

Shmanners 28: Picnics and Potlucks

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Teresa:

What are you bringing to the potluck?

Travis:

A podcast?

Teresa:

Someone's already bringing that.

Travis:

It's Shmanners.

[theme music plays]

Travis:

Hello, internet. I am your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa:

And I'm your wife, host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis:

And you're listening Shmanners.

Teresa:

It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis:

For ordinary occasions. Hello everyone. Happy... It's not the summer solstice yet, is it? When is the summer solstice?

Teresa:

Not yet.

Travis:

Oh, did we miss it?

Teresa:

Oh, no.

Travis:

Oh, no, not again.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

We'll get 'em next year, 2017. We've either missed it or we're too early, but I'm pretty sure it's not today one way or the other. Um, it's the summer here in America. Um, and, and that means a lot of things. It means vacations, which we've talked about. It means, you know, water, parks, uh, pools, beaches, which we talked about, traveling. But it also means picnics and get togethers. And when I think picnics, I think potlucks. And so that's what we're gonna talk about today.

Teresa:

Well, I think that the fact that you think potlucks, uh, almost immediately has something to do with your Southern Baptist raising.

Travis:

You are not wrong because, uh, growing up we did a lot of, like after church get togethers or church related get togethers where everybody would bring, you know, usually the whoever was hosting it at the house would provide the main dish and then everybody else would bring like some green beans, uh, casserole, you know, some broccoli casserole, some cornbread, something like that.

Teresa:

Lot of casserole or hot dishes.

Travis:

True.

Teresa:

If you are, uh, from the, the northern persuasion.

Travis:

[laughs] You know, of the northern variety.

Teresa:

Um, yes. Well, it's called different things in different places. Um, and as far as potlucks in America go, I mean, that's generally where they originated was in the churches.

Travis:

Let's break it down. I mean, I think we've already given a pretty good outline for what a potluck is, but in case that's a term that for some reason you've never heard before. What it is, basically, it is... everybody is meant to bring some sort of dish so that the host is not responsible for feeding everybody everything.

Teresa:

And...

Travis:

And?

Teresa:

Did you know there's another definition of potluck?

Travis:

No. What is it?

Teresa:

It is taking one's chances with what is being served in the cooking pot, wherein travelers and other unexpected guests took their chances with whatever was being served that night. So like kind of, um, uh, like a, almost like a—

Travis:

Dealer's choice?

Teresa:

Like a rock soup? Have you heard of rock soup?

Travis:

I have heard of rock soup.

Teresa:

Yeah. So almost like a rock soup where you don't know what's in the pot—

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... but if you want to eat, you gotta eat it.

Travis:

I thought rock soup was, everybody threw a little bit in and then you ate whatever. It doesn't matter.

Teresa:

It is also that, yes, but you have to eat what's in there.

Travis:

The key point is that everybody is responsible form of it, and then it's like, "Hey, you get there, and what's there is what you eat."

Teresa:

Exactly. So that's a kind of combination of both of the related meanings. Um, the first one where taking one's chances, obvi—came first—

Travis:

Yeah, that why it's call potluck.

Teresa:

Whereas if you were a traveler on the road and you stopped at someone's house and said, "Hey, I'll chop your wood some food tonight—"

Travis:

"I'll fix your fence for a plate of biscuits." Yeah.

Teresa:

Something like that. Um, and then the second one showed up around the late 19th century.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Uh, like I said, in communities and most often church related activities.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

You know, Travis and I actually wanted to have a potluck at our wedding.

Travis:

That is correct.

Teresa:

Uh, my mother insisted that it be catered and I think that probably she made the right choice.

Travis:

Yeah. In the end it was, uh, it was much less nerve-wracking to know that it was gonna be covered. I mean, you never want to get to a potluck and find that six different people have brought green beans and no one's brought a cheesecake.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

You know what I mean?

Teresa:

Exactly. And so if, if that's something like for a wedding that's important to you, you probably should have some sort of semblance of idea of what's going to be there instead of a potluck, which felt very, I don't know, millennial to us.

Travis:

And so the reason we wanted to couple it with picnics as well is I—well, there is, I think, the version of a picnic where it's like you and your sweetie and like, you take a blanket and a basket and spread it out. I mostly think more of like a cook-out picnic, you know, where it's everybody kind of getting together in a park versus someone's house. And once again, everybody brings a dish.

Like, we had a ton of... Especially coming off of 4th of July, I was thinking about this 'cause we had so many of those growing up where we'd go over to, uh, an aunt or uncle's house and hang out for the 4th of July and everybody brought some corn—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... or they brought hot dogs or they brought the buns and everybody kind of cobbled together a picnic out of everybody bringing... So basically a potluck.

Teresa:

The two terms have sort of socially converged.

Travis:

Well, can you give me a little bit more history around them?

Teresa:

Well, um, there really isn't too much specifically about potlucks.

Travis:

Is there a time in each ancient Egypt—

Teresa:

You're not really— [laughs]

Travis:

... where they invented the picnic?

Teresa:

Well, see, the thing is, Travis, people have been eating outside for as long as like, forever.

Travis:

As long as people have been eating.

Teresa:

Yeah. So if you weren't eating inside, you were eating outside, and I guess that makes it a picnic.

Travis:

Yeah. I doubt there was anybody standing around like cavemen standing around saying, "I don't want to eat out here. [laughs] I'll just starve until we established caves."

