

Everything in Good Season:

GROWING FARM TO FAMILY CARE AND EDUCATION



Meagan K. Shedd, PhD, Heidi Holoweski, Maria Distler, MSW, &
Mary Neumaier, RD

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Center for
Regional Food Systems



Acknowledgements

Meagan K. Shedd, PhD

Farm to Early Care and K-12 Education
Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems

Heidi Holoweski

Maria Distler, MSW

Mary Neumaier, RD

National Kidney Foundation of Michigan

SUGGESTED CITATION

Shedd, M.K., Holoweski, H., Distler, M., & Neumaier, M. (2023). *Everything in good season: Growing farm to early care and education*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/everything-in-good-season>

Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems and the Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Network is grateful to the Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Procurement Pilot participants for their involvement in the pilot and their tireless efforts on behalf of Michigan's youngest children.

The authors would also like to thank Andrea Weiss and Emma Beauchamp of Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems for communications guidance, Jen Anderson of Clearing Blocks Editing for copyediting, and Charli Holloway of Charli ReNae Design for design.

The Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Procurement Pilots are generously supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Association for State Public Health Nutritionists.

The ASPHN's farm to ECE grantee programs are supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of cooperative agreement number NU38OT000279 (total of \$1,435,000). Ten percent is supported by an ASPHN's farm to ECE grantee program, which is funded by the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity (DNPAO)/ National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP)/ CDC/ HHS. The contents of this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, DNPAO/NCCDPHP/CDC/HHS, or the U.S. government.

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Introduction

A child's earliest years are vitally important, something early care and education providers know all about. Children are not only developing skills across domains but also forming habits that can last for a lifetime. The adults around children help them to develop food preferences and willingness to try new foods when they are very young (Shedd et al., 2018). This can set the stage for healthy eating for the rest of their lives. With about 12 million children under the age of five cared for outside of the home (Child Care Aware, 2019), the value of early care and education programs to provide quality learning environments and food for the young children in their care is essential.

WHAT IS FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION?

Farm to early care and education (ECE) is an approach that ECE programs take to support the children and families they serve. Farm to ECE is a group of strategies and activities that increase access to healthy local foods and provide gardening opportunities and education about food, nutrition, and agriculture (Riemer Bopp et al., 2022). These three activities are considered the “core elements” of farm to ECE and commonly overlap. For example, ECE providers who garden with young children are also obtaining food for their site and teaching young children about how food is grown.

Farm to ECE is appealing because it can be used in any type of early care and education setting, including childcare centers, family childcare homes, Head Start and Early Head Start, and preschools housed in K-12 school districts.

WHY FARM TO ECE?

Farm to ECE is one way to teach children how food is grown. They learn about the nutritional value of the things they eat and develop healthy eating habits that they carry into adulthood. When children visit farms, orchards, and markets during field trips or enjoy visits from chefs, farmers, or ranchers, they develop an understanding of community food systems. Tasting of local foods can be used across content areas and support learning in literacy, math, science, and social studies to help meet early learning guidelines.

Farm to ECE has other far-ranging benefits:

- Increasing access to locally grown, affordable, healthy food for children and families.
- Keeping money in the local economy—an important investment—by purchasing from local farmers and food producers.
- Reducing travel miles of the food supply, which has a positive environmental impact.

From the perspective of the early care and education provider, farm to ECE can also be another way to document how early care and education programs meet performance standards—especially as activities that are considered “farm to ECE” are already happening across the early childhood content areas. By using a common language to share what is happening in the early care and education setting, sites can share how they are meeting performance standards based on what is taking place in their program every day.

Childcare providers often start with educational farm to ECE activities to help meet early learning standards. These activities can include field trips to farms and farmers markets or having farmers visit classrooms and bring different fruits and vegetables for tasting demonstrations.

Meals and snacks are opportunities for children to learn about where food comes from, build their vocabularies, and develop cognitive skills.

Children can also develop literacy skills from reading books about local foods and farms or creating their own stories after farm or farmers market visits. Reading recipes together is another great way to support literacy and cognitive skill development.

As children try new foods, it can help them develop social and emotional skills by experiencing foods that they might like and enjoy for a lifetime. Similarly, gardening activities can support children in developing large and fine motor skills, social and emotional skills, and encourage literacy and cognitive development. There is no limit to the ways in which farm to ECE can support the development of young children!

