

Get Going Green!

Early childhood is an ideal time to teach children to appreciate and take care of the earth. Child care providers can role model green habits and involve children in earth-friendly lessons and activities.

Better health, a safer food supply, and a more sustainable environment all result from making conscious choices about food, cooking, and eating. There are many steps you can take to make your child care facility more earth-friendly.

Green Your Menu

The principles of eating green run parallel to the basics of eating well. A green diet is naturally high in fiber and nutrients. Minimally processed foods such as vegetables, fruits, grains, beans, nuts, milk, eggs, and smaller portions of meat, poultry, and fish are the basis of a green diet. Foods in their whole, natural forms require far less energy, packaging, and transporting than their highly processed counterparts. For instance, a baked potato requires less energy to bring to the table than a processed fried potato snack. A whole baked potato is also cheaper and far more nutritious!



Cut Down on Waste

The biggest source of food waste is actually food that is purchased and then thrown out, uneaten. Instead of nourishing bodies, food is sent to landfills or processed through sewer systems (by way of the garbage disposal). An effective way to cut down on waste is to allow children to serve themselves at meal and snack time. Encourage children to take smaller servings and ask for more if they are still hungry. This is also a great way to promote healthy eating development. Children learn to eat according to their own appetite instead of eating the amount given to them by an adult.



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Smart menu planning also results in reduced waste. Learn to forecast the amount of food to prepare relative to the number of children you serve. Find creative uses for leftovers. For instance, extra cooked chicken can be used in soups, stir-frys, casseroles, or sandwiches.

Another way to reduce kitchen waste is to compost produce peelings and scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, and crushed egg shells. Worm bins are a great way to turn these kitchen scraps into fertilizer for the garden. It is also a fun learning project for kids.

The Green “Three R’s” (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle)

We have heard it over and over, yet old habits can be hard to change. Make it a priority to bring reusable tote bags and mesh produce bags to the store to carry home groceries and other goods. Minimize food packaging materials by purchasing foods such as dry beans, oats, rice, pasta, and other foods in large size containers. Better yet, purchase foods in bulk and use your own reusable plastic containers.

Recycle food containers whenever possible. Steel and aluminum cans, cereal and cracker boxes, glass jars, and many plastic bottles can be recycled curbside in many communities.

You can also be creative with plastic food containers. Many of these containers can be cleaned and used in various craft projects with the children.

Be Wise with Water

Water is the most important nutrient our body needs as well as a precious and essential natural resource. When washing hands, rinsing vegetables, or brushing teeth, avoid letting the water run continuously. For drinking, encourage families to bring a reusable water bottle made of safe plastic for their child. Refill with filtered water from the tap.

Grow a Garden

Children learn all kinds of things when they participate in growing gardens. They will also be more likely to try new vegetables, fruits, and herbs if they are involved in the growing process. Start with containers or a small outside plot. There are a number of books and resources to help you get started (see *How Does Your Garden Grow?*, Mealtime Memo for Childcare, No. 4, 2009).



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Green Teaching Activities

1. Read the book *On the Day You Were Born* to the children. This picture book is a great way to introduce young children to the complexity of our planet and emphasize how each child is a unique and important part of the world. After reading the book to the children, talk about how we all have a role in keeping the earth beautiful. Ask the children to think of ways to keep the earth clean and safe.
2. Experience the earth by taking nature walks. Ask children to point out and describe the trees, plants, flowers, birds, and animals that they see along the way. Encourage them to draw pictures of things they observe when they return.
3. Plant herbs, vegetables, fruit, flowers, or trees with the children. Talk about how plants provide food for all living things and also make oxygen for us to breathe.
4. Play “water on/water off” with the children. When they are washing hands or brushing their teeth, call “water on” or “water off” and see how fast they can respond. Teach the children that water only needs to run when they are rinsing their hands or mouths.
5. For a craft project, obtain plain canvas tote bags from a craft store and have children decorate them with fabric paint. Encourage the children to take home the bag and use when they go to the store with their families.



Earth-Friendly Children's Books

Frasier, D. (1991). *On the Day You Were Born*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Inches, A., & Garofoli, V. (2008). *I Can Save the Earth! One Little Monster Learns to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle*. New York, NY: Little Simon.

Asch, F. (2008). *The Earth and I*. Orlando, FL: Voyager Books

Recipe to Try

Sweeten up the children's attitude, for the day, with this great whole wheat doughnut.

