

CHOOSING RECIPES AND CREATING MENUS FOR YOUR KITCHEN SESSIONS

Choosing appropriate recipes is a key task for the Kitchen Specialist. The recipes should combine to create a menu that is palatable and appealing when sitting down to the share the meal. While much of this comes with practice, there are some tips you can follow to help with your recipe selection and menu creation.

When starting out, however, you may want to follow the Garden to Table sample menus and recipes available on the Garden to Table website.

Choosing Recipes

Produce

The main consideration, when choosing recipes, is the produce available in the garden. Good communication with the Garden Specialist is therefore crucial and some flexibility to respond to gluts in the garden, or a weather event that destroys produce, is needed.

A list from the Garden Specialist outlining produce ready to harvest in the next few weeks can be helpful when choosing recipes for the upcoming weeks.

There are many ways to find recipes for particular produce. Some cookbooks (such as

Stephanie Alexander's Cook's Companion) are based on produce, with chapters for each type of produce. Recipes on the Garden to Table website can also be searched by the produce. Other cookbooks and the internet can be a source of inspiration.

If you are new to Garden to Table and need to buy produce for your session, make sure you use what is available locally and in season. It will be cheaper and taste better than food that has been imported from other countries.

Ability of class

Start with simple recipes, especially if students are new to the kitchen. If it is the first time a class is in the kitchen you will need to spend 15-20 minutes on a safety talk, so 1 – 2 simple recipes for that first session is sufficient. As time goes on, the children may be able to read and prepare more complicated recipes – be guided by your own experience with them.



Timing

Most kitchen sessions are 90 minutes in length, which allows approximately 60 minutes for cooking and 30 minutes for setting up, sharing the meal and cleaning. You will need to ensure that your recipes can be comfortably prepared by the students in that time – the aim is for children to enjoy their time in the kitchen and feel proud of what they have achieved!

Make a note of how long things take to cook, and factor that into your timeline for the session. Avoid bottlenecks by ensuring only one recipe each session uses a piece of equipment (such as the oven or food processor).

Equipment

It is important to choose recipes that can be easily prepared with the equipment available. You may like to start an equipment wishlist that you can share with the Garden to Table Programme Champion at your school, so you can build up your available equipment over time.

Number of volunteers

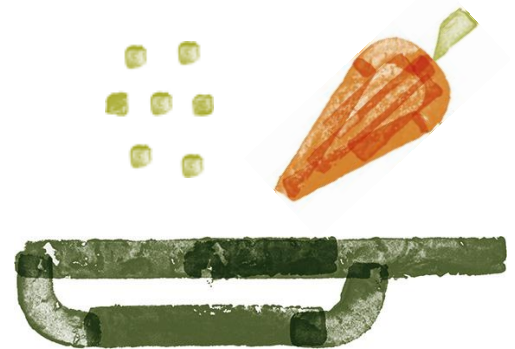
Volunteers are essential to the smooth running of a kitchen session, and well-experienced volunteers will allow you to do more in the kitchen. One volunteer can take charge of a recipe, and support one group of children as

they prepare it. If you have 4-5 volunteers you can achieve more with the children than if you have only 1 or 2. Try to create good communication lines with your volunteers so you know if they are going to be away, and you can adjust your recipes accordingly.

Repeating skills and recipes

It is perfectly acceptable to repeat recipes occasionally, as most students will need to practice basic cooking skills several times. You can keep this interesting for the students by varying your menus.

If you have a roster of classes coming fortnightly (which is the most common timetabling for most schools) then we recommend you keep the recipes and menu the same for the whole fortnight. This will help to minimize your preparation and shopping time, and allow you to perfect the class. If it goes well, make a note for the following year to repeat it!



Creating a Menu

There are a few additional considerations when combining 2-3 recipes to make the menu for each session.

Recipes should go together on the plate

When combining recipes make sure the recipes suit each other and go together on the plate. Some dishes require other recipes to go with

them. For example, soup is nicer with bread, dips need crudité or flatbread to dip into them, a curry or stirfry might need rice to go alongside. The side dish can be prepared by a group of students and also provides valuable, repeatable skills.

Learning how to make a basic flatbread, which can happily accompany so many other dishes, is a wonderful skill and is a cheap and delicious way of extending a meal.

Balance between keeping students busy and too much to do

When starting Garden to Table Kitchen Sessions, some Kitchen Specialists worry about finishing on time and managing the students, so start with only 1 or 2 recipes per session. This is fine for the first few weeks, especially when time needs to be spent on a safety talk before cooking can start.

However, there needs to be a balance between keeping it simple, and keeping all the children

occupied and busy during the session. Unless a recipe has lots of cutting and grating, it will be unlikely to keep 15 children occupied for 60 minutes. Therefore, for most sessions, we would suggest looking at 3 recipes – one for each working group of children in the session.

With 3 recipes, you can create a great menu with a few different tastes so children will hopefully find something they really enjoy eating. It will keep students occupied and teach them how to work as a team, as each group will have responsibility for finishing their recipe.

You can vary the types of recipes groups make in difference sessions, so each group has a turn of making a salad, stirfry, flatbread, dip and baking.

Sample Menus for 4 Sessions:

WEEK	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
1	Garden	Garden	Garden	Beetroot risotto	Salad of the Imagination	Vegie Stock
3	Spinach & Red Lentil soup	Herb rolls	Salad of the Imagination	Garden	Garden	Garden
5	Garden	Garden	Garden	Kumara, spinach and chickpea salad	Mint pesto	Apple muffins
7	Flat Bread	Dahl with greens	Raita	Garden	Garden	Garden