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Many resources and guides about farm to ECE are intended to be applicable across childcare settings. This guide was specifically written for family-based childcare providers caring for smaller groups of children within their homes. It contains experiences and insights from other family-based providers about implementing farm to ECE within their settings.



“We all are learning so much.”

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

The guide is set up by season with sections for the three core elements of farm to ECE: obtaining local food for meals and snacks, gardening, and nutrition education. However, many family-based childcare providers shared that they think about these core elements as overlapping rather than individual activities. Each “season” contains text boxes intended to help integrate all three aspects of farm to ECE to reflect provider feedback.

LOCAL PURCHASING

Local purchasing, also called “procurement,” can be done in several ways. Early care and education providers shared that they most frequently obtain local foods at grocery stores or local retail outlets, direct from farmers markets, through onsite or community gardens, and directly from individual farmers or food producers (Riemer Bopp et al., 2022). Many states have websites that can help connect early care and education providers with local farmers and food producers, including the state’s department of agriculture.

TIPS FOR SOURCING LOCAL FOOD:

- **Start small, choosing one or two products you use regularly.**
- **Introduce new foods with tasting demonstrations or at snack.**
- **Use Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funds to purchase local foods.**
- **Celebrate local foods through special events like Harvest of the Month or the Great Lakes Apple Crunch!**
- **Check out the resource page for finding local products.**

Another national website listing farms, farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and other food options is [Local Harvest](#). Simply indicate the type of local food sourcing and your location.

A CSA program connects farmers and local consumers directly. Farmers sell their products to customers within the farm's community, and customers pay in advance to receive a share (e.g., a box of produce) of the upcoming harvest. Then produce is picked up, often weekly, during the harvest season. This model supports farmers directly by limiting extra costs and strengthening community relationships with the farm.

When buying locally, it can feel overwhelming to try to do everything at once. Instead, try starting with one or two products that you know you can reliably find locally. Introducing new foods with tasting demonstrations before incorporating them into the regular menu can also be helpful. Special events like [Harvest of the Month](#) can help children learn more about local fruits and vegetables as they try new foods or recipes containing those foods. Another idea for local purchasing is special events like the [Great Lakes Apple Crunch](#), which can be a fun way to add local products to your early care and education setting.

FUNDING FARM TO ECE

One of the most-shared barriers to farm to ECE of providers is cost. However, purchasing local foods, gardening with young children in your care, or providing nutrition and agriculture education activities does not have to stretch your budget. More importantly, ECE sites can use existing funding sources such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to help pay for some of these expenses.

The CACFP is a type of [federal assistance program](#) that provides reimbursement to early care and education, adult care, and after-school programs. Participating programs must serve meals and snacks that meet federal nutrition guidelines and must follow procurement practices, such as documenting prices or requiring public requests for bids. However, home-based providers are not required to follow procurement practices.

Home-based providers who participate in CACFP can use CACFP funds to purchase local foods and gardening and nutrition supplies as long as they follow the guidance outlined in the [Allowable Use of Grant Funds](#). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages this practice, as shared in a 2015 [memo](#):

The incorporation of local food and agricultural education into CACFP can play an important role in creating and promoting a healthy environment. There is a well-established and growing public interest in supporting local and regional food systems by purchasing these foods and incorporating agricultural-based curriculum and activities into early childhood education and care. Program administrators and partners are therefore encouraged to use local food to enhance CACFP operations.

Providers interested in participating in CACFP can [contact their state agency](#) to learn more.

Growing Farm to ECE at Your Site

Winter

Planning in the Garden (December–March)

Planning for the upcoming season during the winter is a great way to connect children to the early steps of having a garden! During meals, talk to the children about what they are eating and if that fruit or vegetable is something they would like to grow in the spring. Consider whether your garden can grow those items, and order seeds (if available). Winter is the best time for ordering seeds. Planning a garden can help children develop their problem-solving skills and deepen their connection to observation, numbers, patterns, and symbols.



Purchasing in Season

Purchase these winter products locally from a farmer, farmers market, or food hub, or look for signs at your grocery store indicating they source from local farmers:

Winter Seasonal Items

- Beets
- Cabbage
- Collards
- Frozen berries
- Kale
- Maple syrup
- Onions
- Potatoes
- Pumpkins
- Spinach
- Winter squash



Cooking

LOCAL HARVEST BAKE

MAKES
6
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
20
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
25
MINUTES

CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

A half cup serving equals a half cup of vegetables
($\frac{3}{8}$ cup red/orange vegetable, $\frac{1}{8}$ cup other vegetable).



