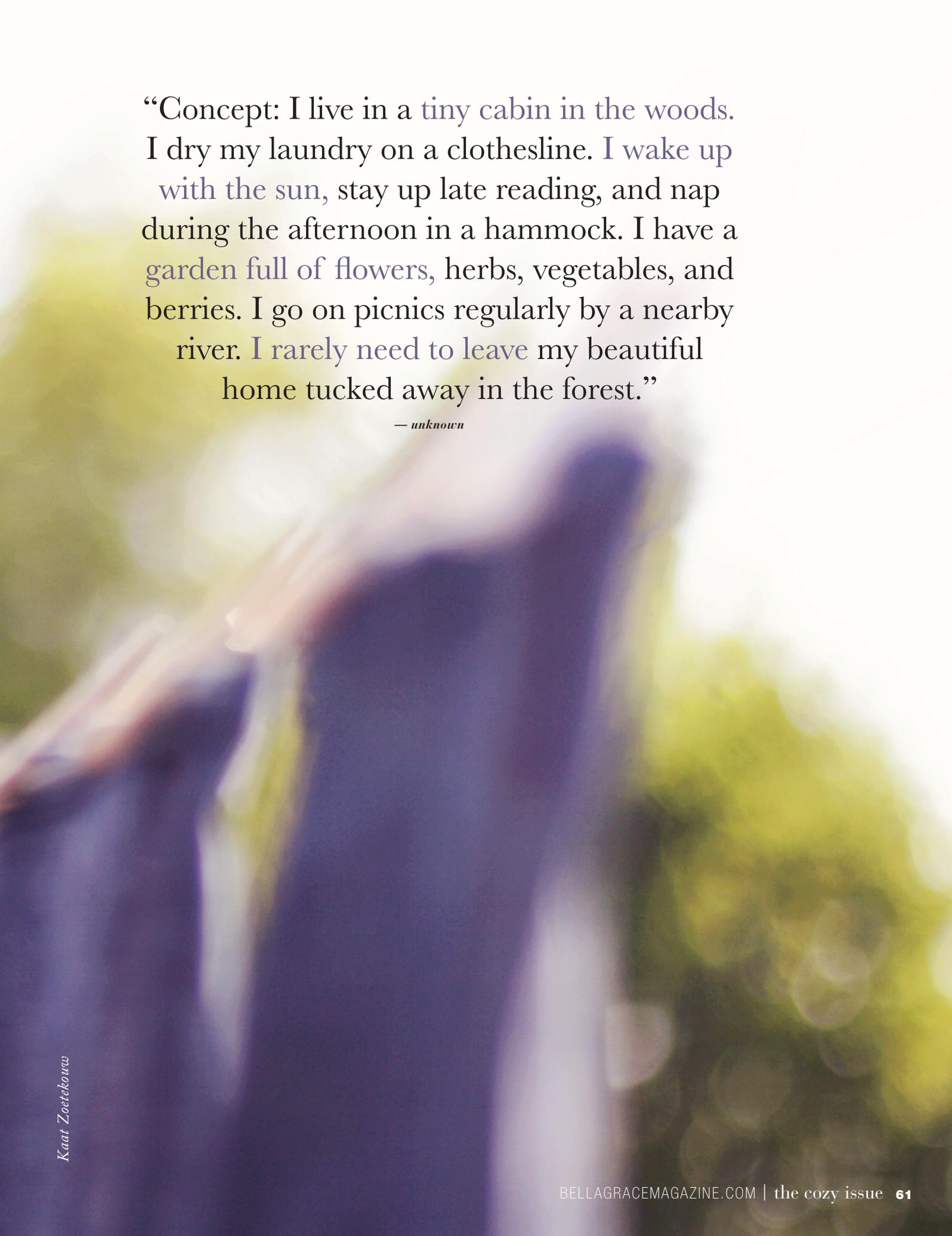
How could having a picnic under blossom trees in spring or picking tomatoes in summer be so special? Though these activities are simple and quiet, they leave you reminiscing about them long after the moment has passed, which makes them one of life's simple beauties. Spending your days smiling and feeling grateful while doing your daily activities is something everyone should strive for.

In my search for ordinary magic, I dress in my favourite frocks, adding flowers in my hair and sparkle in my eyes. Making my day beautiful can really be that easy. I know now that life's simple pleasures can be found and enjoyed every day if I just open my heart. And this, my darlings, opens new horizons and your life can become whatever you'd like it to be, even a fairy tale.

---

*Lorena is forever seeking magical moments in her everyday. You can find her on Instagram (@little.reveries).*





“Concept: I live in a tiny cabin in the woods. I dry my laundry on a clothesline. I wake up with the sun, stay up late reading, and nap during the afternoon in a hammock. I have a garden full of flowers, herbs, vegetables, and berries. I go on picnics regularly by a nearby river. I rarely need to leave my beautiful home tucked away in the forest.”

— *unknown*



Seized by

# a Sunny Day

BY CAITY NEUBERGER

One morning, as I face the normal frustrations of running a home with four small children in it, I shrug off my adult perspective and make a decidedly childlike choice. “Let’s go out on the porch for breakfast,” I say. It’s early enough that there is still dew on the grass and not much traffic on our street. I throw some fruit and other breakfast items onto a tray, trail a blanket behind me with two fingers, and lead my motley crew onto the sunlit front porch.

