

Cooking At Home - A Children's Museum of Denver Activity

In this at-home activity we will explore the wonder and joy of simple food prep, by having the whole family cook a meal together. This activity can be done at home with simple ingredients, and if done together should allow for some quality child-caregiver bonding time, which is essential for children's social-emotional development.

Two options are presented here for things children can help prepare easily: Stir fry and chocolate chip cookies.

Option 1: Stir Fry



This one is healthier but will most likely require children to use cooking knives. Remember to instruct children *thoroughly* before allowing them to use a knife on their own, and make sure they are aware of the dangers of unsafe knife use. *Children younger than 6 years can clean and set the table and cut softer materials with plastic knives while older siblings and adults cut harder materials like carrots.*

Ingredients: (for this recipe we list things you *can* use, not things you *must* use. Feel free to use as many ingredients as you have available, as stir fry is a very versatile cooking option. Amount of ingredients may also vary from what is listed here) 3-4 whole carrots, 1/2 onion, 1-2 garlic cloves, 20 snow peas, 1 can of water chestnuts, 1-2 chicken breasts, 1/4 lb chopped pork, 1 head of broccoli, egg noodles or other noodle, sesame

seeds, squash, red or green bell peppers, mushrooms, shrimp, cucumber, green onion, or red onion.

In addition you will need: A potato peeler, a wok (a large saucepan can be unused in place of a wok, but may be less effective), a spatula to stir the ingredients with, a knife to chop veggies and meats with, a cutting board, oil to grease the wok or saucepan, a separate pan for searing meats if you have any.

1. Have everyone wash their hands for at least 20 seconds. *This is the happy birthday song twice.*

Note: This can be a good opportunity to speak to your children about sanitation and the importance of washing hands if you feel comfortable doing so.

2. Lay out all ingredients in front of you on a cleared counter space. The Children's Museum suggests no more than 5-6 vegetable and meat ingredients for a single stir fry.
3. Rinse all vegetables with warm water and peel the edges of any vegetables with rough edges (such as carrots)
4. With caution, show your children how to chop vegetables and meats into slices the size of an American quarter. For children below the age of six, this may require more supervision. Children above the age of seven should have an easier time but will require some help.

Note: Keep in mind that older siblings (12+) can help younger siblings do these tasks if you are unavailable. This can create co-dependence in siblings and aids in building trust.

5. If you have chosen to use garlic cloves, show children how to smash these with the flat of a knife or dice them into small pieces. If dicing, you will probably need to do this for them because the pieces will be very small.
6. Slice meats, if you have any, into thin slices and sear for 5-10 minutes in a separate pan before adding to the wok. Do not completely cook these meats, just cook the outside of them,
7. Put all ingredients, including seared meats, into the large wok or saucepan. Sear with a moderate amount of oil for 8-10 minutes or until finished.
8. Have children set the table with silverware, napkins, cups, and plates. Have younger children get everyone a healthy drink such as water or milk by pouring it into a cup and setting the cup on the table.

9. Sit down at the table as a family and enjoy! Remember to reflect on the experience with your kids as they eat. What did they like? What did they not like? What could they have done differently to make the experience more rewarding? Students do not learn as well when they do not reflect; even a small amount of reflection can go a really long way.

Option 2: Chocolate Chip Cookies

Chocolate chip cookies are a classic hallmark of childhood learning, and are a great way to introduce children to the wonders of cooking. This option is certainly less healthy than stir fry, but will probably involve students staying engaged for longer and doesn't require use of a knife!

Many of the steps below are taken directly from the Food Network website at the link below. I have made this recipe many times and find it very fun and easy to do. The Food Network is also a great place to go for many other recipes.



<https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchen/chocolate-chip-cookies-recipe4-2011856>

Ingredients: 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, 3/4 cup packed dark brown sugar, 3/4 cup sugar, 2 large eggs, 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract, 1 (12-ounce) bag semisweet chocolate chips, or chunks, 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, 3/4 teaspoon baking soda, 1 teaspoon fine salt

1. Evenly position 2 racks in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees F. (on convection setting if you have it.) Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone sheets. (If you only have 1 baking sheet, let it cool completely between batches.)

2. Have everyone wash their hands for at least 20 seconds. *This is the happy birthday song twice.*

Note: This can be a good opportunity to speak to your children about sanitation and the importance of washing hands if you feel comfortable doing so.

3. Put the butter in a microwave safe bowl, cover and microwave on medium power until melted. (Alternatively melt in a small saucepan.) Cool slightly. Whisk the sugars, eggs, butter and vanilla in a large bowl until smooth.
4. Whisk the flour, baking soda and salt in another bowl. Stir the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients with a wooden spoon; take care not to over mix. Stir in the chocolate chips or chunks.
5. Scoop heaping tablespoons of the dough onto the prepared pans. Wet hands slightly and roll the dough into balls. Space the cookies about 2-inches apart on the pans. Bake, until golden, but still soft in the center, 12 to 16 minutes, depending on how chewy or crunchy you like your cookies.
6. Transfer hot cookies with a spatula to a rack to cool. Wait about 5 minutes, during which time you may reflect with your kids about the experience. What did they like? What did they not like? What could they have done differently to make the experience more rewarding? Students do not learn as well when they do not reflect; even a small amount of reflection can go a really long way.
7. Have children set the table with napkins, cups, and plates. Have younger children get everyone a healthy drink such as water or milk by pouring it into a cup and setting the cup on the table.
8. Serve and enjoy!

Images courtesy of:

<https://www.mccormick.com/recipes/salads-sides/stir-fry-vegetables> (stir fry)

<https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchen/chocolate-chip-cookies-recipe4-2011856> (cookies)