Teresa:

Right?

Travis:

Whatever. Well, well, I guess to be a caveman...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Otherwise, you're just an outside man.

Teresa:

Travis?

Travis:

Uh-huh.

Teresa:

It wasn't always called a picnic. Um, the word picnic actually has French origins. Um, but—

Travis:

[in a French accent] Picnic.

Teresa:

[laughs] Yes, Travis. Good pronunciation.

Travis:

Thank you.

Teresa:

Um—

Travis:

That was more of my French Canadian trapper than it was like actual French accent. Picnic.

Teresa:

This is gonna be a really rough one.

Travis:

[laughs]

Teresa:

[laughs] Travis just—Travis just got up from a nap and he is ready to go.

Travis:

I'm feeling very jazzed. I'm ready to go.

Teresa:

[laughs] Okay. So probably the earliest picnics in England, all right, and before then, like I said, people ate outside all the time—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... were medieval hunting feasts.

Travis:

Oh, okay. That makes sense.

Teresa:

So, uh, they began to establish hunting conventions in the 14th century, and it was customary to have a feast before the chase as a kind of social special thing.

Travis:

Yeah. I mean, you're all together, you gotta strategize on how you're gonna hunt the boar or whatever, and you're gonna get together and you're gonna talk.

Teresa:

Right. So they would've had things to eat, such as like pastries and hams and baked meats and, you know, things that were a little more easily portable.

Travis:

Yeah. Something that travels well.

Teresa:

Um—

Travis:

Because they didn't have like, coolers, they didn't have ice.

Teresa:

Right, right. Well, I mean, they wouldn't have really used those sorts of things anyway, um, even in their indoor feasts. Before these outdoor feasts, it was considered, you know, you had to have a little bit of portability.

Travis:

Yeah. So everything was like cured or, you know, dried or something like that.

Teresa:

Right. So then picnicking really became in vogue as far as outside of this, uh, hunting, sort of social gathering in the Victorian era.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

And there's actually a lot of literary, uh, instances to back this up, uh, Dickens, Jane Austen, all of these people put these sort of, uh, picnic scenes in their literature.

Travis:

Yes, I've heard of that.

Teresa:

Um, in the Victorian area, era.

Travis:

I also just wanna say, 'cause this is what popped in my head whenever I think of like, you know, picnicking before 1900 is the, uh, and I had to look up the title of it, forgive me, but the Sunday on La Grande Jatte. Um, the—

Teresa:

Oh, by Georges Seurat.

Travis:

Yeah. The, the pointillism painting of the picnic, I think that that's what I picture when I picture picnics. [laughs]

Teresa:

Which it's not really that far off, but if you're talking strictly Victorian era, um, they probably would've just brought whatever they had outside. So that includes tables and linens and chairs and, you know... So Victorians weren't really like, laying about on the ground eating.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, and the saying goes, "The wealthier you were, the higher you dined."

Travis:

Oh.

Teresa:

So, I mean, wealthy people brought everything out with them, you know, and they were served by their servants and you know, glass in China and all that kind of stuff.

Travis:

You know, and you see that before, there's an episode of, um, *Supersizers Go* where they're like having, you know, they're eating outdoors, but it looks like you just cut and paste the like dining room set.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

But now you're just out on grass and it's still the same servants, it's the same serving stuff. It's just outdoors now.

Teresa:

Exactly. Um, and then, but the, the next innovation in picnics was really the picnic basket.

Travis:

Invented by John Longerburger. That's probably not true.

Teresa:

[laughs] Probably not true. I'm, I'm not exactly sure who invented the picnic basket. Probably the French, again.

Travis:

Probably. Those French. Always thinking baskets and such.

Teresa:

Well, I mean, they were responsible for the word, why not be responsible for the basket?

Travis:

True.

Teresa:

And the reason that this really drove everything forward as far as picnics go, is because it was easy to carry. It was sturdy, and you could adapt it for specific purposes. So if you wanted to bring champagne, they have ones with like little champagne basket attachments, and glass attachments. And you can put in, um, a utensil sorter. And—

Travis:

Oh yeah. We've seen that on like a Antiques Roadshow where—

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

... there's like a case that you open up, but it's like a full, like, bottle set with the shaker and the glasses and everything.

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

And it was your portable cocktail mixer.

Teresa:

Yeah. So something like that. And, and you could really customize it for what you wanted to do.

Travis:

I also want to think about picnics in the, ye olden days. Um, I think about like the Civil War picnics, where you hear about, there were these, you know, huge epic battles where people would like spread out a blanket and a basket and watch the war happen like we would watch a football game.

Teresa:

And the most famous of that sort of scene that you're speaking of was at the Battle of Bull Run, um, which was considered by many to be kind of like the big, the beginning battle of the Civil War. There were smaller skirmishes and things. Um, but it was, it was largely discussed as being a, a kind of showy battle where not many people were gonna die. It was gonna just kind of be—

Travis:

What?

Teresa:

Yeah, I mean, they talked about it like it was gonna be over in an hour.

Travis:

Wow.

Teresa:

It was not.

Travis:

No. Do you mean the Civil War was supposed to be over in an hour—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... or the battle?

Teresa:

Well, yeah, both. They were like, "Well, this little skirmish thing is gonna last—"

Travis:

Oh man—

Teresa:

"... for about an hour."

