



# Packable and snackable for kids on the move

BY LAURA HUNT ANGEL

This far into spring, the birds and I have gotten into our own routine. Every morning since hubby Chuck put up my gazebo, I go outside to enjoy my morning iced coffee in the relative quiet of the back yard. After coffee, I water the potted plants and refill the birdbath while the starlings, overhead, cajole my kindness. Once done, I settle back into the gazebo to read quietly and wait for the commotion to settle. Eventually, the robins return to spy on worms and the little purple finches take their morning baths in the fresh water.

This morning, a pair of grackles are courting along the fence line. The male, in his best effort to appear handsome, is spreading his wings and dipping his blue-black head in a manner not unlike a beaked Dracula. Apparently, lady grackles find this as hypnotically fascinating as did young Lucy in the original story.

I think that gazebos, wood shops and the like are basically hideouts for grown-ups. If you are like me, you can remember building at least one fort or tree house as a kid. They were wonderful little places to allow the mind to relax and wander, to daydream and create.

Kids today still need the same kind of thing — unstructured time to let their minds grow and discover. It is in moments like that where we learn to improvise and brainstorm, gaining the self confidence we will need later in life.

## The Big Box

On another late spring day many years ago, my neighbor Donna and I took refuge in a giant box in her backyard. I no longer remember what was originally in the box, but it most certainly wasn't a washer, because Donna's mother Judy used an old ringer washer with a big crank on the side that I once caught my fingers in. It wasn't a box for a dryer either, because Judy always hung her clothes on a line. In the winter, she added salt to the rinse water so the clothes wouldn't freeze. When they were dry, she would beat the salt out of them with an old broom handle before taking them off the line. I always wondered if the clothes were itchy from all of the salt. I couldn't even stand tags on my clothes or when the seams on my socks were crooked, so I couldn't imagine having itchy, salty clothes.

I just figured that salting your clothes was another Catholic tradition, because Donna and her family were Catholic. Anything that they did that was different from my family I generally chalked up to their being Catholic and us being Baptist.

Like milk toast. Donna did not like milk toast, but it was something that her mother made for breakfast several times a week, and Donna was not allowed to leave the table until she finished it. Sometimes this took quite a while.

Our Baptist breakfasts were quite different. My mother made things like eggs with bacon and biscuits, or pancakes and sausage. And, I did not have to sit at the table until I was finished. If I was in an especially wiggly mood, my mother would simply slap some bacon or sausage on a biscuit and hand it to me as I ran out the door. Most mornings, I was at Donna's well before she finished, dancing around in Judy's kitchen like a crazed monkey. Once in a while, I would get on Judy's nerves and she would send me outside to wait.

But back to the box. I suspect that a very big freezer had come in it, because there was plenty of room inside for playing. As usual, Donna got to be the wife and I had to be the husband. Donna had long blond hair and thought of herself as very dainty, and I had wild curly brown hair and was usually covered in dirt, so it kind of made sense.

We laid the box on its side so that we could use the opening like doors, pulling them closed to



These mini banana muffins are protein-packed and gluten free.



Prevent rumbling tummies with healthy hand-helds like hard boiled eggs, salami wrapped string cheese or tasty trail mix.



Hints of dill and garlic punch up the flavor in these cucumber roast beef snacks.

make our box into a little hideout. It also made it fairly dark inside, except for a small shaft of light that shot in through a small hole in one corner. We decided that we were on the run from bad guys.

## What's All The Fuss About?

In a way, we were. Two of my sisters had been arguing and, as happens on occasion, it turned into a ruckus. The last thing I remember was someone snapping a switch off the other current bush to go after the black one with. That's when I hightailed it to the box.

With the doors of our box pulled to, my sisters' yelling was reduced to a lower pitch that Donna and I pretended were the bad guys hunting us down. I had gathered up a pile of wide leaf plantain, which grew abundantly out in the orchard, and we liked to use it as money for various scenarios. I was counting out plantain leaf money and we were discussing where to hide it from

the bad guys, when suddenly the shaft of light coming from the hole in the corner of the box went dark. Distracted, I looked up to the hole, wondering what had happened to the sunlight.

