

From: CA Dept of Education

Teacher Tips: Cooking With Kids

Nutrition education takes on a whole new life when combined with cooking projects. Here are some tips.

When it comes to teaching children about nutrition, the most direct route may be through the stomach! Nutrition education takes on a whole new life when combined with cooking projects. Children are more willing to try new healthful foods while nutrition principles taught in the classroom become more relevant (and tasty too). Best of all, cooking in school can be a whole lot of fun!

Why Cook With Kids?

As children become more self-reliant at an earlier age, a "teachable moment" exists for strengthening food-related life skills. Children are increasingly the caretakers of their own nutrition. In one survey, 87 percent of the fourth through eighth graders sampled said that they cook or make some of their own meals. Eighty-three percent said they sometimes prepare their own snacks and eight out of ten sometimes cook or make their own breakfast. Children who don't know how to cook often rely on packaged foods of questionable nutritional quality. With the advent of ultra-convenience foods, some food experts worry that we are raising a generation of non-cooks, skilled only in using the microwave to heat ready-prepared food.

For this growing number of youngsters, nutrition education can really work when concepts are practical and applied, emphasizing skills like sanitation, safe food handling, and basic food preparation skills. Cooking projects give children a boost in confidence, exposure to new and/or healthful foods, and often provide the curiosity and motivation needed to continue cooking at home.

Organizing Cooking Projects

One way to efficiently run a classroom-cooking project is to organize an assembly line. Using a long table or salad bar, line up the ingredients for such items as rolled burritos, stuffed pita sandwiches or fresh fruit kebabs. If you utilize this method, make sure there is at least one adult at the beginning and end of the line. Just before starting through the line, students should put on clean plastic gloves.

For cooking projects that require heating or baking, line large baking trays with parchment paper. Ask students to place finished items on the tray and lightly pencil their initials on the paper below the food. Allow plenty of room between food items.

In situations where students will prepare food at their desk, assign three or four adult volunteers and/or students to hand out food and utensils. Those passing out supplies should practice good hygiene and always wear clean plastic gloves (see sanitation guidelines below).

Regardless of the type of activity or location, managing cooking projects with a classroom of children requires more than one adult. Solicit the assistance of a teacher aide or parent volunteer(s).

Keeping it Clean and Safe

Cooking lessons offer an opportunity for children to learn the importance of safe food handling. Be sure to reinforce the following points with staff, parent volunteers, and students.

Proper Hand Washing is Vital!

- Demonstrate to students the techniques for proper hand washing. Thoroughly scrub all surfaces of the hands and nails with soap, rinse with warm water, and dry with clean paper towels.
- The factor most important in producing clean hands is time. Encourage students to scrub hands for the duration of the "A-B-C song" (about 30 seconds).
- If the restroom is used for hand washing prior to handling food, prop the door open. Otherwise, students will touch the bacteria-covered doorknob on their way out.
- Remind students to wash hands after using the restroom, touching their face, hair, or neighbor, blowing their nose or sneezing, and after handling raw meat, chicken, eggs, or fish.

Provide a Sanitary Work Surface for Handling Food

- Desks or tables should be cleared, cleaned, and covered with clean butcher paper or a vinyl placemat or tablecloth.
- Wash and sanitize all work surfaces, cutting boards, and utensils after they have come into contact with raw meat, fish, poultry, or eggs.

Emphasize Safety with Knives and Equipment

- Before allowing children to begin work on food projects, demonstrate the proper use of knives and equipment. Advise students to always cut towards their table or desk and away from their hands.
- Any equipment, even plastic serrated knives, toothpicks, or wooden skewers, can be dangerous if handled improperly. Promptly remove students who are behaving in a reckless manner with tools or equipment.
- Always wear potholders when handling hot items. Allow trays and pans to cool before passing out food to students.

Safe Food Handling

- Time your projects so that foods do not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. The "danger zone" for rapid bacterial growth is between 40-140 degrees Fahrenheit, i.e. room temperature. Pick up foods from the kitchen right before you begin the project and return leftovers upon completion. Do not allow students to "save" perishable foods to eat later in the day.
- Don't sample food products prepared with raw eggs. Even one tasty spoonful of cookie batter could harbor dangerous bacteria. Recipes that call for raw eggs, such as eggnog or homemade ice milk, should use an egg substitute that has been pasteurized.

There are a few things to remember when cooking and preparing food with students in the garden:

Rules & Expectations

It is very important to set clear and consistent rules and expectations in the outdoor classroom from the start. It is a privilege to be in the garden and those students who cannot handle being there will be sent inside.

Encourage your students to come up with a set of rules for being in the garden. Write them together and display them in a prominent place.

Establish a visual tool or rubric to track behavior in the garden. Set the expectation that student behavior will be monitored using this rubric in the garden. Create a reward system for good behavior.