Travis:

I've been there, a friend invites me to come see their play and they're like, "You know, like 45 minutes." And then pretty soon it turns into a two hour without animation. We've all been there.

Teresa:

Right. Well, so the legend goes that, uh, citizens armed with picnic baskets followed the Union Army out of Washington in July of 1861 to watch, like I said, what they thought was going to be the climactic battle of a very short rebellion.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

They were like, "This'll be it, and it'll be over, and then we'll be done." The tale goes that these citizens impeded the union retreat, creating panic. Um, and, uh, this, this legend has been blown out of proportion, uh, by Hollywood movies—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... and such. Um, and, you know, every movie says something different, but you know, the, the legend goes that innumerable numbers of civilians were actually under fire on the battlefield. And that, um, they began looting and rioting and running in the streets and not, not so, not really. Um, and they weren't even really that close to the battle. It's kind of like a hill overlooking the action almost.

Travis:

That said, I think it's a pretty good Shmammers takeaway lesson from this episode. Don't go have a picnic on, on battlefields. Listen, it's 2016, it's, we're past that point. We should not be camping out on battlefields watching wars while you sip your champagne anymore.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

We're past that now, people.

Teresa:

Yeah, so the majority of spectators we're probably about five miles away from the actual fight. And while they may have impeded the union retreat, um, they didn't directly influence this battle very much.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, they did bring picnic basket.

Travis:

That part is true.

Teresa:

That is true, but probably more out of necessity than anything else. 'Cause if you were following them, uh, from Washington, it's a good 25 miles between Washington and the place where it took place in Centerville.

Travis:

So it's not really what I think of, of them going, "Oh, let's go watch a lovely battle." It was more like, "Well, we need to go check this thing out and this is what we need to do to get there and we need provision."

Teresa:

By carriage, it was seven hours to get there.

Travis:

Oh, okay. Um, so this was not just like a jaunty afternoon thing?

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

And I'm certain that there were probably locals there as well, but anyone who had traveled from Washington probably couldn't rely on the hospitality of those locals 'cause they were on the opposite side.

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

So if you wanted food for seven hours and more like 14 hours—

Travis:

They had to tailgate.

Teresa:

[laughs] They had to tailgate, they had to bring it with them.

Travis:

So we have a lot of questions, but before we had into the break, there was one—I want to head into kind of a more general discussion about picnics in public—

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Before we head into the question section, and I thought a good jumping off point was a question from Laura who asked, "Is it normal for a host to keep a list of who is bringing what and then communicate to all attendees who is bringing what?"

Teresa:

More or less, it is actually. Um, for the host to orchestrate they usually want a rough idea of what you're bringing. Um, it can be as much as, "I need four people to bring drinks, four people to bring meat, four people to bring sides, four people to bring dessert," and then that's it. Or they may choose to go even further down the line and down the list and, uh, make a running tally of what people plan to bring, and when two people say, "I'm bringing Caesar salad," they say, "Sorry, that's already taken. Bring something else please."

Travis:

But, uh, it seems to me like a potluck is a solution to the problem of why should the host have to pay for and provide everything when there could be

like 20, 30, 40, 50 people coming, right? Everybody can shoulder a little bit of the burden or chip in money, but I've also seen people... A lot of people asked about what if it's like a workplace potluck that they never opted to want to participate in, but suddenly they're expected to do it.

Is there a way to like opt out of a potluck if you, for financial reasons, or maybe you're just not a cook, you can't make it out to the store? Is it possible to still participate without feeling like an absolute turd?

Teresa:

If you are invited to a potluck, you do need to bring a dish to share. I think that that is one of the intricate parts, um, that if, if you didn't bring a dish and then your neighbor didn't bring a dish and then three other couples didn't bring a dish, there wouldn't be enough food for everyone. And it's important that if you are going to attend, and I'm not saying you have to attend every potluck, but if you're going to attend, you need to bring something to share.

Travis:

Is portion an important part of it? Like say you were going to go and you didn't have a lot of money to spend, but you could like stop by your local Kroger or a bakery and grab like, you know, maybe a dozen to 24 cookies and bring them, and you maybe could only spend like 10 bucks max, but you brought something.

Teresa:

Uh, I would say that generally, uh, you should bring 12 servings of whatever it is you're going to bring.

Travis:

Uh-huh.

Teresa:

If that's a casserole, that's about a nine by 12 casserole. Um, for cookies, a whole box of cookies is definitely 12 servings or more. Um, that's, that's enough to share and enough for you as well.

Travis:

So bringing something is better than... Bringing something, even if it is store bought or... And when I say store bought, I don't mean like I went and spent a ton of money buying very fancy store bought food. I mean like you buy a box of cookies—

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like you're bringing something, even if you can't invest a ton of money or time into it.

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

Now, I wouldn't recommend that as like your go-to, but I think that people understand, especially friends. If it's the friend's potluck, I think if your friends, your friends will understand if, like all you can do is all you can do. But the fact that you made some kind of, um, effort is always appreciated.

What about if you're invited, especially to a potluck where everybody's kind of providing food and you want to bring a guest or you want to bring a friend or you know, a significant other or something like that. Is that something you need to run by the host first so that people can plan accordingly for the amount of food?

Teresa:

Right. Just like any party, unless explicitly stated that you are welcome to bring a guest, you should run it by the host. Um, just because a lot of these things require flatware, require silverware, um, you need to make sure that there's enough room wherever you're going. Say it's a, say that you've only rented one picnic table, and if everybody brought a guest, no one would have anywhere to sit. Uh, so you, you do need to contact the host.

