

TITLE | BEST PRACTICES FOR COOKING OUTSIDE

CATEGORY | Program

SUB-CATEGORY | Cooking Outside

OVERVIEW | This document outlines Education Outside's best practices for cooking outside in the school garden with students.

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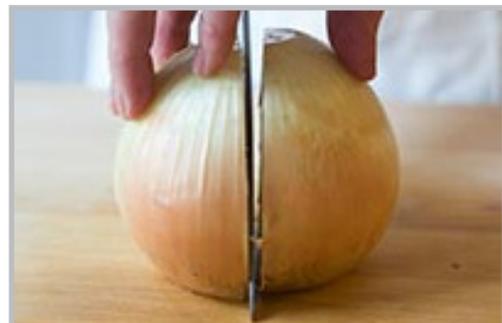
There are many ways to structure a cooking class with students in the school garden. Much of the structure depends on the size of the garden, the size of the class, and what the recipe is. If there is enough produce to harvest in the garden, you can have each student harvest and wash. If there's just a small amount of produce to harvest, you can assign a small group of students to complete the task and have the rest of the class working on other prep tasks. Below are some tips for a successful cooking lesson.

Safety:

- Check for any food allergies or dietary restrictions in advance.
- Provide time for students to wash their hands before cooking.
- Teach students how to properly harvest and wash produce.
- **Always supervise students using knives. One adult per 2-3 students.**
 - It's important that students are taught how to use real tools. They feel empowered when given proper training.
 - Build knife skills slowly over time. You can start students on plastic knives and later in the year they can use adult knives with close supervision.
 - Consider knife alternatives. Students can cut many ingredients using scissors.
 - Pre-cut more challenging produce like onions in quarters and have students finish cutting these pieces with supervision.
 - Teach students the knife skills detailed below.

Knife Skills:

- Always ensure you have adequate adult supervision if students are using knives.
- Show students how to use a bridge cut to cut food in half or quarters. Form a 'bridge' with the thumb and index finger of one hand; position the blade under the 'bridge'.



- Show students how to place the flat side of the food down on the cutting board for more stable cutting of round foods, such as an onion.
- Show students the claw hold for slicing food into smaller pieces. Form fingers into a claw, with fingertips tucked under and gripping the food and knuckles touching the side of the knife (acting as a guard for the fingertips).



Lesson Prep (ahead of time):

- Determine what is growing in the garden and what ingredients can be harvested for cooking. Use available ingredients from the garden and supplement recipes with store-bought ingredients.
- Try the recipe yourself before teaching it.
- Coordinate with the classroom teacher(s) ahead of time so they are prepared to help during the cooking lesson.
- When possible, coordinate your lessons so that they connect to the unit you are teaching and the classroom teacher can make connections indoors.
- Recruit volunteers in the school community. Share the lesson plan with them in advance and clearly assign their roles and responsibilities for each activity.
- Connect your cooking to students' experience and use a culturally mindful approach.

Lesson Prep (day of the lesson):

- Print all handouts/visuals (i.e. produce cards or pictures of the ingredients being used) and gather other materials (pencils, clipboards, etc.) needed.
- Set up stations/materials before students arrive. Spend time making your tables look appealing. Students will immediately want to engage.
- Have clean-up spaces prepared so you can explain to students the clean-up procedures and they can immediately help when they are done.

Class Structure:

- Cooking requires many different tasks:
 - Harvesting
 - Washing
 - Cutting
 - Reading recipes
 - Mixing ingredients
 - Cooking/stirring, etc.
- Assign small groups of students to each job.
- OR, split the class in half:
 - Introduce ingredients and recipe with the whole class, then assign jobs (by number, job slips, etc.)
 - One group helps prep for cooking
 - One group works on a garden job or does a worksheet activity
 - Rotate groups mid-way through the lesson
- See *Back Pocket Activities*, *Art Projects & Celebrations*, and *Icebreakers* in the Table of Contents for ideas for students who finish early.

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- Students will ask for the recipe: write it on the board for them to copy, print it as a hand-out, or let them know where they can find it (on the web or in a recipe book you hand out at the end of the year).
 - No job is too small--ripping leaves or spinning the salad spinner are great for students. All jobs are important.
 - Depending on the recipe and class size, sometimes a cooking demonstration is easiest, using a large center table in the garden. Students help with prep, but the garden educator demonstrates the cooking with students gathered around.
 - Plan enough time for students to enjoy the meal together.

Cooking/Eating Culture:

- “Don’t yuck my yum--everyone has different tastes!” If a student doesn’t like something, it’s okay, but they should be polite and understand that others might.
- Give students the option not to eat something, but encourage them to *try* everything.
- Cooking is about community: share a moment of appreciation after everyone has been served, but before anyone eats. Thank the garden/sun/rain/bees/the group before eating: “Thanks Garden!” or “Cheers to us!”
- Thumb-o-Meters: Students can rate the meal; it’s okay if someone doesn’t love it.

Clean-Up:

- Provide a brief overview of clean-up procedures before cooking starts and after eating has finished.
- Dismissing by table/group/row can reduce bottlenecks at the clean up area
- Compostable plates or lunch trays make clean-up faster and are ideal for classes that are back to back.
- If you’re using reusable plates or silverware, use the three-bin method (as described in Essential School Garden Cooking Supplies). Fill the containers before class and let students proceed through the wash line.