Assign small groups in advance and explain the flow of the class beforehand so students know where they are expected to be, and doing what activity, at the beginning, middle, and end of class.

Over time, build a culture around the opening circle, cooking and worksheet stations, and closing circle rituals. Student ownership over the whole process will allow the class to cook in the garden more frequently and to go deeper into the lessons.



Highlight harvest areas with signs.



An opening circle helps set the tone and expectations for a cooking day.

Advanced Preparation

It goes without saying that cooking in the garden with students requires prior planning and set-up. A few things to keep in mind:

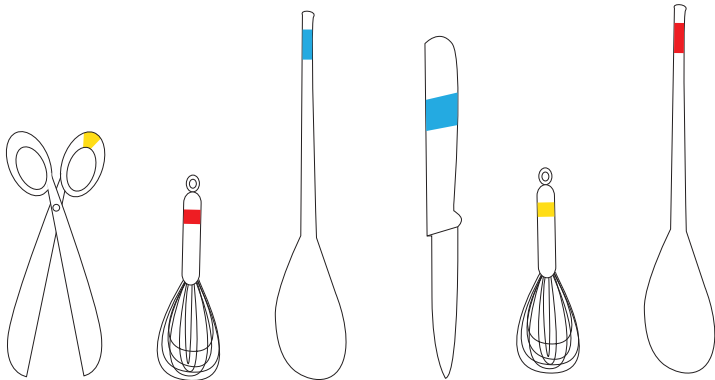
- Have another adult in the garden if possible; parent volunteers are great.
- Set up cooking and worksheet stations with necessary equipment and supplies.
- Set up a washing station, which can be as simple as a bucket of soapy water, ready for forks or other reusable utensils.
- Set up waste bins (compost, trash, and recycling as needed).
- Locate and highlight harvesting areas with signs.

Knife Skills & Management

This is your opportunity to teach students how to properly and responsibly use knives. Don't be afraid!

Have only one station where students will be using knives. Introduce your students to this station and discuss and model how to properly and safely use a knife. Here are some essential tips:

- A knife must never leave the table.
- If a student must walk with a knife, always hold the knife with the tip pointing to the ground with a straight arm held flush against the body.
- If a student needs to pass a knife, it should be offered handle-first.
- Knives should be cleaned by wiping with a wet cloth at the table, and should never be deposited into any buckets of soapy water for dishes and utensils.
- Knives, when not in use, must have their covers on.
- Use color-coded tools to your advantage. Assign each student or group of students a color for knives and other tools so at the end of class you can see who has cleaned and put things away properly. (Colored electrical tape wrapped around a handle is great for this, if all knives look the same.)



Color-coding your utensils can help you keep track of your tools during cooking day.

Back-Pocket Activities

It is important to train all of your students, throughout their experiences in the garden, how to do certain essential garden tasks. These “back-pocket” assignments will allow students to engage with the garden, unsupervised, when they have finished the main lesson or activity.

Some essential tasks include watering, weeding, collecting pests (such as snails and slugs), and harvesting (in designated “harvest anytime” areas). When cooking with students, a flexible recipe is a great gift, as it allows for seasonal, last-minute additions from the garden if there is free time before sitting down to eat. Create a clean-up checklist so students who finish tasks first can find another job quickly.

Back-Pocket Activities for Students

- Garden Scavenger Hunt
- Journaling
- Watering
- Weeding
- Picking up Trash on the Schoolyard
- Mapping the Garden
- Observing Habitats
- Digging in a Designated Area
- Sketching
- Flower Bouquets

Harvesting and preparing the crops for the feast are daunting steps to accomplish before taking the first bite. Strategic planning and preparation, good clear instruction, and trust in your students can make all of this remarkably easy and fun. Have your systems set up, teach your students rituals, and stick to them.



Classroom Management Tips for Cooking with Students in the Garden

There are a few things to remember when cooking and preparing food with students in the garden:

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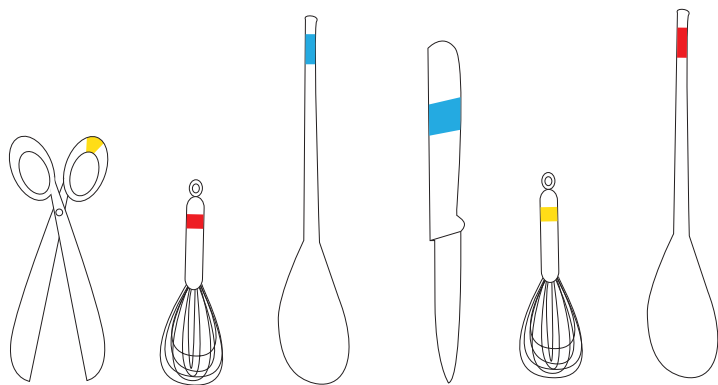
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