

# GUIDE TO COOKING WITH KIDS



COOKING WITH KIDS CAN BE AN EXCITING AND REWARDING EXPERIENCE. HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR PLANNING SUCCESSFUL KIDS COOKING ACTIVITIES, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON COOKING FOODS FRESH FROM THE GARDEN!

*Eat food, mostly plants, not too much - Michael Pollan*

**GOALS OF COOKING:** nutrition education, a willingness to try new foods, a sense of seasonality, and basic competence in the kitchen

## Things to teach & learn:

- how to read a recipe
- how to measure
- how to use tools safely
- how to practice good hygiene
- how to try new foods with an open mind
- how to wash dishes joyfully
- how to offer an honest review without being impolite
- how to eat politely as a group
- how to cook with things that you can grow
- nutrition basics

## Location

Cooking can be done in various locations including the classroom, a school kitchen or outdoors. Where ever you choose to do your cooking, be sure that the space is large enough to accommodate the number of kids who will be cooking. Clear off and clean work surfaces or put down a clean table cloth.

If using chairs, ensure that they are sturdy and high enough for kids to work comfortably and safely.

Identify the nearest electrical outlet and water source if needed. Ensure that the cords of any electrical appliances are not a hazard for tripping. Similarly, hot plates and skilletts should be located where they will not easily be bumped, and all electrical appliances should be away from water.

## Materials

Always make sure that you have all the ingredients for the recipe and enough cooking tools for the number of students who will be cooking. You will also want to be sure to have plenty of clean towels available for any spills or mess, a container for compost, and dishes and utensils for eating.

We have the following available for use: cutting boards, knives, graters & peelers, a camp stove (summer), griddles (school year), a solar oven, and a cooler.

If cooking outdoors or somewhere without access to a sink, bring 3 basins, soap, bleach, a sponge and a drying rack for setting up a dishwashing station (see "Clean Up" for more details).

## ***Choosing a Recipe***

When choosing a recipe, the most important thing to consider is if the necessary tasks are age and experience appropriate. For example, kindergarteners do not have the motor skills to do fine chopping with knives, so choose recipes that involve more tactile jobs such as washing vegetables, tearing lettuce, or spinning greens in a salad spinner (ex. kale chips).

Other factors to consider when choosing a recipe include:

- Does the recipe connect with children’s interests or classroom projects?
- Does the recipe promote healthy food choices?
- Does the recipe feature seasonal and local products children can find in the school garden or on a local farm?
- Is the recipe affordable, and does it use ingredients many families are likely to have at home?
- Is this a recipe you are familiar with and excited about cooking?

Students will often be excited about a recipe and want to share it with their families. It’s a good idea to have copies printed out for students to take home.

## ***Group Management***

Consider the following formats:

**Tastings:** students taste fruits or vegetables from the garden. Samples may be tasted directly from the garden plant (ex. lettuce) or cut up and distributed (ex. cucumber).

**Food Preparation Demonstrations:** students watch and assist while you cook. This format is good for demonstrating tasks that may be beyond the capabilities of young students or if time is short. Engage the group by having them read the recipe, identify ingredients, help with measuring or stirring as appropriate, and taste samples.

**Hands-on cooking:** students cook with the assistance of adults. This format gives kids the most hands-on experience but can also be the most challenging to manage. Strategies for success include:

- **Working in small groups with appropriate adult supervision.** Children spinning lettuce in a salad spinner can work fairly independently while those with knives or other sharp utensils should always be under close adult supervision.
- **Dividing the cooking activity into stations.** A hands-on cooking experience can be organized to have all of the steps for a complete recipe at one station or have each station focus on one step of the recipe and have the groups come together and finish as a whole class. If adult supervision is limited, consider having fewer cooking stations and providing independent assignments or worksheets to students when it is not their turn to cook.
- **Having plenty of tasks.** If all of the cooking jobs are taken, give students jobs such as “photographer” or “journalist” and have them go around and document what other kids are doing; display the recipe on the board and have students copy it down when they are done; or, instruct students to start cleaning up as they near completion of the recipe.
- **Emphasizing that cooking is a team effort.** There are many different tasks involved in making a recipe, and everyone may not necessarily get to do their first choice job. Explain to the class that all of the jobs are equally important, and if everyone does their part then there will be delicious results that they can all share!