Baked Whole Wheat Doughnuts A-07¹

Frozen whole eggs, thawed	½ cup	Baking powder	2 tsp
OR	OR	Baking soda	1 tsp
Fresh large eggs	3 each	Ground cinnamon	¼ tsp
Brown sugar, packed	¾ cup	Ground ginger	¼ tsp
Honey	¼ cup	Ground cloves	¼ tsp
Lowfat plain yogurt	½ cup		
Vegetable oil	¼ cup	Sugar	½ cup
Enriched all-purpose flour	2 ¾ cup	Ground cinnamon	1 cup 1 ½ tsp
Whole wheat flour	1 cup		

In a bowl, whisk eggs until foamy. Add brown sugar, honey, yogurt, and oil to eggs and whisk to combine.

Combine flours, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves in separate bowl. Sift dry ingredients into egg mixture, 1 cup at a time. Stir lightly after each addition until soft dough is formed.

Cover with plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

On well-floured surface, roll out dough to a ½ inch thickness. Cut doughnuts with a floured doughnut cutter. Combine unused dough and continue process until all dough is used. Place doughnuts 3 across and 4 down onto each half-sheet pan (13 x 18 x 1 inch) which has been lightly coated with pan release spray or paper lined. Spray tops of doughnuts lightly with pan release spray.

Topping:

Combine sugar and cinnamon in a shaker. Sprinkle tops of doughnuts evenly with sugar mixture.

Bake until lightly browned: Conventional oven: 350 °F for 6–8 minutes; Convection oven: 300 °F for 6–8 minutes.

Portion is 1 doughnut.

Number of servings: 24

Serving size: 1 doughnut provides the equivalent of 1 ¼ slices of bread.

¹USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at www.nfsmi.org.

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Breakfast Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
½ cup orange juice (½ cup fruit juice) 1 Oven Baked Whole Wheat Pancakes A-06A ¹ (1 slice bread) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ cup fresh banana slices (½ cup fruit) ½ serving Baked Whole Wheat Doughnuts A-07 ¹ (½ slice of bread) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ cup fresh orange sections (½ cup fruit) ½ slice whole wheat toast with 1 Tbsp peanut butter ² (½ slice of bread, 1 Tbsp peanut butter) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ cup sliced fresh strawberries (½ cup fruit) 1 piece Banana Bread Squares A-13 ¹ (1 slice bread) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ cup pear halves (½ cup fruit) ½ slice whole grain waffle (½ slice of bread) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)

Lunch Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
¾ cup Ground Beef and Spanish Rice ¹ (1½ oz cooked lean meat, ¼ cup vegetable, ¾ slice of bread) ¼ cup green beans (¼ cup vegetable) ½ cup Orange Glazed Carrots I-24A ¹ (¼ cup vegetable and fruit) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ Toasted Cheese and Tomato Sandwich F-09 ¹ (1 oz equivalent meat/meat alternate, ½ cup vegetable, 1 slice of bread) ¼ cup broccoli (¼ cup vegetable) 1 plum (¼ cup fruit) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	¾ cup Stir-Fry Chicken D-18 ¹ (2 oz cooked lean meat, ⅝ cup vegetable) ⅜ cup Not Fried Rice A-08 ¹ (½ oz cooked lean meat, ½ cup vegetable, ½ slice of bread) ¼ cup diced peaches (¼ cup fruit) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ cup Lentil Soup H-07 ¹ with ½ oz cheese and ½ oz ham as garnish (1½ oz equivalent meat/meat alternate, ¼ cup vegetable) ¼ cup steamed spinach (¼ cup vegetable) ¼ cup baked apple with cinnamon (¼ cup fruit) ½ piece cornbread (½ slice of bread) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)	½ roasted turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread (1½ oz cooked lean meat, 1 slice of bread) ¼ cup lightly steamed carrot sticks (¼ cup vegetable) ¼ cup oven baked potato wedges (¼ cup vegetable) ¾ cup 1% milk (¾ cup milk)

Snack Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
¾ cup Yogurt Fruit Dip G-04 ¹ (2 oz cheese) ½ cup fresh apple slices (½ cup fruit) Water ³	½ oz graham crackers (2 crackers) (½ oz grains/bread) ½ cup diced peaches (½ cup fruit) Water ³	½ oz wheat crackers (4 crackers) (½ oz grains/bread) ½ oz cheddar cheese (½ oz cheese) Water ³	½ slice whole wheat bread (½ slice of bread) 1 Tbsp peanut butter ² (1 Tbsp peanut butter) Water ³	½ oz cheddar cheese (½ oz cheese) ½ cup applesauce (½ cup fruit) Water ³

¹USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at www.nfsmi.org. Ages 3–5.

²Sunflower butter may be substituted for peanut butter.

³Water is suggested as a beverage for all snacks even when other beverages are offered to encourage children to drink water.

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Sources

National Food Service Management Institute. (2010). *Care Connection*. University, MS: Author.

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