Our “front porch” is actually more of a stoop. There’s no railing, no screened-in windows, no rocking chairs or fancy pillars. Just a bunch of flat boards that make a platform, something just large enough to spread a picnic on.

As we munch our way into wakefulness, I encourage my children (all of them under the age of 5) to be a tad quieter than usual. We catch the sounds of birds, the sights of sunrays peeking through the trees, neighbors going quietly to work, and squirrels running free. *Sitting there on that blanket with orangey sunshine ringing our faces, I felt small. I no longer felt the insanely stressful urge to seize the day. No, I was letting the day seize me.*

Summer is for the children — and I am far from being a child — but as I raise my own children, I am given a second opportunity to become childlike. To relish the way cool summer grass tickles my bare toes. To splash in the creek, not caring if I get wet or dirty. To admire flowers and chase fireflies and run up and down the playground stairs. To run until I can’t breathe, stuff my face with juicy fruit, to let the sun bleach my hair. *Ah, summer. It moves me — if I let it.*

Could I let it keep moving me? Could I let the sun move me to warm gratitude, the breeze move me to joyful dancing, the birds move me to unabashed singing? »

We adults tend to think that we are so strong and powerful and smart that it is our job to grapple with the day and come out on the other side with a trophy in our hands. We wrestle our time, fight for our futures, and watch vigilantly for our chances, but we can re-learn what all children know: *the greatest joy is found when you let each day seize you.* Through my children's eyes, I learn that summer, like all seasons, is not a page to be read or a memory to be made or a scene to be watched from afar. No, each season is an invitation: come, and be moved. Come, and be transformed. Come, and be seized.

During that breakfast picnic on our little street, surrounded by birds and houses and city noises, I felt more awake and alive than I ever have by forcing wakefulness through coffee or music or to-do lists. Because I was not taking charge of anything at all. I was simply being moved. Being a part of. Being willing. Being seized by the summer day.

*Caity Neuberger is a stay-at-home mama to four stunning children who uses words to keep magic alive for as many as she can. You can find her on Instagram (@caityneub).*





# THE YEAR OF *Picnics*

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
MELANIE BEILNER

“How hard can a picnic be?” my kindred spirit friend asked while we were discussing possible summer plans. This question needed some careful thought. I had styled and photographed almost a dozen picnics for the sole purpose of creating beautiful images. I very much enjoyed the process. It hadn’t mattered that I wasn’t in the picnic or having the picnic; simply setting it up and admiring it through my camera lens had given me plenty of joy.

I came to love picnics so much from the influence of my favorite movies, like “Anne of Green Gables” and “Pride & Prejudice.” The only picnics I could remember, in my real life, looked very different. Vague memories included family outings to the beach with a cooler, or camping trip picnics. These memories were mostly good but did not look like the gathering in my favorite movies. When I began styling and photographing picnics to look like the ones I admired, I had such fun looking at it from the outside. However, it was a ton of work, with heavy props, sometimes cooking all the food, and lugging around a backpack of camera gear. The realities of styled picnics helped prepare me for real picnics. »





In 2017, I was turning 40 years old. This prompted me to consider my reality, dreams, and life up to that point. I decided to try for ultimate bliss: a year of real picnics. I would participate in the experience as well as take a few photos. The rule for this project was to plan at least one picnic a month, even during the fall and winter months. The picnic had to include a blanket or quilt, a beautiful location, and food.

I had high expectations for the first picnic. It was March in the Pacific Northwest, and the day was rainy and cold. After driving around for too long, we eventually parked by a bay and ate in the back of our vehicle. We ate our favorite salami pretzel sandwiches, strawberries, and hazelnut pastries from the farmers market. We were warm, cozy, and picnicking with a rainy ocean view. This first picnic experience taught me to be more flexible; it helped me realize some of the picnic photos would be idyllic while most would not be magazine-worthy. The goals did not include golden light hour or perfect arrangements, a color scheme, or styled outfits every time. The goal was to go on a picnic! »



I wanted my year of picnics to have a little style, so I incorporated a bit of beauty one way or another for each one. For me, the journey required flowers, so I stopped to forage and bring along a bouquet. Sometimes, the food was a granola bar and coffee, while other times it was a full spread of treats. The picnic locations varied, including a rowboat, my backyard, a buttercup field, a surprise cliff of daisies, a country trail leading us into bear territory, a pond with surprise large frogs, a bumpy mountain gravel road that would not end, a freezing snowy mountain, and a magical park with tall wavy grass and cherry blossoms near the ocean. In 12 months, I enjoyed a total of 16 picnics. I'm so glad I did this project and am able to share it with you.

*Here are a few helpful hints if you decide to go on a picnic:*

- Consider what your priorities are and how much you are willing to carry.
- If possible, give yourself a whole day of picnic bliss.
- Bring extra food for the journey to the picnic. Finding that beautiful location takes some time, and you don't want anyone to get "hangry."
- Be realistic about fall and winter picnics; bundle up and bring something hot to drink. Try to plan for better-weather days, but don't be afraid to have a little adventure.
- When picnicking alone, tell someone exactly where you will be. Keep safety first in mind, and do not go far from possible help.

*To learn more about Melanie Beilner, visit [countrycottageliving.com](http://countrycottageliving.com) and follow along on Instagram (@country.cottage.living). She welcomes email at [melaniebeilner@yahoo.com](mailto:melaniebeilner@yahoo.com).*