## ***Safety in the Kitchen***

**Food Allergies**-Before cooking with kids, check with parents, teachers or your school nurse about any allergies.

**Food Safety**- Before cooking, be sure that (1) your work surface is clean (e.g. spray it down before starting), (2) cooking utensils are clean, (3) everyone's hands have been washed with soap and water, and (4) fruits and veggies are washed thoroughly with potable water. Throughout the cooking process, discourage students from licking their fingers or utensils. In the event of an accidental finger in the mouth, have students wash their hands again before returning to work. Remember to tie back long hair. Refrigerate any cooked or cut up foods within 2 hours.

**Tool Safety**-Before beginning any cooking activity, be sure to go over safe practice of any potentially hazardous tools. Be creative with alternative tools. For instance, apple corers and scissors are great substitutes for knives.

Model and enforce these guidelines to minimize mishaps:

- There should always be a supervising adult present and focused on the tools being used
- Carry tools with the blade pointing down
- Walk, don't run, in the kitchen
- Hands on the handle, rather than the blade
- The blade should always point and move away from your body
- When sharing tools, pass and take them by the handle with the blade down
- With regards to sharp knives, we recommend:
  - Kindergarten: no knife usage
  - 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: no more than 2 knives per supervising adult
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade: at teacher's discretion

## ***Eating Etiquette***

It's worth having a conversation about polite eating as a group before beginning a cooking experience. Students are often great at brainstorming a list of polite behaviors (keep your mouth closed while chewing, remember to say please and thank you, wait until everyone has been served before eating, etc). It's also helpful to remind students that even if they don't care for a particular taste, it's polite to keep that thought to themselves since the person next to them may be less eager to try a new food if they hear words, like "ew!" or "gross!" or "I hate tomatoes!" It's worth setting the stage for a positive experience by helping students find cheerful ways to express their opinions.

## ***Encouraging Adventurous Eating***

Children are often eager to eat the food that they helped prepare, but some will express hesitancy to try new foods, or foods they think they will not like. Encourage kids to be "food explorers" and take "adventure bites." Explain that explorers need to be brave because they never know what sort of adventure they are going to have—it could be scary or fun and exciting. You can have kids imagine what a food explorer hat would look like (could be a pirate hat, cowboy hat, etc.) and put it on their head to get ready for their adventure. If kids are unwilling to taste the food, encourage them to explore the food using their other

senses (how it looks, feels, smells, etc.). You can also have kids pretend that they are food scientists who are trying to describe what their snack tastes like to an alien from Mars. Encourage them to use descriptive words such as “sweet” or “salty” rather than opinion words like “gross” or “delicious.”

## Assessment

Give kids the opportunity to share how they liked what they ate. You can:

- Have them use concrete adjectives to describe how the food tasted.
- Have them raise their hand and tally on the board if they “Loved it and would eat it again,” “Thought it was okay and might eat it again,” or “Didn’t care for it and wouldn’t choose to eat it again.”

## Clean Up

During summer (always) and during the school year (If time allows), involve students in some part of the clean up process. Tasks can include: scraping unwanted food into a compost bucket, clearing dishes and cooking materials, wiping down tables, and washing dishes.

For kid-friendly dishwashing, set up at 3 basin dishwashing station with a drying area:

- Basin 1: warm, soapy water with a sponge
- Basin 2: warm water with a capful of bleach (soak for 20 seconds)
- Basin 3: warm rinse water

It is important to have a fun, quality control adult inspector to ensure dishes are cleaned properly.

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