Travis:

Um, we touched on it a little bit, but this, I want to just nail home the last couple, uh, bits of it. So Ira asked, and I think it's a good question, "Do I need to cook something or can I bring a nice party platter?" We talked about doing store-bought stuff. Do you, is there a difference between someone who like, makes a casserole at home and goes to the store and pays, you know, \$50 for a meat tray? Like, is bringing something store-bought kind of gonna get you a little bit of like a, "Oh, store-bought? Mm, nice. Okay."

Teresa:

I don't think so. I think that there needs to be variety of food in any case. And if everybody brought hot casseroles, you know, that's, even if they all taste completely different, you want a little variety on your plate. So—

Travis:

That's as true about potlucks as it is about the world.

Teresa:

Yes. Uh, so never be ashamed about your contribution as long as it's something that people will eat and enjoy. Now, as far as like crudité, uh, which is, you know, a some sort of creamy dip plus carrots and celery and broccoli and things like that.

Travis:

Edible vegetable, like—

Teresa:

Edible, yeah.

Travis:

... some kind of, uh, finger, you know, sized, bite-sized vegetables.

Teresa:

That is often the fallback. You should contact your host to see if they will be providing that. That's an easy thing for a host to do, or if someone has already done it because they end up there a lot. [laughs]

Travis:

Is the host not responsible for the main dish? I had it in my head that like the host says, "I'm going to be making a rack of ribs or the, a big pot of, you know, uh, chicken or whatever, and everybody else brings the sides."

Teresa:

I think that the host is responsible for telling everyone what they will be bringing, what they will be making and providing. Um, but in the case of, like you talked about, kind of like a, a grilling situation, um, should the host be responsible for burgers and hotdogs and ribs and chicken and all of that? I don't think so, but I do think that the host should be, should be responsible for making sure everyone knows what it is will be provided.

Travis:

So here's the question that we didn't get, but it's just popped in my head.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

If you are throwing a thing, say you're having like a backyard cookout, you know, or like a, you know, um, potluck birthday or whatever is, is as the host, especially as an adult host, say, you know, you have a home and a family and you're, you know, a full-fledged adult—

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

... not that there's one right way to be an adult, but I'm just saying any, it doesn't matter. Are you responsible for providing drinks for everybody? Be it alcoholic or non-alcoholic, or is BYOB... Do you ever grow out of BYOB as an appropriate instruction on an invitation?

Teresa:

Um, unless you are hosting a wine tasting or, uh, some other sort of, um, a beer gathering or something that you have described as such, I think that BYOB is always a great idea, um, because alcohol specifically is expensive. Um, you can—

Travis:

And also everybody has a preference.

Teresa:

Everybody has a preference. And, um, other than water, and probably some sort of punch slash juice slash beverage other than alcoholic, I think that you can ask your... What do I say? Your friends to bring.

Travis:

Is there something... Uh, so if you, say you were doing like, uh, you were going to have a keg for your backyard barbecue.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Or you were going to, uh, like get a big, huge slab of fancy meat that you were gonna grill. Is it okay to say like, "Hey, I'm spending all this money on this thing, bring a gift, and—or bring a dish and \$10 to chip in towards the overall cost of the event?" Or is it like you either bring money or you bring a dish?

Teresa:

I think that should be it. I think that you should, um, if you are not able to host the upfront cost of the party to have it, say you want a keg, and you can't buy it, you shouldn't have the keg.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Uh, a potluck dinner, should be your contribution is the food or the drink that you bring.

Travis:

Got it. Well, we're gonna head into break and then we're gonna come back with some more questions, uh, from you. But first, here's a word from another Max Fun show.

--

Justin:

Hi everybody, I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Dr. Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Every Tuesday we bring you *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. A show about all the dumb, weird, terrible ways that we've tried to fix each other over the years. You know, some light summer listening.

Sydnee:

Maybe you wanna hear about yogurt enemas, or why we tried to eat mummies for a while, or why drinking cholera diarrhea sounded like a good idea.

Justin:

That and so much more is waiting for you every Tuesday right here on the Maximum Fun Network with Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine.

--

Travis:

Okay, we're back. Um, we've got some questions every week. We will put out what, uh, topic is going to be usually by Tuesday afternoon. And then give you a chance to ask your questions for advice on etiquette and manners. Uh, you can either tweet at us @ShmannersCast, S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S, or you can go on the Facebook group or the maximum fun.org Facebook group.

Um, so this is a question that we received a lot of in a lot of different forms, but Elizabeth asks, "Should I ask about dietary restrictions or can I just make something that is generally liked, like pasta, salad, cookies? And how much do I need, or how far out of my way should I go to accommodate, for example, a preference versus an allergy."

I mean, there's a lot in that question, so let's break it down first. As far as like say a food allergy goes, I mean, there's people that are allergic to shrimp, there's people that are allergic to peanuts. People are allergic to a lot of different things.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Is it your responsibility as a person bringing a dish to try to pick something that does not contain a single allergen of everybody at the party?

Teresa:

It is not. Um, if you are concerned about a specific friend who will be attending the potluck, if you want to make sure that they have a variety of options, by all means, do something you know that they will enjoy. Otherwise, it's really more important that you label those allergens that are in the dish that you bring, like you said, shrimp or peanuts, or if it's, uh, vegetarian or if it's vegan or, or things like that. Um, those sorts of things, it's very nice to label them so that people who do wish to avoid those things or flock towards those things will know which dishes to go to.

