

Gardening with Children

Gardening is a fun and easy way for children to learn about fruits and vegetables. Children are more willing to try the new vegetables if they take part in growing them. Gardening also gives children a sense of satisfaction and pride when they see the produce they have grown.

Planning a Garden

Explain that spring is the time of year gardeners and farmers plan for their crops. Gardeners plan what they want to plant, prepare the soil by digging, adding compost, planting rows of seeds, and labeling them. Let the children decide what type of garden they want to plant. Older children can draw the garden design on a poster board with colored markers.



Making Compost

Compost is organic material sprinkled around growing plants to give them food they need to grow well. Compost is made naturally by farmers when they plow plants into the ground and in forests when the leaves break down. We can also make our own!

Directions

Put a quart of fruit or vegetable scraps in a clear plastic bag. Add a couple of handfuls of top soil. Toss in a piece of charcoal to keep the compost smelling fresh. Tie the bag with a twist tie. Every few days or so, open the bag and stir it around. In about three weeks, the bag of garbage will become a bag of sweet-smelling compost!



Planting the Garden

Rake the selected garden spot smooth and sprinkle the compost over the garden. Follow the design the children planned earlier. Mark each row before planting by stretching a string between two sticks and putting a picture of vegetables to be planted next to each row.

Leave a wide path between the rows so the children will be able to plant and work without stepping on the seeds. Plant seeds following the directions on the seed packet.



Tell the children how long it takes for each plant to grow. Beets and zucchini take about 8 weeks, bush beans and cucumbers take 11 weeks, and carrots take 10 weeks, while lettuce only takes 5 weeks. Also explain that the garden will need care every day. The children will need to weed and water the garden.



Indoor Gardening

Gardening is not limited to outside. Many plants can grow right indoors. One example is an herb garden. All you need is a muffin pan, soil, and herb seeds, such as sage, thyme, basil, rosemary, and chives.

Put the soil in the sections of the muffin pan. Add the herb seeds and cover them lightly with soil. Be sure to keep the soil moist. Place the pan near a window and watch the herbs grow. Once they are grown, the herbs can be cut with scissors, washed, and added to the children's salads, soups, and sandwiches.

Other Fun Indoor Gardening Activities

Let the children make their own potting soil. It is very simple. They can mix one part soil, one part compost, and one part vermiculite in a large container or bucket. Vermiculite is a natural mineral that expands when heat is applied.

Let the children paint their own clay pot. The clay pots need to soak in water for an hour before they are painted. The children can personalize their pot by adding fun designs and pictures with acrylic paint.

Help each child plant a seed using the potting soil and clay pot that they made. Place the pots near a window. The children can be responsible for taking care of their plant. They will enjoy watching it grow.



Recipe to Try

Three-Grain Pancakes are a great way to start the day. Photo shows pancake topped with Spiced Apple Topping C-04¹.

Oven-Baked Three-Grain Pancakes A-06B¹

Enriched buckwheat flour	1 cup
Whole wheat flour	1 cup
Wheat bran	1 cup
Baking powder	2 Tbsp
Sugar	¼ cup
Salt	2 tsp
Frozen whole eggs, thawed	½ cup
OR	OR
Fresh large eggs	3 each
Vegetable oil	¼ cup
Lowfat milk	3 cups



Combine flours, wheat bran, baking powder, sugar, salt, eggs, oil, and milk in a mixing bowl. Using the whip attachment, mix for 30 seconds on low speed. Scrape down sides of bowl. Mix for 1 minute on medium speed until batter is smooth.

Into each half-sheet pan (13 x 18 x 1 inch) which has been lightly coated with pan release spray pour 1 quart 1 cup of batter.

Bake until golden brown: Conventional oven: 450 °F for 10 minutes; Convection oven: 400 °F for 8 minutes. Cut each pan 5 x 5 (25 pieces). Portion is 1 piece.

Number of servings: 25

Serving size: 1 piece provides the equivalent of 1 slice of bread.

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

Mealtime Memo FOR CHILD CARE

Breakfast Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Banana slices Oven-Baked Three-Grain Pancake A-06B ¹ Milk	Fresh plum slices English muffin with flavored cream cheese ² Milk	Grapes cut in half Whole-grain toast Milk	Diced peaches Cream of Wheat® Milk	Fresh strawberry slices Unsweetened whole-grain cereal variety Baked Scrambled Eggs D-15 ¹ Milk

Lunch Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Ground Beef and Spanish Rice D-22 ¹ Baked acorn squash with cinnamon Milk	Chicken or Turkey Salad E-07 ¹ on whole wheat bread Steamed broccoli Apricot halves Milk	Macaroni and Cheese D-20 ¹ Shredded lettuce and carrots Ranch Dressing E-18 ¹ Pear slices Milk	Vegetable Frittata D-01 ¹ Banana slices Corn Muffin A-02 ¹ Milk	Grilled cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread Lentil Soup H-07 ¹ Fresh apple slices Milk

Snack Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
String cheese Wheat crackers Water ³	Peanut butter ⁴ Graham crackers Water ³	Carrot and celery sticks Whole-grain English muffin Water ³	Lowfat yogurt, plain Pineapple chunks Water ³	Fresh orange sections Whole Wheat Muffin Square A-11A ¹ Water ³

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

²Cream cheese is used for flavor. Cream cheese is not creditable on the CACFP.

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

⁴Sunflower butter can be substituted for peanut butter.

Sources

National Food Service Management Institute. (2009). *More Than Mud Pies: A Nutrition Curriculum Guide for Preschool Children*. (5th ed.)

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