

# Tips for Cooking with Kids

*(Adapted from an original document created by Life Lab, the Resource Conservation District of San Diego, and UC Davis for the California School Garden Training Program)*

## Enjoying Food with Students

Enjoying a fresh harvest is one of the best parts of gardening with students. Teachers and researchers have noticed that students who have helped grow, harvest, and prepare fruits or vegetables are more likely to try them, like them, and want to eat them again.

At Life Lab, we do not require students to try new foods. Rather, we let students know that we hope they will try new things, and offer them suggestions for polite things to say if they would prefer not to finish, such as, "Thank you, but it turns out this is not my favorite." On the farm, we sometimes tell students that if they take a bite of something and don't care for it, they can spit it out onto the soil, where it will decompose and help new plants grow. Many students, when given this freedom, feel less apprehensive about trying new fruits and vegetables.

Don't be discouraged if students don't try something the first, or even third, time it is offered. Some students may need to see a food several times before they accept it enough to try it; and they may need to try it a few times before they come to like it. Keep offering fresh snacks from the garden, and make sure the students see you enjoying the snacks yourself!

## Checklist of Cooking Supplies

The following is a list of basic supplies for cooking in the classroom or in the garden. Quantities are geared for one group of 12 to be cooking at a time. For larger classes, we suggest rotating students through stations so that you are cooking in groups of 12 or fewer. Some schools keep their cooking supplies on a rolling utility cart. This allows them to be shared among classes, put away easily, or even rolled outside for an outdoor cooking project. Many of the supplies below can be bought inexpensively at second-hand stores or donated by parents.

|                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 12 cutting boards, thin plastic | 2 baking sheets         |
| 12 round-tipped steak knives    | 2 9"x13" baking pans    |
| 1 stove or hot plate            | 5 mixing bowls          |
| 1 small pot with lid            | 1 colander              |
| 1 large pot with lid            | 2 cheese graters        |
| 2 large skillets                | 5 liquid measuring cups |
|                                 | 5 sets of dry measuring |

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 5 cups                     | 1 bottle of dishwashing soap            |
| 5 sets of measuring spoons | 5 sponges with scrubbing side           |
| 5 wooden spoons            | 3 large dish tubs                       |
| 5 spatulas                 | 2 large dish-drying racks               |
| 1 steamer basket           | 5 kitchen towels                        |
| 5 vegetable peelers        | 1 blender                               |
| 5 whisks                   | 1 hand mixer                            |
| 1 can opener               | 1 first aid kit                         |
| 2 manual citrus juicers    | Optional: 1 slow cooker                 |
| 1 ladle                    | Optional: 1 solar cooker/<br>solar oven |
| 4 potholders               |   |
| 2 rolling pins             |   |
| 1 salad spinner            |   |

## Food Safety

Safety concerns should always be foremost in your mind when cooking with students. Be informed about any food allergies in your class, as well as your district's policies on food and health. Establish hand-washing routines and safety rules with your class.

## Washing Hands

All participants in cooking activities should wash their hands before cooking, after taking a break from cooking, after touching their faces, sneezing, or coughing, and before drying or putting away dishes. Teach students to wash with warm water and soap for 20 seconds, then dry their hands with a clean cloth or paper towel. Demonstrate for students coughing into your elbow, or "scratching" an itchy nose with your upper arm.

## Safe Food Handling

- ☼ Cover all cuts on hands with bandages or gloves while cooking.
- ☼ Tie long hair back during cooking.
- ☼ Consider providing potentially contagious students with an alternate activity to prevent them from sharing their germs.
- ☼ Wash the sink with hot soapy water before and after washing fresh produce.
- ☼ Wash produce under running water just before preparing or eating.
- ☼ Wash cutting boards before and after food

preparation. If you have access to a dishwasher, use it to clean and sanitize cutting boards. If not, rinse them in a weak bleach solution (see above). Use separate cutting boards for produce and meat products. Do not place cooked foods on the same surface that was used to prepare the foods when raw; this is especially important for meat.

- ☛ Designate one person to serve each dish (for example, one person is in charge of ladling soup into bowls) rather than allowing every person to touch the same serving utensil.
- ☛ Keep hot foods hot if serving over an extended period of time.
- ☛ Store all cut vegetables or fruits and prepared foods in the refrigerator.