Travis:

Yeah. And at the very least, put your name on what you're bringing so that someone could go, "I don't know, ask Travis what's in it." And, rather than just leaving people wondering and going, "Did you make the casserole? Did you bring the broccoli? Is there something else in the broccoli?" Um, so then as far as how much do you bring, you mentioned at least 12 servings.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

But like if you're doing, say, just a ginormous gathering, there's gonna be like 40, 50 people there. Do you need to scale up your thing or is it that the number of people bringing dishes will accommodate the number of people there and you just stick to like a, a casserole size thing instead of having to make three casseroles because of how many people they're gonna be.

Teresa:

That second part, what you said.

Travis:

Oh, great.

Teresa:

Um, the, the amount of people amplifies the amount of dishes. So if everyone is bringing a dish, there should be plenty for everyone to eat as long as you bring about 12 servings.

Travis:

Got it. Um, now, the last part of the question from Elizabeth, the preference versus allergy, that seems to me to be more like, "Well, we will figure that out on the day." But it seems like you wouldn't want to go out of your way if someone goes, oh, I, well, I say that, but then I think about desserts and like, if you're gonna make a chocolate cake and nobody else there likes chocolate, does that change what you make?

Teresa:

Well, really, the great thing about potluck is because everyone is bringing a dish, hopefully they can eat the dish that they brought.

Travis:

Fair.

Teresa:

You know? So as far as different preferences go, if you don't like what someone else brought, hopefully you like what you brought and you can eat that.

Travis:

Well, that fa— Okay, so this question from Chris kind of ties into that. "Can I bring something spicy to potluck or do I have to cater to spice wussies?"

Teresa:

I believe you can bring something spicy and again, I think you should probably label it as, so if it is more spicy than, I would say, you know, Taco Bell or whatever, you probably should label it so that people don't get surprised. But—

Travis:

Can I bring Taco Bell to a potluck, just get a big box of burritos?

Teresa:

Isn't there like a, a 12 taco box or something?

Travis:

I'm sure there's a hundred taco box if you paid them enough.

Teresa:

Uh, I—

Travis:

"I brought an assortment of tacos."

Teresa:

[laughs] I wouldn't advise bringing Taco Bell.

Travis:

Unless it's a super cool potluck.

Teresa:

Unless it's a super cool potluck. [laughs]

Travis:

Um, this question is from, uh, uh... It's a great name. El Del Flago. I love that. "Is it impolite to take the last piece scoop bit of something?" I mean,

this is an age-old question. You know, the last piece of pizza, the last chicken wing, that kind of thing. Is it cool?

Teresa:

I don't think it is, uh—

Travis:

Cool or impolite?

Teresa:

Impolite.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

I don't think it is impolite because this food is there to share. It's there to be eaten. Um, and especially because you're not sitting around a table asking for seconds, you should feel to, feel free to eat what you want to eat. And—

Travis:

What if it is your second portion? What if you've already had a piece of the pizza or one of the chicken winks or a big scoop of mashed potatoes?

Teresa:

Well, then as long as you have waited until everyone else has been served, go ahead and go back.

Travis:

Um, I will just say, just a little addendum there. Something to keep in mind, especially if there's someone on the grill whose job it has become to grill food for everybody, make sure that they're taken care of. I've been that person many, many times and nothing sucks worse than finishing cooking everybody's food for them on a grill, only to find that like half of every, like half of the dishes are already empty and you've just gotten your first chance to eat.

Teresa:

I definitely agree. You need to make that grill cook a plate.

Travis:

Exactly. You know, go and say like, "Hey, what do you want?" You know, that kind of thing. This question is from Sarah that I think ties into all this once more. "What's the protocol for non-vegetarians, non-vegan chowing down on vegetarian and vegan options?" Uh, is it the kind of thing where if there is a vegan, a vegetarian option, you need to let the vegans of vegetarians have it and stay away from it, or is it on the table, it's open season?

Teresa:

That's tough. Um, because... So, so let's flesh out this situation just a little more. Let's say that the people who are vegan or are vegetarian have brought that dish. I would say that if there are several dishes to choose from, go ahead and feel free to eat whatever it is that catches your fancy.

Travis:

Maybe sample rather than just stand in front of and consume.

Teresa:

Yes. I would definitely urge that. But, um, if there's only one, if the vegan person has brought a vegan dish, try and let them eat that.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Um, you should probably stay mostly away. Please try a bite because everybody wants to have a compliment on their cooking. Um, but you should leave the majority of that dish to the people who, who can really only eat that.

Travis:

And I think that that goes back to what you were saying, which is if everybody's gotten to eat, like if you're the first person in line and there's one vegan dish, don't heap half of it onto your plate.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

That's if you're non-vegan, but like if you know it's the end of the day and there's some bites left on a vegan tray that you've been wanting to try, go for it.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Um, so this question is from Alfie and this is a little bit more picnic-centric. Um—

Teresa:

Okay, great.

Travis:

Well, this is on Twitter. "We normally take off our shoes before sitting on a picnic blanket. Is this normal?" This is a good question because the other side of the blanket is on the ground.

