



Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Getting Started: Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Guide





Chapter 3: Exploring Cooking and Tasting with Young Children

Introduction: Cooking and Tasting with Children

Hands-on cooking activities are engaging, sensory learning experiences that motivate young children to try new foods. These activities could include washing produce, preparing produce (like tearing leafy greens or using other manual tools without blades), measuring ingredients, or mixing ingredients for dressings. Children can also participate in arranging and serving foods before taste testing.

Tasting new foods can be exciting and sometimes challenging! Take time for children to be a part of the preparation, to ask questions, to explore, and they'll be ready for new tastes!

Research shows that cooking with young children supports their physical, social, and emotional development.



Physical Development and Motor Skills

Children develop both gross and fine motor skills through meaningful cooking tasks.



Social and Emotional Development

Children work cooperatively with others to complete multiple steps.



Approaches to Play and Learning

Through exploring and asking questions, children build interest and curiosity about the food they eat.



Communication, Language and Literacy

New vocabulary is developed through unique and meaningful real-world experiences.

The kitchen classroom provides a real-world context for exploring math, science, social studies, and art ideas.



Math

Mathematic concepts of number and measurement have essential meaning while cooking.



Science

Children build knowledge related to motion and matter.



Social Studies

Through cooking, children build a connection to their greater community.



Creative Development

The preparing and sharing of food is a familiar story for dramatic play.

The following overview will get you started!

Finally, safety is the most important thing to consider with young children. Please review the "Tips for Safety while Cooking and Tasting" before getting started.

Hands-on Cooking for Young Children

“Cooking” with young children is often focused on the preparation of raw, seasonal fruits or vegetables. Children can wash produce, make bite-sized pieces, combine ingredients, and arrange the dish to be served. The snacks could be salads, skewers, boats, or roll-ups. Children can also participate in measuring and mixing ingredients for a dip or dressing.

Cooking tasks for young children include:

ZERO TO ONE YEAR OLDS	TWO YEAR OLDS	THREE YEAR OLDS	FOUR AND FIVE YEAR OLDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe, engage, and connect with adults and older children as they prepare foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry vegetables Gently wash leafy vegetables Tear leafy greens Arrange vegetables on dish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrub root vegetables with brush Pour liquids Use a whisk to stir liquids Shake a closed jar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Squeeze citrus Slice herbs with scissors Measure liquids Serve food

What will we need?

For basic recipes with young children, like the ones provided on the next page, not many tools are needed. Here is an example list to get started:

For washing:

- Colander
- Unused toothbrushes

For cutting:

- Cutting boards
- Scissors
- Nylon knife (for teacher)

For dressings:

- Measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Jar with lid
- Whisk
- Blender

For serving:

- Platter
- Napkin

What will we cook?

Start with what is seasonal! Seasonal produce is less expensive and when it’s purchased from local farms, it is as fresh as possible – making it taste better and more nutritious.

Cool Weather Crops:

- Leafy greens
- Radishes
- Carrots
- Broccoli
- Turnips

Warm Weather Crops:

- Tomatoes
- Bell peppers
- Cucumbers
- Okra
- Corn



How will we cook?

Explore the Ingredients

- How would you describe what this vegetable looks like to someone that has never seen it before? What color is it? What does it feel like? What does it smell like?
- Where do you think the food came from? How did it grow? What did it need to grow? Who grew it? How did it get to our school?
- Do you think you’ve ever seen this vegetable before? Here at school, in the garden, at home, at a grocery store, at a restaurant? What does it remind you of?

Cook Step-by-Step

- Watch the teacher show you the task.
- Practice the task while your teacher helps.
- Finish all by yourself!

Recipes for Young Children

Children in early care can participate in the preparation of many snacks - particularly those that involve washing, preparing, arranging raw produce and making a dip or dressing.

Easy Recipes for Young Children

Here are some examples for easy recipes that feature local foods. See notes to incorporate these recipes into your CACFP meal pattern.

Minty Melon Salad

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Yield: 6 cups

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon honey*
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 6 cups cut melon cubes (watermelon, honey dew, cantelope)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh mint

Directions:

Stir honey and lemon juice together in a large bowl. Add melon and mint and stir to coat.

CACFP Crediting Information: Serve ½ cup of Minty Melon Salad with 1 oz of Brown Rice Crackers

Tomato Basil Corn Salad

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Yield: 3-4 cups of salad

Ingredients:

- 6 ears of corn, shucked
- 3 large tomatoes diced (or 1 pint grape tomatoes, cut in half)
- 1/2 cup small-diced red onion (or 1 small onion)
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup julienned fresh basil leaves

Directions:

Cut the kernels off the cob, cutting close to the cob. Toss the kernels in a large bowl with the red onions, vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Just before serving, toss in the fresh basil. Allow to marinate for 20 minutes for the best flavor. Can be made and refrigerated overnight.

