

Garden to Table: Growing Food with Kids

The art of juggling multiple responsibilities in life—family, child care, work, school, extracurricular activities, meal preparation, etc.—is definitely challenging and sometimes daunting. Trying to find a good balance while maintaining quality of life is something we all desire. One challenge faced by child care providers is providing healthy, well-balanced meals



and snacks to children every day. Eating at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruits on a daily basis is recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is an encouraged practice among child care providers (1). Vegetables and fruits can be purchased at a variety of places, including grocery stores and supermarkets. A fun and fresh alternative to buying food from the store is growing food of your own at home.

Why grow vegetables and fruits at home when time is scarce and the grocery store is so convenient?

- 1) Vegetables and fruits grown at home tend to cost less compared to store-bought produce.
- 2) Growing food at home means you'll have fresh food at your fingertips ready to be incorporated into a variety of tasty meals.
- 3) Adults and children are more likely to eat vegetables and fruits when they are involved in the growing process.
- 4) Vegetables and fruits that are grown and harvested in season have the freshest taste.
- 5) Growing food with children provides great learning opportunities. The process of growing food involves learning about soil cultivation, planting seeds, nurturing the growing process, and harvesting.
- 6) Working in the garden is an excellent way to increase daily physical activity.
- 7) Excess food grown in the garden can be frozen for use later, thereby preventing waste and reducing food cost.

Get Kids Involved in Growing Food

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) recommends for children 3-5 years old to eat a half cup of vegetables and/or fruits at each meal and during snack time (2). Getting children to eat vegetables and fruits might be difficult if they are picky eaters. Even if the children are not picky eaters, they might desire less healthy food options in place of vegetables and fruits more often than not. Current research shows that only 26% of American children aged 6-11 eat the recommended amount of fruits and only 16% eat the recommended amount of vegetables. Furthermore, 1 in 5 children aged 6-11 is diagnosed as obese. Weight diseases that were once mainly diagnosed in adults are now being observed in children (3). Consuming a healthy diet that includes adequate amounts of vegetables and fruits, combined with daily physical activity, is associated with better health and lower weight status among children and adults. Incorporating vegetables and fruits early on into a child's meal pattern every day helps establish healthy eating habits that will benefit him or her for life.



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So what can be done to increase vegetable and fruit consumption among children?

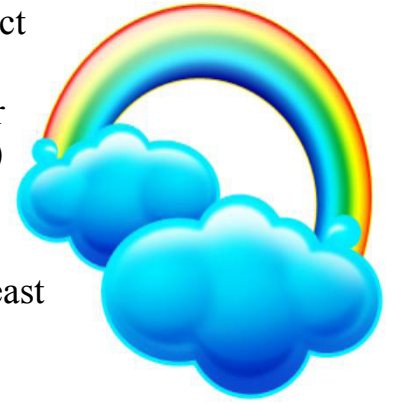
One possible solution is to get them involved with growing food that will end up on their plate. Involving children in the process of growing vegetables and fruits enables them to better understand where their food comes from, as well as helps establish a connection between themselves and food. Children are likely to develop a sense of pride and satisfaction from growing and harvesting their own food. As a result, children tend to want to eat what they grow, thereby increasing their daily intake of vegetables and fruits. Meal options featuring the

daily harvest is an exciting opportunity for children to discover how the produce they watched grow is turned into the food they will eat. In addition, taste-testing different vegetables and fruits, both fresh and cooked, will sharpen children's sensory appreciation of the food and help develop a willingness to try new tastes.



Fill Your Plate with Variety and Color!

The coined phrase, 'eat the rainbow', addresses a very important aspect of nutrition and health. Phytochemicals found in food are responsible for their color. For example, beta carotene (a carotenoid and precursor to vitamin A) found in carrots is responsible for their orange color. (4) Choose a variety of different colored foods when preparing meals to help provide children with essential vitamins and minerals needed for optimal growth and health. Make a goal with your children to eat at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruits each day. Plant colorful vegetables and fruits in your garden to contribute to your colorful plate!



Most people do not eat enough dark-green, red, and orange vegetables. They also tend to not eat enough beans and peas, which are the mature forms of legumes.

Have your children eaten any of the following vegetables this week?