Teresa:

Yes. But that's not the side of the blanket that people are sitting on and touching with their hands that are then probably touching food. Um, so I think that taking your shoes off is a very conscientious thing to do, uh, leaving them very close by and, you know, making sure that you put them back on when you get off the blanket. I think that's a great idea.

Travis:

Uh, this question is from Gin and it ties back to what we were talking about a little bit with the BOB, BOB, BYOB question, you know, about the rapper, B.o.B.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

This question is about palms over bag dot. "About drinks, is it okay to bring beer or wine instead of a dish? Do you need to bring both?"

Teresa:

Uh, that really depends on what your host has asked of you. If you have been assigned maybe to bring drinks, feel free to just bring drinks. But if they have asked specifically that every person bring a dish in addition to your, uh, adult beverage of choice, you need to bring that dish that you are asked.

Travis:

Does this, is this a good solu— Like, say I was invited to a thing, uh, that they said, "We're having a party for 30 people." And then I was like, "Can I bring Teresa?" And they're like, "Uh, yeah. I mean, everything's already taken." Is that a good opportunity to be like, "We will provide the drink," or something like that. Or is that too huge a commitment to say, "We'll provide the drinks?"

Teresa:

Um, I think for a party of 30 people providing the adult beverage drink is, is a little bit cost prohibitive.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Um, if you are... It is very kind if you are asking to bring a guest for them to bring something with them. Um, I would say that it is usually pretty safe to bring a dessert. People are going to eat those things.

Travis:

True. When, uh, do you think, uh, this is going to sound a little weird at first, but go with me. If you are a couple... If, okay, I might be wrong, but I'm gonna play out a scenario. It feels like if you are a couple, it's okay to just bring one dish. It feels like if you are two separate people or you just want to bring like a friend with you, that you each need to bring a dish. Would you say that that's true or am I making that up?

Teresa:

No, I would say that it's generally accepted that a household provides a dish. Um, and so if you live with your SO, you have, you know, very similar finances, you can bring a singular dish.

Travis:

Should that scale to like two people are bringing the dish, so like maybe 12 store bought cookies doesn't cover it? Or do you think it's like, "Hey listen, you brought a thing. We're not gonna ju—" At the end of the day, it really does.

I want to be clear, this is a great time to bring up, when we do this show, we are talking about like buy the books, manners in etiquette. Not like 100% of the time, black and white this is true every time. No gray area. Of course,

like if you are friends with people and you all just bring a 12 pack of PBR and a case of cookies and they're like, "Yeah, great. We're just happy you're here." Of course. We're talking about like the buy the book stuff. Is it—does it need to scale up? Like it needs to seem like two people brought it?

Teresa:

Anything other than I think than, um, a casserole or some, you know, something that's encapsulated like that, I think it's, it's a nice thing to have it to scale up 'cause if there's two people eating, there should be enough for two people to eat.

Travis:

Right. Um, this is back to picnic blankets. Uh, Madeline asked, "What is the etiquette for sharing, not sharing picnic blankets? Is everybody responsible for their own?"

Teresa:

Picnic blankets are one of those things that you can easily put back in the car if there are too many of them. So I would say always bring your own to a picnic, um, so that you're prepared if you need it. If people are willing to share, uh, if or if it's a, the very large picnic blanket that they have and they say, "Oh, come on over here and hang out with us." Then you have one, then you don't have to use it, but you should have one just in case.

Travis:

Uh, this is from Megan. "How do I balance quality versus quantity? I can make a lot of 'okay' mac and cheese or some classy mac and cheese."

Teresa:

I think that that really depends on, um, how much you are willing to spend, uh, because here's the deal, no matter how much you spend, there is always gonna be one person who spends more money on the dish.

Travis:

Are you looking at me? Because I—

Teresa:

And more than one person.

Travis:

... spend way too much... I spend way too much money on dishes for things, is that why you're looking at me because I'll bring like six things to a thing

where everyone's supposed to bring one? Is that why you're looking at me, Teresa?

Teresa:

And then more than one person who is going to bring something that is very inexpensive.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So, I would say make what you like. If you really like that macaroni and cheese and it only makes the requisite 12 servings, go ahead and make it 'cause you like it. Um, but if it doesn't make enough, you should probably make the one that you can afford. So the, the mediocre mac and cheese will still be eaten.

Travis:

The 'okay' mac and cheese.

Teresa:

The 'okay' mac and cheese will still be eaten and enjoyed. So it's that, I think that that's really your personal preference in how much you're willing to spend.

Travis:

Uh, we have a question from Faye and five-year-old Max. "If you are a kid, do you run around or eat the food?"

And I like this question because generally, especially at like the Southern Baptist style picnics I've been to, you have cornhole or baggo or whatever you wanna call it, you maybe have horseshoes or you have ladder ball, or you have kids trying to catch fireflies or maybe water balloon fight or water... All of these activities that, especially if it was very kid-centric, that the food could sit there uneaten. Or you have these kids and you're like, "Hey, you need to come eat." Like, is the point of a picnic for the socializing and the activities, or is it there for the social eating and everybody breaking bread together?"

Teresa:

I think it's a healthy balance of both. Um, especially speaking to Max. When you are called to eat, when it is time to eat, you should come over and eat. But then when you're finished, go back to what you were doing. Play on.

Travis:

And eat like the people there worked hard to make the food.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

Not like you're just trying to shovel it into your face. I—listen, Max, I'm speaking from experience here, 'cause this was me too.