CACFP Crediting Information: Serve ½ cup of Tomato Basil Corn Salad with ½ oz of Mozzarella cheese



Here are some general ideas - be creative!

Dips and Dippers

Children can help with mixing a dip or dressing and may be able to cut the veggie dippers or break bread into dipping-sized pieces.

Salads

Children can help with mixing a dressing and assist with tearing leafy greens for a salad. They may be able to cut the other veggies into bite-sized pieces as well. Salads can be themed with ingredients that represent every color of the rainbow or every part of the plant.

Boats

Instead of eating veggies and a dressing from a bowl, it can be eaten from an edible “boat” like a halved bell pepper or a halved and hollowed out cucumber or summer squash.

Wraps and Roll-ups

Veggies and dressing can also be folded or rolled up into a lettuce leaf or tortilla like a taco or burrito.

Skewers

Add different fruits to make a pattern.

*Honey should not be served to children under the age of one.

Kale with Raspberry Vinaigrette

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Yield: 6 cups of salad

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons raspberry jam
1/4 cup rice vinegar or apple cider vinegar
1/3 cup olive oil
Salt and black pepper to taste
2 large bunches of kale, stemmed and torn

Directions:

1. Vigorously whisk together the raspberry jam, vinegar, and olive oil until thoroughly combined; season with salt and black pepper.
2. Rinse torn stem in a colander under running water. Pat kale dry with paper towels and transfer to a large mixing bowl.
3. Pour raspberry vinaigrette over kale, and with clean hands, massage the vinaigrette into the kale until the kale turns a deep green color (2-3 minutes).

CACFP Crediting Information for three to five

year olds (snack): 1/2 cup of kale salad + 1/2 ounce equivalent of Whole Grain crackers equals one vegetable and one grain.

Fruit Dippers with Honey Yogurt

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Yield: 2 cups of dip

Ingredients:

2 cups vanilla yogurt
1/2 cup honey*
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
Assorted fresh fruit (such as apples, bananas, pineapple and/or strawberries), cut into wedges or bite-size pieces

Directions:

Combine yogurt, honey and cinnamon in small bowl; stir to blend.

CACFP Crediting Information for three to five

year olds (snack): 1/2 ounce yogurt + 1/2 cup of fruit equals one meat/meat alternate and one fruit.

Veggie Wrap

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Yield: 10

Ingredients

2 large size avocados, pit removed
2 teaspoons fresh lime juice
Dash garlic powder
Salt and pepper to taste
1 pint grape tomatoes, cut in half
2 cups shredded carrots
10 oz baby spinach
10 taco sized whole wheat tortillas

Directions:

1. Scoop the flesh of the avocados from the skin using a spoon and place into a mixing bowl. Add lime juice, garlic powder, salt and pepper and smash the avocados with a fork until a paste is formed.
2. Arrange tortillas on a cutting board or plate and spread 1 tablespoon of avocado mixture on half of each tortilla. Top with remaining vegetables and roll up to enjoy!

CACFP Crediting Information for three

to five year olds (snack): One veggie wrap = one vegetable and one grain.



Cucumber Hummus Boats

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Yield: 24-30 3" boats

Ingredients:

2 10-oz containers of prepared hummus
6-10 cucumbers, sliced in half lengthwise, seeds scooped out with a spoon
2 pints grape or cherry tomatoes, cut in half or quartered

Directions:

Fill empty cucumber boats with hummus. Top with cut tomatoes. Cut cucumbers into 3-4" pieces per serving.

CACFP Crediting Information for three to five year

olds (snack): 1/2 cup of cucumber + 1/2 ounce of hummus** = one vegetable and one meat/meat alternate

*Honey should not be served to children under the age of one.

**Commercially prepared hummus must have a Child Nutrition label or Product Formulation Statement that specifies how to credit the hummus toward the meat/meat alternate and/or fruit/vegetable component(s) based on the serving size.

Tasting with Young Children

Tasting new foods can be exciting and sometimes challenging! To excite children around tasting new foods, involve them in as many steps as possible - from choosing what to taste (maybe something they have been growing in the garden!) to participating in preparing the dish and deciding how to serve it. The pressure of trying something new can also be relieved by offering only a sample size and celebrating the courage it took to take even the smallest bite.

Taste tests are intended to encourage adventurous eaters that grow to love the taste and texture of healthy, seasonal fruits and vegetables. They are simply an introduction to foods the children may see again soon at lunchtime, growing in the garden, or on the grocery store shelves so students can build familiarity and meaningful experiences with those foods.

How will we taste?

