

TAILGATING TIPS

One of the biggest tailgating challenges is getting everybody in the same place at the same time. If you can't spend the extra money for special parking spots, designate a meeting area such as a shopping-center parking lot and caravan to the stadium so everyone parks in one area. You also can use cell phones, of course, to stay in touch.

A few more pointers from LuAnn and Tim Reinders' tailgating buddy, Robin Brekke:

*Keep it simple at first. When you're starting out, serve no-cook items such as sandwiches and food from a local deli. Then, gradually expand your menu and invest in more equipment, if you like.

*Get organized. Make lists and diagrams to help you pack and remember everything.

*Cook ahead. Prepare as much of the food as possible at home, so the cooks can enjoy the tailgate, too.

*Plan simple food for the kids (burgers, hot dogs, even peanut butter- and-jelly sandwiches).

*Think non-breakable. Pack food in plastic or disposable containers with lids.

*Bring extra. From utensils to paper towels and trash bags, you'll need more than you think. Bring extra tables, too. There always seems to be more food than table space.

*Take plenty of water, especially for early-season games. Frozen bottled water can substitute for commercial ice packs and provides cool drinking as the ice melts. Also bring a jug of extra water for cleanup.

*Use two coolers -- one for food and one for beverages, so food doesn't heat up every time someone reaches in for a drink.

*Pack food in the order of use. Put items you'll need last at the bottom of your cooler and those you'll use first at the top.

*Keep clean. Because soap and running water probably won't be handy, take hand-sanitizing liquids and sanitizing wipes.