

Florida Food Fare

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Helping Hands in the Kitchen

Children learn by touching, tasting, feeling, smelling and listening. They love to help prepare food and cook because they can use all their senses. Children will take pride in serving food they have helped prepare and it is an excellent opportunity to help them learn good habits from the start. There are several things to keep in mind to make sure cooking activities with your children are fun, educational and stimulating.

The first thing is safety. Keep sharp objects out of reach. For some foods plastic utensils or cooking tools specifically made with safety in mind can be used. When working with very young children, it might be a good idea to do the slicing and dicing ahead of time and place the ingredients in small paper or plastic cups. A plastic pizza wheel or a pair of plastic scissors can be used to cut or chop some vegetables, fruits, and meats. An egg slicer is another alternative for slicing eggs, bananas, strawberries, kiwis or cooked vegetables. If you are planning to involve a young child in a cooking activity, start with recipes that do not require heating the ingredients. Working with an older child, always demonstrate the importance of using oven mitts and turning pot handles toward the back of the stove when cooking.

The second thing to consider is your child's abilities. The younger the child, the less developed his/her motor skills will be. So that the activity does not become frustrating, plan cooking activities that he or she can manage without too much trouble. Generally, three to six -year-olds can add and stir ingredients in a bowl, wash fruits and vegetables, tear lettuce to make a salad, knead bread dough, and spread peanut butter or soft cream cheese. Six to eight year olds can measure dry and liquid ingredients, set the table, beat ingredients with a wire whisk or small mixer (make sure they turn off the mixer when adding additional ingredients), drop cookies from a spoon onto a cookie sheet, make cracker crumbs with a rolling pin and use a dull knife to cut soft foods. Children eight to ten can usually use a can opener, a microwave oven and prepare simple recipes. Children ages 10-12, should be able to use an oven and sharp knife with supervision, a grater to shred ingredients and prepare recipes with multiple ingredients.

The third thing to consider is time. Children have short attention spans and want relatively immediate results. It is best to give young children quick, simple jobs and give instructions one at a time. Be prepared to repeat instructions as often as necessary and have patience. Expect things to take longer and expect spills and messes, but don't let it take away from the

enjoyment that you and your child experience from working together.

Some other important things to keep in mind are the importance of washing hands before cooking and reading the entire recipe before beginning. There is nothing more disappointing than finding out halfway through a recipe that you don't have all the ingredients. Get them into the habit of cleaning as they go. Be sure stools are sturdy and have rubber pads to grip the floor so little ones don't slip while working on a high surface. Remember, children need supervision in the kitchen at all times, especially when they are beginners.

Your kitchen can be a classroom with colors, shapes, numbers and smells waiting to stimulate your child. Start out simple, and enjoy the experience of working side by side with your child. He or she may be more willing to try new foods if they have helped in the preparation. You can talk about safety, nutrition, the smell, texture and appearance of the food you are making. They will gain a new appreciation for cooking, as well as the time and effort you put into making dinner for the family. Maybe one day it will be your child who is making the breakfast that you wake up to. For more information on cooking with kids and more recipes check these websites: www.amazingmoms.com, www.theideabox.com, www.allrecipes.com, and www.kidshealth.org

Recipes

Crunchy Banana Bites

A cool delicious snack for the very young cook

2 bananas
3-4 tablespoons honey
2 tablespoon wheat germ
3 tablespoons chopped
soy nuts or dry roasted peanuts

Peel the banana and slice into 1-inch chunks. Cover a cookie sheet with aluminum foil. Put honey in a shallow dish. Mix the wheat germ with the chopped nuts and sprinkle on waxed paper. Dip the banana chunks in honey, then roll them in the chopped nuts and wheat germ. Place them on the cookie sheet. Set the cookie sheet in the freezer for about an hour or until the banana chunks are hard. Then put them in a plastic bag and keep the bag in the freezer. Eat the banana bits frozen.

Fun Fruit Kabobs

A fun recipe to make with friends too

wooden skewer sticks (1 for each person)
bananas
apples
green grapes
red grapes
pineapple chunks
plain or fruit flavored smooth style yogurt
coconut

Wash the grapes and apples. Cut apples into small squares. Peel the bananas and cut them

into chunks. Pour yogurt onto a large plate. Spread coconut onto another large plate. Slide pieces of fruit onto the skewer and design your own kabob. Do this until the stick is almost covered from end to end. Hold your kabob at the ends and roll it in the yogurt so the fruit gets covered. Then roll it in coconut. You might try granola, chopped nuts or raisins as an alternative to coconut.

Pumpnickel Bread Men

a gingerbread-man cookie cutter peanut butter or soft cream cheese (try one
several slices of pumpnickel bread of the fruit flavored cream cheese spreads)
raisins or other dried fruit

Cut gingerbread-man shapes out of the soft part of the pumpnickel bread. Spread the peanut butter or cream cheese on the bread. Use the dried fruit to make eyes, noses, mouths and buttons on your pumpnickel men.

Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

A nutritious snack for the more experienced cook

3/4 cup sugar	1/4 teaspoon baking soda
2 tablespoons margarine or butter	1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 large egg	1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 tablespoon lowfat milk	1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup applesauce	1 1/4 cups quick cooking oats
3/4 cup all purpose flour	1/2 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Cream sugar and margarine with mixer until smooth and creamy. Add egg and mix on medium speed for 1 minute. Slowly add milk and applesauce and mix for 1 more minute. Scrape the sides of the bowl. In a small bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. Add dry ingredients gradually to the creamed mixture and mix on low speed for two minutes until blended. Add oats and raisins and mix well. Measure by rounded teaspoons and place onto lightly greased cookie sheet about 2 inches apart. Bake 10-13 minutes until lightly browned. Remove from oven and cool on wire rack. Makes about 30 cookies.