### Basic Knife Safety Rules

Consult your school's policy on knife use before introducing knives in the classroom. Make a poster of simple knife use rules, and discuss knife safety every time knives are used.

- ☛ **Elbow Room:** Make sure you have plenty of space before starting to use a knife (some teachers advocate spacing students more than an arm's reach apart).
- ☛ **Eyes on the Task:** Watch what you are doing while using a knife. If you need to look up, stop cutting for a moment.
- ☛ **Claw & Saw:** The hand holding the food should be in a claw shape, with fingers curved and the thumb behind the fingers. The cutting hand "saws" with the knife well away from the fingers. Alternatively, the non-cutting hand can be placed on top of the hand with the knife.
- ☛ **Low & Slow:** Take your time when cutting, and keep your knife at the cutting board, not waving through the air.
- ☛ **Cut Away From Yourself:** Cut away from your body, not toward your body. Keep the knife tip facing the center of the table, and the blade facing down toward the cutting board.
- ☛ **Knives in the Basket:** When you are done with your knife, place it in the knife basket in the center of the table. Never walk away with your knife, and never place knives in a sink or dish tub full of water; someone washing dishes could accidentally take hold of a knife and get hurt.
- ☛ **Hand It Over Carefully:** If you need to hand someone a knife, offer the handle and point the blade toward the floor, so he or she doesn't accidentally grab the blade.

If your students will be cutting round, hard things like beets or carrots, have an adult cut the items in half so that they have a flat surface that can be placed down

on the cutting board, and won't roll around while the students are cutting. For younger students, boiling or steaming vegetables first makes them easier to cut.

When selecting knives for use with students, consider age level and the tasks at hand. Round-tipped steak knives are great for older elementary students, and work well for most vegetables. The serrated edge works well with a "sawing" motion. For younger students cutting soft foods, we recommend using nylon knives or crinkle cutters.

### Strategies for Cooking with Students Successfully

Cooking with students requires thorough preparation and a plan for organizing the activity so that everyone has a task. Make sure you have all ingredients and needed equipment, including enough copies of the recipe; and figure out how you will divide up the tasks in the recipe so that every student can take an active role.

### Getting Organized

There are several ways to organize a cooking activity with students.

- ☛ **Small Groups** – Divide the students into small groups and have each group prepare the same recipe. Each group has everything—all the ingredients and equipment to make the recipe.
- ☛ **Large Group** – Divide into small groups and have each group harvest and prepare a different part of the same recipe; then combine the ingredients.
- ☛ **Cooking Show** – Imitate a cooking show, with the teacher at the front of the class doing the bulk of the cooking, but inviting students to the front to help with certain tasks. This method is less participatory, but can be fun and appropriate for certain recipes.
- ☛ **Production Line** – Use an assembly-line approach. The ingredients are lined up in one location, and students travel down the line adding each item to their plates or bowls. This is useful for simple recipes such as trail mix or salads. It is helpful to have instructions at each item such as "Take one spoonful."

When planning to cook in small groups, some teachers place all supplies and ingredients on one central table, so that one student from each group can get each item as needed and then put it back for other groups to use. Other teachers prefer to give each group a tray loaded with everything they need. Give each group a large-print copy of the recipe they will be using, so that the whole group can read it together. Laminating these copies will make it easy to reuse them.

It is ideal, when cooking in small groups, to have one adult per group of up to 10 students. To achieve this student-to-adult ratio, you may invite parent volunteers to

lead the lesson with small groups simultaneously, or you might engage your class in an independent learning activity while you do the lesson with one small group at a time.

Prepare the cooking area ahead of time, so that when students arrive, they can simply wash their hands, watch a demonstration of how to do the specific tasks in the recipes, and then split into groups and complete the tasks. Depending on your students' grade level and abilities, you may assign each student specific tasks, or you may allow them to choose their own tasks within their small groups.

When deciding how to break a recipe into individual tasks, remember that students will be more concerned with having jobs to do than with efficiency. So, for example, if a recipe calls for 2 ½ cups of flour, and your students are working in groups of five, passing the bag of flour and asking each student to add ½ cup of flour often works better than having one student measure all the flour. Rotating the task of stirring is also helpful.