After the tools and tables are cleaned up and after the snack is served with all children seated, it is time to taste!

It is often preferred to lead children in tasting all together on the count of three. This gives each child the chance to taste quietly and form their own opinions before sharing them. Then, here are some steps to leading children to share what they tasted:

Share Describing Words

How would you describe the fruit or vegetable?

- Sweet, spicy, sour, bitter?
- Crunchy, soft, juicy, gooey?

Share Opinions

What did you think of the fruit or vegetable?

- "I love it!"
- "Delicious."
- "Interesting."
- "It's not my favorite."
- "I don't like it yet."
- "I may try again another time."

Collect Data

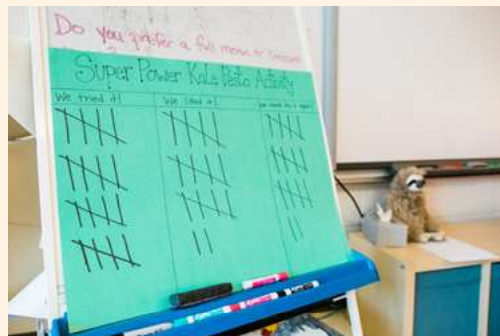
Would you try this fruit or vegetable again?

- Yes, Maybe, No



Following a taste test, data can be collected by raising hands, making a sticker chart, or drawing a bar graph or pictograph.

Beyond building knowledge of numbers and quantity in children, it is valuable feedback for the teacher, staff, and parents on the children's current taste preferences.





Tips for Behavior Management while Cooking and Tasting

Young children love working with food and tools! For many children it is empowering to choose and prepare their own foods. With the high levels of excitement, it may be necessary to monitor and refocus children's attention and energy level. Here are some tips to help children make decisions that are best for the cooking and tasting environment:

Naming the Space

When food and cooking tools are present, the classroom space or the class time can be named something that reminds children of the shift in expectations, such as the Kitchen Classroom or Tasting Time.

Gathering Together

It is important to have a gathering space near a demonstration table where, when requested, children can sit comfortably to watch and listen to instructions.

Dividing into Small Groups

Hands-on tasks are easier, safer, and more engaging for children when they are completed in small groups of five to six children. Consider other independent tasks small groups of children can be involved in while one group is engaged in a hands-on activity with the teacher. Activities may include reading books about food, drawing a picture of their favorite food, or sorting foods by attributes.

Start with a book!

Consider reading about growing and cooking food before or after each hands-on food experience. See Appendix E for a list of favorite children's books.

Tips for Safety while Cooking and Tasting

It is important for young children to be closely supervised while engaged with tools and while eating. Here are some tips to help keep children safe while they are cooking and tasting:

Preparing to Cook

Wash Hands

Wet and Lather

Wet hands using warm running water.
Lather soap up to elbows.

Rub and Scrub

Rub and scrub for 20 seconds on the backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, and under fingernails.

Rinse and Dry

Rinse under warm running water. Dry with paper towels. Turn off running water with a paper towel, not bare hands.

Clean Space and Tools

Clean, rinse, sanitize all surfaces used for food prep and eating, including the sink.

Clean, rinse, and sanitize all tools and utensils used for food prep and eating.

Wash Veggies

Wet

Wet vegetables with cold running water.

Rub or Scrub

Rub delicate vegetables gently or scrub root vegetables with a brush.

Dry

Pat vegetables dry.

Storing Food

Follow proper food safety storage guidelines for any food that is stored for any amount of time before serving or food that is leftover after serving.

Cooking

Avoid Allergens

- Review all known allergies with the school nurse and parents.
- Prepare a school protocol in case of emergencies.
- Be alert for allergic reactions including tingling or itching in mouth or slight swelling of lips or tongue.

Supervise Tool Use

Many cooking tasks for young children do not require tools but children can use small hand tools with appropriate supervision. Introduce each new hand tool to children slowly with the steps below. When heat or blades are necessary, they should not be used when children are nearby.

Divide into Small Groups

Small groups of five to six children are ideal for hands-on activities, particularly when the tasks involve using tools.

Mark Your Space

It is important for children to know boundaries for their bodies and for their tool, including where to place their tool when it is at rest. Ideally each child would be sitting in their own chair and have a cutting mat to work on.

Model the Task

With children's attention focused on the teacher, model the task that children will complete independently. Remind students that tools are designed for specific tasks and they are not to be used as toys.

Supervise Closely

Tools should be used with direct supervision of an adult at all times.

Store Appropriately

When tools are not in use, they should be stored out of reach of children.

Tasting

Eliminate choking hazards

Sit to Taste

Eating while seated prevents choking.

Try Small Bites

Each bite should be small enough for small mouths but large enough to encourage chewing to prevent choking.