



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

Family Matters

Improving Health Together

May 2023 Newsletter

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Colorado State University, U.S.
Department of Agriculture, and Colorado counties

Growing Your Own Food by Glenda Wentworth

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A good way to focus on eating healthy is by growing food at home. However, gardening can be overwhelming, so start small. If you have limited space at home for a garden bed, try using large containers placed on your porch, patio or other outdoor space.

Benefits of Growing Food

Children are typically fascinated by the growing process. Gardening increases awareness and appreciation of where food comes from, and the factors involved in making plants flourish. Growing food can give children a sense of accomplishment and pride, helping build their self-esteem. Additionally, research shows that when children help to grow their own food, they are more likely to eat what they have grown. Finally, when children are exposed to different foods through the growing process, they are more likely to try different kinds of produce that you purchase as well.



Choosing Containers

Look around to see what you already have; preferably 8-12 inches deep. Barrels, buckets, clay pots, 5-gallon buckets and large pots all work; get creative. The containers need holes in the bottom to allow the water to drain out. This helps keep the roots from drowning and rotting. If the container doesn't have holes, can you drill a few holes in the bottom? You can use a hammer and nail to make holes in a plastic bucket. Avoid using treated wood or containers that held toxic substances. Think about fitting the size of the container to the plant you will be growing. Use seed packets as a reference to match the container to the depth of soil needed. Place containers where they will receive the most sunlight. Vegetables and herbs generally need at least 8 hours of sunlight a day.

Planting & Growing



Soil quality is important. For best results, use potting mix (not garden soil). Re-used potting mix can harbor insects and diseases so it is best to use new potting mix.

Easy foods to grow from seeds include herbs, salad greens such as spinach or lettuce, and small tomato varieties. Salad greens are great options if your containers only get around 6 to 8 hours of sunlight.

Caring For Your Garden

Remember that plants need attention to grow successfully. Plants in containers may need more water as the soil tends to dry out quickly. Keep soil consistently moist and avoid getting plant leaves wet when watering. Pinch off any dead leaves. Lightly fertilize with a vegetable fertilizer once a month.

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Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Encourage Taste Testing

After you have rinsed the produce with water, taste the produce that has grown. Even if it doesn't leave you anything for supper, children are excited to taste produce from the garden right away. The best thing about gardening is that it exposes children to a variety of vegetables.

Let's Talk

Engage the participation of your children from the start. Plan with your children. Gather the supplies you will need. Suggest the vegetables that will more likely grow in your situation. Depending on their age, children will have different interests. Smaller children love digging in the dirt (kids love to get dirty), making the holes for the seeds, and even watering the plants. Older children can help read the seed packets. Discuss with your children who will be responsible for watering, weeding, and harvesting. Consider making a daily chart to help remember what task needs done each day. Most importantly, have fun spending time with each other.

Recipe for Health

Club Salad, (makes 2 adult size servings)

Adapted from: Spend Smart Eat Smart
Iowa State University Outreach and Extension



Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup whole wheat pasta, uncooked (elbows, rotini)
- 3 cups salad greens (romaine, spinach, spring mix)
- 2 cups chopped fresh vegetables (bell peppers, broccoli, celery, carrots, cauliflower, cucumber, onion, tomatoes)
- 1 cup cooked protein (beans, chickpeas, chicken, ham, hard boiled eggs, quinoa)
- 1/4 cup salad dressing - Use any salad dressing in this recipe.
- Make your own by combining 1/4 cup olive oil and 3 tablespoons vinegar (balsamic or rice vinegar are mild and well-liked by children)
- Optional: shredded or cubed cheese
- Optional: sunflower seeds
- Optional: avocado

Instructions:

1. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water.
2. Rinse salad greens and selected vegetables under cool water and drain.
3. Chop vegetables into bite sized pieces, as needed.
4. Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and cool.
5. Place 1 1/2 cups salad greens in each of 2 large bowls or plates.
6. In a medium bowl, stir together cooked pasta, chopped vegetables, cooked protein, and salad dressing.
7. Top the salad greens with the pasta mixture and cheese, if using.

This recipe is a great way to use leftovers such as leftover cooked pasta, chopped vegetables, and cooked beans, eggs, and meat.