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Teach Kids to Cook Share the Work, Share the Fun

By Sheila Gains, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Arapahoe County

Children enjoy being helpers and doers. Using their hands to create something gives them a great sense of accomplishment. So, take time this summer to teach your children how to cook. The payoff might just be breakfast in bed some time in the future. Until that time comes, cooking with kids has many other rewards:

- Great conversations can happen when adults and kids are in the same room, the TV is off and hands are busy.
- Math skills are reinforced when children weigh and measure ingredients, cut foods in equal size pieces and divide portions.
- Following directions is a skill that comes in handy when cooking from a recipe or completing a school assignment.
- Fine motor skills and muscle coordination are developed as children learn to use kitchen tools. A two year old should not be assigned to chop vegetables with a sharp knife, but they can successfully cut a banana with a plastic table knife or stir.
- Children take pride in what they make, whether it is a finger painting or a peanut butter and banana sandwich. If you want kids to eat more fruits and vegetables, have them make dishes with these foods.
- Once kids learn the basics, preparing foods can be an opportunity for them to express their creativity; caterpillar celery, sailboat sandwiches, etc.



Tips for Success:

It's always a good idea to start cooking with a review of the importance of clean hands and surfaces to prevent foodborne illness.

Food Safety Tips to Keep in Mind:

1. Wash hands with soap and water, rubbing soapy hands together for 20 seconds and rinsing with warm water before and after handling food.
2. Clean counter tops, cutting board and utensils before and after preparing food.
3. Wash hands, utensils and surfaces after handling raw meat, poultry or fish and before preparing other foods.
4. Make sure perishable foods like milk, eggs and meats don't stay at room temperature for more than 2 hours, including preparation and serving time.

No two children are the same, when it comes to the cooking skills they are ready to learn. Start with simple tasks, show them how to do it, and then let them give it a try. Don't worry if something gets spilt, plan on it. Have lots of paper towels and a broom within reach and extra ingredients to measure.

Cooking activities for children at different ages.

2-3 year olds

- Rinse fruits and vegetables in cold water
- Peel bananas
- Slice soft foods with a table knife
- Stir food in a bowl
- Pour dry ingredients in a bowl
- Measure handfuls of ingredients such as raisins or nuts.

4-5 year olds

- Open packages
- Grease pans
- Use cookie cutters

- Tear lettuce
- Mash bananas and avocados
- Pour liquid ingredients in a bowl

6-8 year olds

- Shred cheese
- Measure both wet and dry ingredients with measuring cups and spoons
- Whip egg whites
- Read simple recipes
- Roll dough
- Knead dough

Let's Talk:

Make sure that your summertime cooking lessons don't feel like school or a dreaded chore. Appeal to their creative, inquisitive or competitive side with recipe ideas. Ask kids to help you come up with ideas to put more fruits and vegetables in the snacks and meals you serve. Ask everyone to come up with 3-5 recipes or ideas. If a brainstorming session doesn't yield enough ideas, check out a few kid friendly cookbooks from the local library. You can also do an internet search for ideas and recipes. Older kids might find this task a fun way to show you how well they know how to use a computer. Then put kids to work testing their recipes in the kitchen.

Recipe for Health:

Fire Ants & Grass Clippings

Ingredients:

- 12 ounces broccoli slaw
- ¼ cup cran-raisins
- ¼ cup shelled pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds
- ½ cup Asian ginger low-fat dressing

Directions:

Open bag of broccoli slaw. Pour slaw, cran-raisins and seeds in a bowl. Pour dressing over the slaw. Toss well and chill for 1 hour before serving.



Adapted from: Kids in the Kitchen.org