

Sharing secrets of the kitchen



By Leanna Knox

Can you think of a fun activity to do with your kids that doesn't cost a bundle, teaches them some valuable life skills, and may even help to keep them healthy as they get older? It's cooking, of course! The very best part is that it usually doesn't take much convincing to get kids involved. It seems that wanting to cook and help in the kitchen comes naturally to kids. Just think about how many pies have been made in a sandbox or the number of cakes that have been created during a bubble bath?

Aside from the fun part of cooking with kids, there are a lot of benefits to sharing the secrets of the kitchen with your children. First of all, learning to cook helps them to learn about nutrition and healthy eating. Given the environment in which our children live, with junk food available around every corner, kids are going to need the skills to choose healthy foods. Spending time in the kitchen, discussing foods and the reasons why you chose to use the ingredients that you did is a way to help children to develop important life skills. Sharing these secrets allows them to develop a healthy appreciation of what should and should not be in the foods they eat. Involving kids in cooking can also be palette-enhancing, as children are much more likely to eat foods that they have been involved in preparing. Cooking can also boost self-esteem. Working together to create something that can be enjoyed and admired by the entire family provides a very real sense of accomplishment which makes them feel capable and valued.

While it may not cost a lot of money to cook with your children, there are a few things that are needed to guarantee a successful experience for all. One of the key requirements is patience. Kids, and many adults for that matter, cannot be counted on to be neat when they are cooking. Try to stay relaxed and not worry about a bit of spilled milk or a few ingredients landing on the flour. It is also a good idea to keep in mind that while the recipe might not be being prepared exactly as it should be or that the product might not turn out perfectly, these are all learning experiences and can be great outlets for creativity. Who knows, the "new" version may turn out even better than expected?

Timing is another important factor in making the experience a success. Cooking together is not likely to be a positive experience for anyone if there are tight time restrictions. It is much better to choose a time when the schedule allows for a few slowdowns. Also, make sure that the kids are well rested. This can make everything go much smoother and helps to keep frustration levels from rising. Choose your time wisely!

It is also important to do some advance planning for the activity. To start, be sure that you have chosen the right recipe. When it comes to making the selection, the most important thing to keep in mind is to keep it simple. In fact the simpler the recipe that is chosen the better. For younger children, look for recipes with no more than five ingredients in them. Muffins, tossed salad, fruit smoothies or assembling pizzas are all good choices. Things will also work better if you prepare what you can in advance. For younger children you may want to do quite a bit of prep work. Think of the cooking shows you see on television, where ingredients are washed, chopped, measured and ready to be combined together in the final product. As children get older, and their attention span increases, they can get involved in the preparation of the ingredients.

The final thing that is needed to help to guarantee success is to share the “chef’s rules” with the children. Give them a tour of the kitchen and talk about what is okay to touch and what can hurt them. It is also important to emphasize the need for clean hands when cooking, and teamwork to keep everyone safe during both the cooking and eating of the final product.

Recently, the Dietitians of Canada and EatRight Ontario teamed up to hold an Ontario Kids Recipe Challenge. This recipe contest was designed to encourage children to get excited about healthy eating and being creative in the kitchen. The contest focused on favourite school lunch and after-school snack recipes, that were healthy and tasty. Emphasizing healthy choices in lunches and snacks is an important way to help kids to get all the nutrition they need to grow and do their best in school. The entries were judged on nutrition, taste, originality, ease of preparation and the answer to the question, “why would kids like this recipe?” The grand prize recipes can be found at www.eatrightont.ca/en/ViewDocument.aspx?id=380. With choices like Yummy Quinoa Lunch, Souper Lunch with Rice and Beans, Carrot and Apple Salad and Emily’s Zippy Dip, you are sure to find something to entice even the most reluctant young chef to head to the kitchen.

Getting into the kitchen with your children should be a positive experience for everyone. While it is important to do a bit of planning, and make sure that the

timing is right for all involved, the benefits can certainly worth it. Share secrets of the kitchen with your children and help them to develop a lifelong interest in cooking and healthy eating. Certainly secrets worth sharing!

Fabulous Fiesta Quesadillas

These quick and tasty quesadillas are a great choice for starting to cook with your kids. Ole! Makes 6 servings.

1	red onion	1	
one-half cup	fresh cilantro, chopped		125 mL
2 cups	cheddar cheese, grated		500 mL
3	tomatoes		
4 Tbsp	fresh lime juice		60 mL
	salt and pepper		
6	flour tortillas	6	

1. Preheat oven to 275 degrees.
2. Using a small knife, chop the onion and tomatoes. Place the chopped tomatoes and onions in a small bowl. Add lime juice and salt and pepper. Stir until well mixed.
3. Grate the cheese. Then place it in a small bowl and stir in the chopped cilantro.
4. Take each tortilla and spread half of it with cheese mixture. Spoon the tomato mixture on top. Fold the empty half of each tortilla over top of the filling.
5. Place the folded tortillas on a baking sheet and put in the oven for about seven minutes until the cheese has melted. Cut each tortilla in half, and enjoy!

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