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Clean Ideas: Stamp Out Picnic Stains

Easy ways to treat common picnic stains

Picnic aficionados agree: food tastes better outdoors!

And whether it's because we're simply more relaxed outdoors or because the summer menu fosters more hands-on eating, food stains proliferate.

To minimize the damage, keep hand wipes close by even when dining al fresco at home. For away-from-home picnics, pack stain-removal wipes or a stain-removal pen. Come laundry time, here's how to treat some of the most common stains.



Baked beans: Working from the back of the stain, flush it with cold water. Next, pretreat it with a liquid laundry detergent, using an up-and-down motion with a soft brush to break up the stain. Rinse well. Then sponge with white vinegar and rinse again. Repeat, treating the stain with liquid detergent, then with white vinegar until you've removed as much stain as possible. Pretreat with a prewash stain remover and launder with bleach that's safe for the fabric.

Barbeque sauce: Treat the same as for baked beans. If the stain remains after laundering with bleach, rub in liquid laundry detergent and soak in warm water for up to 30 minutes. Launder again.

Butter: What good is corn-on-the-cob unless it's slathered with butter? For stains that make their way off your fingers and onto your clothes, pretreat with a prewash stain remover and launder, using the hottest water that's safe for the fabric.

Chocolate: Deliciously gooey s'mores are a favorite campfire treat, as well as a prime source of chocolate stains. When the stain strikes, gently scrape off any excess chocolate. Once you get the item home, soak it in cool water. Then pretreat with a prewash stain remover and launder in the hottest water that's safe for the fabric. If the stain remains, launder again, using the type of bleach that's safe for the fabric.

Ice cream: Pretreat or soak stains using a product containing enzymes. Soak for at least 30 minutes – longer if the stains are old. Launder, using the warmest water that's safe for the fabric.

Mayonnaise: Pretreat with a prewash stain remover and then launder, using the hottest water that's safe for the fabric.

Mustard: Flush under cold water to loosen the stain, and then pretreat with a prewash stain remover. Launder, using the hottest water that's safe for the fabric. Add bleach to the wash also – preferably chlorine bleach. (Check the care label to see if it is safe for the fabric.)

Soft drinks: Sponge the stain with cool water or soak it in cool water for about 30 minutes. Pretreat with a prewash stain remover. Launder; if safe for the fabric, add chlorine bleach to the wash.

Watermelon: These stains fall into that mysterious category of "invisible stains." The drips dry up and the stain seems to disappear. But if left over time, the stains will oxidize into pale yellow or brown stains. To keep this from happening, launder the item in the hottest water that's safe for the fabric.

Wine: Sponge the stain with cool water or soak it in cool water for about 30 minutes. Pretreat with a prewash stain remover. Launder; if safe for the fabric, add chlorine bleach to the wash.