

Farm to School Resource Guide

Parent Tip Sheet

Cooking and Gardening with Children

Dear parents and guardians,

Thank you for considering our Farm to School Resource Guide as a learning opportunity for your child at home! In this document, you will find tips for engaging your child in gardening and cooking activities. We recognize and honor that you know your child best, so please consider this tip sheet as a list of suggestions, not best practices for working with your child. We leave that expertise to you!

Gardening and cooking with your child are excellent avenues for exploring a variety of subjects, such as math, science, reading, writing, and more. Your child will gain hands-on experience with practical skills that will serve them for a lifetime. Engaging your child in garden- and cooking-based education also encourages social emotional learning (SEL). If you would like to learn more about SEL and how to engage your child in it, please visit the [TBAISD Remote Learning Toolkit](#).

The majority of these tips were adapted from the FoodCorps Program Guide. You can download the full program guide here if you are interested: <https://foodcorps.org/resources/program-guide/>

We hope you and your child enjoy this resource!

Sincerely,

Farm to School Educators of Northwest Michigan

Cooking with your Child

- Promote agency in your child by asking them to choose the recipes you cook together or give them the option of selecting certain ingredients.
- Encourage your child to use all of their senses when cooking. Trying a new food is not all about taste! It is important for your child to get to know a food with their sense of sight, smell, hearing, and feel as well.
- Make a habit of starting your cooking experience with hand washing. Demonstrate and emphasize the importance of removing all food from hands, washing every surface with hand soap for at least fifteen seconds, and rinsing thoroughly. You can sing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Happy Birthday” twice through! Remind your child to not touch anything besides their hands, cooking utensils, and food once their hands are clean!
- Children are much more capable of safely handling knives than many adults often realize, but it is important to review knife safety at the beginning of each cooking experience. Keep your child’s skill level in mind, but also remember that children must practice a skill to improve! Here are some general knife safety tips that you can model for your child:
 - Keep the tip of the knife on the cutting board.
 - Go slow and stay low.
 - Make a [bear claw](#) with the hand holding the food.
 - Stay focused with your eyes on the job!
 - When you are finished using a knife, lay it on your cutting board and aim the tip away from yourself.
 - To give a knife to someone else, put it down and ask them to pick it up.
 - Model how to cut each vegetable your child will be working with. Ideally the cutting surface is waist-high.
 - Be sure to go slowly and exaggerate and highlight the proper techniques you wish to see from them. Emphasize a solid hold on whatever is being cut, consider the thickness of the food, and demonstrate the appropriate size piece that you are aiming for. Say things like, *See how I keep the tip on the cutting board the whole time, and I just rock the knife back and forth. See where my other hand is when I’m cutting.*



Gardening with your Child

You don't need a large yard or a detailed garden plan to engage your child in garden-based education! A small patch of dirt or a pot of soil can encourage your child to become curious about the mysteries of gardening.

- Allow your child to choose what you plant or pick between the options you have available.
 - Encourage them to consider what tools you have available before starting your garden.
 - Encourage them to consider water access when choosing your garden's location.
- Do garden chores alongside your child to demonstrate that gardening is fun, not a burden.
 - If you are a family of singers, singing songs in the garden is a great way to make weeding fun and go by quickly!
- Encourage curiosity and exploration in the garden by asking your child to think of why certain things are the way they are.
 - "Why do you think this leaf is fuzzy?"
 - "What do you think caused the holes in this lettuce leaf?"
 - "What do you think these tiny root hairs are for?"
- Model empathy and respect for all life in the garden by encouraging your child to not step on plants or needlessly squish insects.
- Failed crop? No problem! Turn mistakes or failures into learning opportunities by asking your child to think about "What can we do differently next time?" or "How can we improve in the future?"