Dark-Green Vegetables: sources of fiber, beta carotene, vitamin C, folate, calcium, and iron

Kale	Broccoli	Collard Greens
Arugula	Spinach	Mustard Greens
Bok Choy	Watercress	Swiss Chard
Leaf Lettuce	Beet Greens	Brussels Sprouts



Red & Orange Vegetables: sources of fiber, beta carotene, vitamin C, and potassium



Carrots	Red Beets	Butternut Squash
Tomatoes	Pumpkin	Red/orange Bell Peppers
Radishes	Red Onion	Sweet Potatoes
Rhubarb	Acorn Squash	

Beans & Peas: sources of plant-based protein, iron, zinc, folate, potassium, and fiber

Kidney Beans	Lentils	Garbanzo Beans (chickpeas)
Soy Beans	Pinto Beans	Black-eyed Peas
Green Peas	Navy Beans	Black Beans



Tips for Growing Food

Gardening is a rewarding experience that has potential to reap in nutritional, mental, and physical benefits. Before going to purchase materials for your garden, be sure to make a gardening plan. For starters, determine the amount of space available for gardening. Do you have a large plot in the backyard that could be utilized as a garden? Or would a small, medium or large planter box (on the ground or raised) be more appropriate?

Perhaps you don't have a backyard or space for a planter box. In that case, individual pots might be ideal for growing food in small places like your porch or balcony.

If your garden is to be outside, consider growing seedlings inside to give yourself a head-start on the season and avoid late frost. Seedlings usually take between 4-12 weeks to grow before being transplanted into an outdoor garden plot or planter. Not all types of vegetable/fruit seedlings (especially root vegetables) can handle being transplanted, however, so pay special attention to instructions and planting recommendations provided on each seed packet. Examples of vegetables that should not be transplanted and only direct-seeded in the garden include beans, beets, carrots, peas, spinach, turnips, and zucchini. If you are able to get an early start and grow seedlings, you'll be able to harvest ~4-6 weeks earlier compared to planting seeds directly outdoors. To get your seedlings started you'll need to purchase appropriate starting-mix soil, seeds, and seedling containers (see insert for making your own biodegradable seedling containers).

One of the main goals of every gardener is to grow food that will be eaten by themselves and others. Take time to make a list of seasonal vegetables and fruits that everyone likes (children and adults). In addition to foods known and loved by everyone, add new foods to the list for everyone to try. Involve the children in this process so that they can feel they had an important role in choosing which plants are grown while increasing their excitement in trying new foods.



Most vegetables and fruits grow during a specific season. Visit www.almanac.com for a list of plants by type, growing zones, etc. to determine which crops to plant and when. Plan your garden according to season. For example, during the summer months common crops that grow well include corn, summer squash, watermelon, and peas. Plotting your garden out on a map with the produce you plan to grow will help make sure there's enough growing space for each plant. Follow planting instructions listed on seed packets or other reputable gardening sources to prevent overcrowding in your garden bed. Not all plants grow well together, so looking into complimentary plants is advisable. In addition, plant vegetables and fruits together that have similar watering needs. Some plants need frequent, shallow watering, whereas others need deep, less frequent watering. Overall, have fun gardening and look for new ways to incorporate fresh vegetables and fruits from the garden into meals for you and your children to enjoy!

Resources:

1. United States Department of Agriculture and United States Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 (7th ed.). Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, December 2010.
2. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Child and Adult Care Food Program. (2012). Creditable foods guide for child care centers and family day care homes.
3. Ogden, C., Carroll, M., Curtin, L., Lamb, M., & Flegal, K. (2010). Prevalence of high body mass index in US children and adolescents, 2007-2008. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 303(3), 242-249.
4. European Food Information Council. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.eufic.org/article/en/show/spotlight/rid/colours-of-fruits-and-vegetables-and-health/>

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Make Your Own Biodegradable Seedling Pots!

Getting ready to start a vegetable garden? Begin by making biodegradable seedling pots with the kids. Seedling pots made from newspaper enables you to go from seed to seedling and then straight to planting in the garden without needing to transplant the seedlings. The newspaper will breakdown after being planted in the gardening bed, so no need to worry about taking the seedlings out of the paper seedling pots. The kids will love being a part of the process and will thrill at the magic of sprouting seedlings!

Number of helpers:

1+

What you'll need:

Newspaper

Scissors

Glass or cup for a mold—if possible, this should have a small concave in the base

Potting mix

Seeds of your choice

Water

Twine

Low-cut cardboard box or aluminum deep-dish baking pan



Photo courtesy of www.flickr.com

Activity:

Fold a length of newspaper in half.

Roll it around the cup at least twice, leaving about 3-5 cm to tuck into the base.

Tuck paper up into the concave base tightly. Tie twine around the outside of the cup.

Slip the paper off the cup. Make as many as you need.

Fill each paper pot with potting starter mix. Get the kids to help!

Sow seeds into the potting mix. Repeat until finished.

Store seedling pots in a low-cut cardboard box or aluminum deep-dish baking pan.

Get the kids to water regularly and keep an eye on them. Depending on the seeds, you should see some sprouts beginning to poke through the soil within 7-10 days.

Once the seeds become seedlings, let the kids plant the whole thing—newspaper pot and all— into the ground, planter box or larger pot. The newspaper pot will break down in the soil and you will have a gorgeous garden full of herbs, veggies, and/or fruit before you know it!



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