



Classroom Cooking with Kids

Guides

Adapted From: Vermont Harvest of the Month (vermontharvestofthemonth.org)

Why Cook with Kids?

Cooking with kids in the classroom is rewarding, and it is an excellent way to build both practical and social skills. It's fun and can easily be integrated across all academic disciplines. Cooking in the classroom can extend the "food learning season" into the winter months, provide valuable hands-on learning experiences, and can be a wonderful class bonding exercise. So, we would ask, why not cook in the classroom?

Helpful Resources

Guides

- Montana Harvest of the Month Taste Test Guide, Montana Harvest of the Month
- Montana Harvest of the Month Cooking Cart Guide, Montana Harvest of the Month
- Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools, Center for Ecoliteracy
- Food is Elementary: A Hands-on Curriculum for Young Students, Antonia Demas, Ph.D., Food Studies Institute
- Fresh, Healthy and Safe Food: Best Practices for Using Produce from School Gardens, Vermont FEED
- How to Teach Nutrition to Kids, Connie Liakos Evers, MS, RD
- How to Teach Cooking to Kids, Julie Negrin, MS, CN
- Nourishing Choices: Implementing Food Education in Classrooms, Cafeterias, and Schoolyards, Eve Pranis

Cookbooks

Dig Deeper

Get more information, register, or download resources:

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- Honest Pretzels, Mollie Katzen
- Pretend Soup & Other Real Recipes, Mollie Katzen
- Salad People, Mollie Katzen
- Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes, Felicity Dahl
- Kids' Fun and Healthy Cookbook, Nicola Graimes

Classroom Management Tips for Cooking with Kids

Ultimately, you know your students best. A healthy dose of common sense and a pinch of patience will go a long way! Here are helpful tips to keep in mind when working with your student chefs:

1. **Practice good hygiene.** Wash hands with soap and warm water before touching any food or utensils. Gloves are not required if the food you are preparing will ultimately be cooked, but they are recommended if the food will be served raw. Encourage arm sneezing, and stress the importance of not touching your face, hair, etc. once hands are clean.
2. **Set up beforehand.** Prepare work stations ahead of time with ingredients and proper tools. Students can be involved with the set-up, especially if given specific tasks.
3. **Work in small groups.** Cooking with children is most successful when they can work in small groups of no more than 4-5, ideally with one adult per group. Younger children benefit from even smaller groups. Increase the adult-child ratio by involving parent volunteers in classroom cooking activities.
4. **Have a job for everyone.** Include every student in the cooking process by assigning everyone a job. This may mean giving each student a small task or even making up additional jobs. Tasks can include reading the recipe aloud, checking to be sure you have included all the ingredients, washing produce or dishes, drying dishes, measuring, stirring, or helping another student. Every job is important! Create a job list for the group to split up in advance can be helpful.
5. **Knife safety and handling.** Kids can cut too, as long as you give them a safe and appropriate knife for the task. As an introduction to knife use, you can use plastic disposable knives, plastic knives from a kids' set, or a butter or dinner knife with a less-than sharp serrated edge and a rounded point. Herbs, peeled fruit, and soft vegetables like zucchini, cucumbers, and tomatoes work well with these kid-friendly knives. Sometimes a sharper or larger knife is a more appropriate tool for a cutting job and, with proper use, can be a safer option than trying to cut something with an inadequate tool. Use your discretion in gauging the readiness of your students for using more professional cutting tools and always monitor use closely.

Be careful with knives and other sharp tools such as graters and peelers. Instill the importance and responsibility that comes with handling knives and kitchen equipment. Teach children the

proper ways to hold, wash, carry, and store these tools. Most children take this responsibility very seriously.

Demonstrate before you ask the students to do any cutting task. Place a wet paper towel under your cutting board to prevent it from slipping around on the table. Use a claw-like grip (with fingers curled slightly under) to hold the food steady on the cutting board - the knuckles act as a bumper and fingertips are kept away from the knife blade. Before cutting rounded objects, such as potatoes, carrots, or zucchini, give the food a flat edge so that it does not roll around on the cutting board. Do this by cutting a small slice from one side of the food so that it can lie flat on your work surface. Make sure that tools stay with the cutting board.

6. **Read the recipe aloud.** Ask a child to read each instruction aloud as you prepare the food. Kids will get a sense of taking turns and sequencing from following directions in order. This also helps to pace the process so that you can focus on one job at a time and avoid multiple distractions.
7. **Make cleaning part of the routine.** Cleaning up is an important part of the cooking process and kids may love using a mop or dustpan as much as they love the food preparation. But save cleaning until the cake is in the oven!
8. **Taste!** Have the students taste the food they are preparing.* Encourage the practice of trying new things, but never force anyone to eat something against their will. Try offering the option of a “No, thank you” bite if someone is hesitant to taste the food. Also keep cleanliness in mind when tasting the food – use clean tasting utensils to prevent contamination.

*See “Montana Harvest of the Month Taste Test Guide; Montana Harvest of the Month” for more tips on successful taste testing.