Teresa:

[laughs] Travis is an experienced shoveler.

Travis:

Yes. You don't wanna just shovel the food in your face so you can get back to what you were doing because I think that that doesn't show courtesy to the people who worked very hard to make sure that this food was provided at the event.

Teresa:

Right. So play until it's time to eat, then eat in a leisurely fashion, and then go back to playing, Max.

Travis:

Uh, this question is from Melissa. "Is it okay to bring traditional food from your culture to a potluck?"

Teresa:

Um, if you are willing to label it, and maybe discuss its ingredients a little bit, certainly. Um, I always advise to bring recognizable food because you want people to eat it. I'm not saying that food from different cultures is unrecognizable, but it is a little different for other people who may not recognize it from that culture. So if you bring an ingredient list or if you, um, equate it to something that they may have had already, people are more likely to try it.

Travis:

I also think it depends on what group of people you're bringing... Like for example, if I was going to like, you know, a six-family potluck where I knew everybody, yes, I love trying, you know, dishes from different cultures and... But if you're taking it to your work party where, you know, everyone you work with is kind of boring and bland and doesn't like to try new things,

maybe not. You know, it just, I think that when you're picking a dish for a potluck or a picnic, you need to cater to your audience a little bit.

Teresa:

Sure, a little bit. But it's always nice to keep an open mind and try new things. I think that the idea of labeling it, um, equating it to something people might be a little more familiar with, or even including an ingredient list of some of the more, uh, if there are some familiar things in the dish, even though the dish may not be familiar, I think that's a great place to start.

Travis:

Um, speaking of this is from Cherry The Bearded on Twitter. "Is it rude to bring something I like without checking its mass appeal? I'm a picky eater and I guarantee it's food I will eat."

Teresa:

As long as it's been okayed by the host, bring whatever you like.

Travis:

But you shouldn't... Like, if you have a weird food preference, like say you like, I don't know, peanut butter and tuna fish sandwiches, a thing that I've been known to enjoy from time to time—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... you should not maybe bring that, because you should assume that that will not be touched by anyone but you.

Teresa:

I don't think that if you suggested that as an option to your host, that they would be, um, eager to accept that. I think that they might encourage you to go a different route.

Travis:

Unless they're the only other human being on earth who has had it. I didn't make this up.

Teresa:

They might—

Travis:

This was served to me by a friend when I was a kid and I was like, "Yes, this is good." And now I still enjoy the occasional fish and peanut butter sandwich. I know, it's weird. I get that. I don't expect to find it on the menu at like, Denny's. I get it.

Teresa:

There might only be two of you.

Travis:

There might be just me and this kid that apparently their parents are like, "I don't know, maybe Travis will eat this." And I did. Um, this is from Logan. Is it bad for me to bring alcohol if you know that there will be a mixed company of people who drink and people who don't or can't?"

Teresa:

No, I don't think it is. If you, if it is BYOB, bring what you're gonna drink.

Travis:

What if it's not stated that it's BYOB? What if there's not been any overt discussion of alcohol at the party? Is that something that, is it bad for him to contact the host or hostess... Is it bad for him to contact the host and say, "Should I bring drinks or should I bring alcohol?" Is that cool?

Teresa:

Not at all. It is not bad for him. I think that anytime you contact the host, they are, they are probably more willing to talk to you about what they would like you to bring than be surprised. So, um, go ahead and contact them, see if that's, if that's cool with the party. And my bet is that it is.

Travis:

Uh, this question is from Renee, and I'm gonna spin it into a second question afterwards. "If you have to duck out early, is it rude to take what's left of your dish or should you offer to leave it?"

Teresa:

Um, I am from the school and Emily Post agrees that you should offer to leave it. Um, you are welcome to bring with you a separate like Tupperware type dish to bring home leftovers if they are offered, if the host insists that you take them. Otherwise, you should leave it.

Travis:

Should it be assumed otherwise that the host... If it's at someone's house, it feels to me like it's maybe like, yeah, this is the leftovers, kind of go to the host of like, the tip for having the party at their house. Is that always the case? And like if it's a picnic, should you just assume that everybody's taking home their own leftovers or...

Teresa:

I think that if it is a picnic, um, when you are leaving, you should probably empty your casserole dish or whatever you brought it in onto a plate or onto a separate thing, leave the food and take your dish. But unless the host insists that you take leftovers with you.

Travis:

But if I were the host of something like that and there were enough people there, and at the end of the day there were two people left and a table full of like food, I would be so upset that I was left to cleaned it all up and cart it all away.

Teresa:

Well, but that's a case where you would insist that people leaving take leftovers.

Travis:

Mm-hmm. I mean, but like just—

Teresa:

So I said— [laughs]

Travis:

What, what I mean is just their own leftovers, or if they're leaving and they're like, "This is all delicious." It's like, take a scoop of everything home with you.

Teresa:

Exactly. That's why you should bring your little Tupperware, um, so you have it with you. And if the host insists that you make a couple plates and take 'em home, you can do it. But it shouldn't be an expected thing.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

You should expect to leave the food with the host, and then once they insist that you take it, that's when you take it.

Travis:

That's when you pop the Tupperware out of your pocket.

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

And like, "Well, if you insist, Tupperware."

Teresa:

So you can be prepared. There's nothing wrong with that. You can be prepared, but you should expect to leave that food.

