



Cooking

Cooking is fun. It's also a natural laboratory for helping children to develop and learn. When children participate in cooking activities, they learn how food is prepared and how it contributes to their health and well-being. They also form eating patterns that can last a lifetime.

Cooking is a natural laboratory for teaching academic content. When children are engaged in preparing food, all of the key components of the content areas. Literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology-can be explored. Here are some examples of how you can make this connection among content, teaching, and learning.



Literacy

Go over recipes cards with children to expand their vocabulary and language. As children learn how to knead bread, grind peanuts, and flip pancakes, they learn new words as well as skills.

Stock the Cooking Area with wonderful children's books that feature eating and cooking to enhance children's understanding of books and other texts. Many books-such as *Storybook Stew* (Suzanne I. Barchers and Peter J. Rauen) and *Cooking Up a Story* (Carol Elaine Catron and Barbara Catron Parks)-can enhance children's enjoyment of literature and cooking. Include cookbooks, recipe cards, store coupons, and recipes from newspapers and magazines to demonstrate different kinds of print.

Expand children's knowledge of print and letters and words by developing and using recipe charts and cards and picture cookbooks with children. Point to the words as you read the chart from left to right and top to bottom. Draw children's attention to the words on food containers and boxes. Offer children alphabet cookie cutters or show them how to form dough in the shape of letters.



Mathematics

Involve children in solving problems about number concepts by posing challenges for them to solve. For example, ask children how they could divide the bowl of dip they made so that everyone in the group can have some. Give children practice in developing one-to-one correspondence by having them set the table for the same number of children as there are chairs at the table.

Help children to gain knowledge of geometry and spatial sense by giving them shape cutters for making sandwiches, and having them select the best place to position a rack for baking in the oven.

Develop patterning skills by showing children how to create a layered salad or lasagna.

Provide children with recipes to follow to give them experiences with measurement. Have children observe how many teaspoons are in a tablespoon and how many cups are in a quart.

Encourage children to use data collection, organization, and representation skills in the Cooking Area by recording how many people want to cook different recipes, such as pancakes or waffles.



Science

Pose questions that will encourage children to conduct physical science investigations. For example, have them test an egg's freshness by seeing whether it sinks or floats in a glass of water. (Spoiled eggs will float to the top.) Encourage children to use their senses to observe what the gelatin looks like as it sets, how the dough feels when flour is added, or what the lemonade tastes like without sweetener in it. Help children to understand why food changes form-why ice cream freezes, chocolate melts, or pudding thickens.

Have children plant radish, pea, and cucumber seeds that can be grown for cooking activities to see life science in action. Children can suspend sweet potatoes or avocado seeds in jars of water until they root and give off branches. Make every cooking activity a lesson in nutrition and good eating habits. Set out carrots, celery, and sprouts for children to prepare and eat; encourage children to prepare recipes with fruits instead of sweets.



Social Studies

Ask parents to share their family recipes to expose children to people and how they live. Supplement these family treasures with recipes that you have collected reflecting varied cultures and customs, regions of the United States, and climates.

Focus children's attention on people and the past by having them keep a weekly picture food diary of everything they eat at school. Use these diaries as you discuss nutrition. Parents can learn about their children's diets, too.

Begin a classroom recycling program to learn about people and the environment. Start by collecting whatever food containers-steel cans, glass jars, plastic jugs-are recycled in your community. If you're ambitious, you might even set up a compost pile. To do this, collect vegetable and fruit wastes that can be added to the soil for enrichment. As children clean up in the Cooking Area they can separate out their paper, metal, glass, plastic, and food trash. (Most of your recycled newspapers and office paper will probably come from other activity areas.)



The Arts

Decorate the walls and backs of dividers with children's paintings and drawings of foods they have cooked to expose children to the visual arts. Develop a class cookbook that children can illustrate.

Promote drama by pantomiming the movements of various cooking activities such as moving legs like an eggbeater, being a kernel of corn popping, or a piece of bread in a toaster.



Technology

Talk with children about the appliances they use in the Cooking Area to make them aware of technology.

Challenge children to explore gadgets and other technology tools. Pose questions such as, "How would you open cans without a can opener?" or "How are an egg beater, a wire whisk, and an electric hand mixer alike and different?"

On field trips to a farm or hatchery, encourage children to explore how people use technology. Request that the guide show children the machines that are used to milk cows, plant seeds, harvest plants, feed fish, and the like.

The examples we give of cooking experiences that engage children in learning important content can happen in any Cooking Area when teachers are purposeful about what they plan. In the next section we explore the teacher's role in more depth.