All I could see was an eye. It was big and blue, with dark flecks and little patches of gold here and there. I blinked, and I saw long dark lashes swish back open. I knew without a doubt that it was a monster.

Panicked, I screamed at the top of my lungs. Donna was facing away from the hole and had no idea what I was screaming at, but she joined me anyway and together we screamed our ever-loving hearts out. All at once, I knew what I had to do. I had to get to my mother.

My mother was — as all mothers should be — my safe haven, and I knew that if I could make it to her that I would be okay. Quick as lightning, I shot to the box doors, shoved them open and ran full bore into my yard. I

was halfway to my house when I realized that someone, someone quite human, was yelling, "It's me! It's just me!"

I turned around and Donna was standing beside the box. Her sister, Terry, stood wide-eyed next to her. "It was just me," Terry said. "I was just peeking on you guys."

Two bright pink spots appeared beneath Terry's big blue eyes, and I could tell she was worried that she was going to get into some really big trouble for scaring me half to death.

Clutching my dirty little shirt to my chest, I had no intention of getting her into trouble because I was embarrassed to have acted like such a baby. In a still shaky voice I told her that it was okay. But I still needed my mother, and no one else would do. I hurried into my house and collapsed at the kitchen table. My mother poured me a little glass of milk and put a slice of banana bread in front of me while I told her of my terrifying experience.

## The Recipes

Try these filling and easy-to-carry recipes for busy youngsters. They can be easily adjusted for special diets, making them good choices for adults, too.

### Powered Up Mini Banana Muffins

Using almond and coconut flour, which may seem a bit expensive, but a little goes a long way and adds loads of protein and fiber to keep your youngster going strong. The sugar substitute is helpful in maintaining steady blood sugar levels, and pure baking soda (with no wheat based anti-caking

ingredients) means that this is also a gluten free recipe.

**1/4 cup coconut or other oil**  
**2 very ripe medium bananas, mashed**  
**1/2 cup sugar or a substitute such as Splenda brand**  
**3 eggs**  
**1 tablespoon vanilla**  
**1 cup almond flour**  
**1/2 cup coconut flour**  
**1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda**  
**1/4 cup coarsely chopped pecans, optional**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees, line two mini muffin tins with paper liners and spray them with non-stick spray. Thoroughly combine coconut oil, bananas, sugar, eggs and vanilla in a medium bowl. Add remaining ingredients and blend well. Batter will be heavy. Scoop batter into muffin tins to make 24 mini muffins. Bake 20-25 minutes, or until golden (the nut flours makes these muffins take a bit longer to bake).

Note: I store these in the fridge, but you may not need to because they are usually gobbled up pretty quickly. Makes 24 mini-muffins, or use a 5x7 loaf pan and bake for 35-40 minutes. Cool before cutting.

### Cucumber-Roast Beef Snacks

These little breadless sandwiches are a scrumptious alternative to sweets for kids, but pretty enough for grown-up party platters, too.

**1 large English cucumber**  
**1/2 lb. thinly sliced roast beef**  
**1 8-oz. package cream cheese, softened**  
**1/2 teaspoon dried dill**  
**1/2 teaspoon garlic salt**

Peel the cucumber and slice into 1/4-inch rounds. Cut the slices of roast beef into halves or quarters, depending on their size and how much you want to use for each snack. Combine the softened cream cheese with the dill and garlic salt. Place a small amount of the cream cheese mixture on one side of each cucumber slice. On half of the slices, place some of the roast beef, then top with the other half of the cucumber slices. The number of servings varies, but you should get enough cream cheese spread for at least a dozen snacks.

Tip: For adults or kids who like a little kick for their palates, try adding a bit of grated horseradish to the cream cheese mixture.

### Quick Handhelds

These grab-and-eat snacks are perfect portables for on-the-go little ones:

- Roll thinly sliced ham or salami around string cheese.
- Make your own trail mix of nuts and or dried fruits. Throw in a few chocolate chips for sweetness.
- Dip dried banana chips in dark chocolate.
- Hard boiled eggs are a great portable breakfast.