Travis:

Um, speaking of leaving, we got this in a lot of different forms from people, but if you show up, and this is kind of a more general party question than I think is specific to potlucks and picnics. But it's a good one because everybody's bringing something.

How, if you show up to a thing where everybody has brought food and that kind of thing, and, and the focus is eating, how long do you reasonably need to stay and attend? I mean, if the food's ready to go and everybody eats right away, can you leave after 20 minutes or is that like eat and run and it's very rude? Like, how long do you need to stay at a function like this?

Teresa:

Um, I think that you certainly need to stay until every person has been through the line. Um, if there are still people waiting for their hot dogs or brats or whatever, you shouldn't leave before they've eaten. Um, so I would say wait until the last person eats, then do a round of goodbyes, and you can head out.

Travis:

Is the potluck something that you can show up to anytime during the given timeframe, or is it better to show up right at the beginning so all the food's there and ready to go?

Teresa:

I think that it really depends on how hungry you are. [laughs] If you show up late, there may not be any food besides the food that you've brought, or—

Travis:

And you may be taking home a full dish—

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

... if everybody else has eaten. Yeah.

Teresa:

Or there may only be desserts left and you're left just cake and ice cream to eat. Um, so you, you take your future into your own hands when you show up late to one of these functions. I would like to end the podcast with some historical picnic fair ideas.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Here is a snack picnic from a recipe printed in 1944. Thermos of Bloody Mary, sliced corn beef, roast beef, turkey, Virginia ham, Switzerland, Swiss or Bel Paese cheese. Cheddar cheese, tin of anchovy filets. Boneless skinless sardines, hard-cooked eggs, variety of mustards, sweet butter, uh, French or pumper nickel bread, fruit, angel food cake, pickles, and coffee.

Travis:

Was that called the Travis pigment? Everything in there is something I love very much.

Teresa:

That's called a snack picnic, and I was just taken aback on how much food they suggested for a snack picnic. Now, I suppose it's snack in the way that none of these are expressly mentioned as pre—made sandwiches.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, and so maybe it's just slices of corn, beef and roast beef and things that you can pick at and put on your plate all separately. But I, that certainly—

Travis:

It's not snack like I think of it like a fruit roll up and maybe a fig Newton.

Teresa:

Right. Um, here is one from the same book called First Picnic in Spring. Chilled white wine, shrimp and shells with mustard mayonnaise.

Travis:

Is that shrimp [mm stuff] or like, yeah?

Teresa:

Yeah. [laughs]

Travis:

I love [mm stuff].

Teresa:

Scallions and radishes with sweet butter, old country meatloaf, French bread and butter.

Travis:

You don't want any new country meatloaf. It's gotta be at least a week old.

Teresa:

Rockford cognac spread.

Travis:

Whoa.

Teresa:

Strawberries in kish, iced coffee with cream and more kish.

Travis:

What's kish?

Teresa:

Uh, it is a liqueur that is often used in desserts. Uh, say like, uh, a black forest gateau—

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

You have kish in it.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Here's one that Travis will love. This is from 1983 called a Classic Summer Picnic.

Travis:

That's the year I was born.

Teresa:

Old South fried chicken.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

Barbecue ribs with back bay sauce.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

Early Dutch coleslaw.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

Heritage baked beans.

Travis:

Oh yes.

Teresa:

Dill potato salad.

Travis:

Oh yes.

Teresa:

And buttermilk custard pie.

Travis:

Oh, that is good. That's a very Southern boy. I like that.

Teresa:

I knew you would like that.

Travis:

I say that I was raised West in West Virginia which is not really the South, but a lot of Southern tendencies, I would say.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I think that's gonna do it for us this week. Thank you for joining us. Uh, thank you for listening to the show and thank you for telling a friend about the show. Word of mouth is the best way to help our show grow. I will just say, I haven't edited yet. We're still in the middle of the podcast, but I really had fun recording this one. I thought this was a really great episode and I thought my wife did a great job. Um—

Teresa:

Oh, thank you, Travis. If you think that I did a great job, you listeners out there, would you please go to iTunes and rate review and subscribe.

Travis:

And maybe tweet about the show. Every week when we put the show up, we, uh, put out a tweet about it and you just need to click retweet where you can share it on Facebook. Join our Facebook group. Like I mentioned earlier in the show you can just, uh, search Shmanners, S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S. You can also join the maximumfun.org Facebook. Uh, maximumfun.org is an amazing network of podcasts that we are on and that I highly recommend that you check out all the other shows on.

There's lots of amazing ones on there this week. I wanna highly recommend, as I normally do, Sawbones. If you like this show, you will like Sawbones. Also, check out Still Buffering, uh, Minority Korner, Adam Ruins Everything. There's a lot of good ones on there. And you know, as always, thank you to Emily Post. Is that—did I do that right?

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Thank you, Emily Post.

Travis:

Um, we also wanna say thank you to Kayla Mossel for our, uh, our artwork and our, our iTunes album, you know, design. And thank you to Brent "Brentalfloss" Black for our intro and outro music. Not only is Brent a good friend of ours, um, he is also an amazing musician and a co-host of Trends Like These with me on maximumfun.org.

You can own that as your ringtone, the intro and outro music for Shmanners, you can get that as a ringtone. Just go to, uh, the iTunes store on any Apple device, search Shmanners ringtone, and it could be yours. It's super great. I'm a big fan of that.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

So join us again next week.

Teresa:

No RSVP required.

Travis:

You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa:

Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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