### Modeling Cooking Skills

Demonstrate good cooking skills for your students, and ask classroom volunteers to do the same. When beginning a recipe with students, ask students to read through the recipe out loud, to check that they have all the necessary ingredients and supplies assembled and to make sure that they understand all the steps of the recipe.

Before allowing students to chop a vegetable, for example, demonstrate the task yourself. After you have modeled a task, such as chopping carrots into half-rounds or slicing a bell pepper into 2-inch strips, leave your sample out. Students can then look back at the example on the cutting board to remember what the final product should look like. Similarly, demonstrate how to measure, grate, juice, or perform any other task in the recipe.

If you will be cooking a recipe that would benefit from students' tasting it to adjust seasonings, model a way to taste without sharing germs. Use a clean spoon, take a small amount of food, exaggerate blowing on it and checking the temperature, taste, and then deposit the spoon in the dish tub (with an enthusiastic "Mmm!" or "Needs a bit more salt!").

### Age-Appropriate Cooking Tasks

Kids love to help prepare food. In addition, the more involved they are in harvesting and preparing healthy foods, the more likely they are to eat them. Of course, the ways kids can be involved will depend on their dexterity, their ability to follow directions, and their age and

experience.

The following is a list of age-appropriate food preparation tasks brainstormed by teachers attending Life Lab workshops. These are all recommended for supervised groups of 12 or fewer children at a time.

#### Grades K-2

- ✿ cracking eggs
- ✿ crumbling
- ✿ cutting soft items (with scissors; crinkle cutters; or nylon knives. you can parboil carrots and other hard veggies to make them softer)
- ✿ grinding
- ✿ juicing
- ✿ kneading
- ✿ mashing
- ✿ measuring (you can pre-measure and then have each child measure part, knowing that the entire amount will eventually get mixed in)
- ✿ picking off stems
- ✿ presentation (e.g., decorating with flowers)
- ✿ pushing buttons (on a blender, for example)
- ✿ rolling/Wrapping
- ✿ scooping
- ✿ spinning salad
- ✿ spreading
- ✿ sprinkling
- ✿ squeezing
- ✿ stirring
- ✿ tearing leaves, etc.
- ✿ using an apple peeler
- ✿ using a food mill
- ✿ using a mortar and pestle
- ✿ washing (you can give each child 1-2 leaves)

#### Grades 3-6

- ✿ blending
- ✿ chopping, slicing, dicing, and mincing with round-tipped steak knives
- ✿ collecting compost
- ✿ doubling or tripling recipes
- ✿ grating
- ✿ reading recipes
- ✿ sautéing
- ✿ seasoning
- ✿ washing

## Grades 7-12

With appropriate supervision and instruction, children in this age group are generally capable of just about any task described in a recipe. Cooking with this age group also provides us with excellent opportunities to teach or reinforce their math skills, such as adding or multiplying fractions or graphing food waste over time. For ongoing cooking instruction, children this age can start to improvise in the kitchen or use their own ideas to improve upon recipes.

### Serving

Once the recipe is prepared, we recommend cleaning the entire cooking area first. In many cooking activities, this can be done while the meal is on the stove or in the oven. Then, once the entire area is clean, make sure that students

are seated before serving the food. Give them a few minutes to enjoy what they have made before guiding students into further discussions. Allow students a chance to share what they liked, and what they might do differently if they made the meal next time. Then conclude with any relevant discussion topics, such as where the ingredients came from.

### Cleaning Up

Use a set of laminated “Cleanup Cards” that students pull from a hat to assign and guide them in clean up tasks. *See next page for printable Cleanup Cards.* You may need to adapt these cards to fit the specific clean up needs of your food preparation area.

### *Dish Washer*

Scrub all dishes with soap  
and warm water

### *Counter Cleaner*

Bring dirty dishes to sink  
and clean counter

### *Dish Rinser*

Rinse soap off dishes

### *Store Food, Compost, Recycle, Garbage*

Put leftover food in refrigerator, food  
scraps in compost bin, and recycle or  
throw away any remaining garbage

### *Dish Dryer*

Dry each dish with a clean dish towel

### *Supply Organizer*

Put away aprons, cooking equipment,  
unused ingredients, stools, etc.

### *Dish Organizer*

Put away dry dishes

### *Sweeper*

Sweep the floor