Recipe and Photo Source: [Institute of Child Nutrition, n.d.](#)

INGREDIENTS

2 cups (8 oz.) fresh butternut squash, peeled and cubed

2 cups (8 oz.) fresh beets, peeled and cubed

2 cups (8 oz.) fresh sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed

1 tbsp. olive oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. Kosher or iodized salt

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. fresh garlic, minced

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried parsley (optional)

Nonstick cooking spray

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 °F.
2. Toss butternut squash, beets, sweet potatoes, olive oil, salt, and garlic in a medium-size mixing bowl.
3. Line a 9" x 13" baking dish with a layer of parchment paper. Spray lightly with nonstick cooking spray. Add vegetables to dish and spread evenly.
4. Bake for 25 minutes.
5. Cook to 140 °F for at least 15 seconds.
6. Remove baking dish from oven. Garnish the vegetables with parsley (if using).
7. Serve in half cup portions (using a measuring cup or 4 oz. spoodle utensil).

SQUASH CASSEROLE

MAKES
8
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
5
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
40
MINUTES



Recipe and Photo Source: [Institute of Child Nutrition, n.d.](#)

CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

One piece equals one-half ounce of meat alternate and one-quarter cup of vegetables

INGREDIENTS

Nonstick cooking spray

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh onion, peeled, $\frac{1}{4}$ " dice

1 cup zucchini, fresh, unpeeled, grated

1 cup yellow squash, fresh, unpeeled, grated

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. parsley, dried

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. oregano, dried

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. table salt

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. black pepper, ground

1 egg, whole large

2 tbsp. skim milk

$\frac{1}{4}$ oz. shredded reduced-fat sharp cheddar cheese

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 °F.
2. Lightly coat a medium baking dish (8" x 8") with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.
3. Spray a medium skillet with nonstick cooking spray and heat over medium-high heat.
4. Add onions and sauté for three minutes or until soft. Stir frequently.
5. Add zucchini and yellow squash. Sauté for five minutes. Stir frequently.
6. Add parsley, oregano, salt, and pepper; stir. Continue cooking until zucchini and yellow squash begin to lightly brown, about five minutes. Remove from heat.
7. In a small bowl, whisk egg and milk together.
8. Place sautéed vegetables in baking dish. Top with egg and milk mixture and gently stir. Be sure to keep vegetables spread evenly on the bottom of the pan.
9. Sprinkle cheese evenly on top of mixture.
10. Bake uncovered for 20 minutes. Critical Control Point: Heat to 160 °F or higher for at least seconds.
11. Cut pan into six pieces.
12. Serve one piece.



INVOLVING CHILDREN IN COOKING

Younger children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Wipe up counters and tabletops.
- Help with dough and cookie cutters.

Older children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Use a peeler on washed fruits and vegetables.
- Break eggs into a separate bowl, washing hands after.

Engaging in Activities

PLANNING OUR GARDEN

Originating Idea

Children are more likely to participate in garden-based activities and eating if they have personal connection to the foods being grown. Engaging children in the planning process will expose them to a wide variety of foods and vocabulary. Children will also share preferences and cultural connections with their selection of food items.

Materials

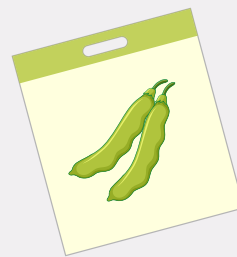
- Seed catalogs (free to request online)
- Stickers (round label/whatever is on hand)
- Chart paper or posterboard
- Marker

Activity

Introduce the idea of planning for the spring garden to children by reflecting on what was grown last year (if applicable) or what their favorite fruits and vegetables are to eat.

Hand each child a seed-ordering catalog with stickers, which they can add to any item they would like to grow. While they look at the pictures, ask questions about the items they are selecting and read the names of the seed varieties out loud when they add stickers to them. Write down the items they share using the marker and paper, creating a quick table.

Once they have explored the catalogs and you have written down their suggestions have them vote on which foods they would like to grow. Ask the children to raise their hands and vote for the items they would like to grow. Then, tally the votes and order seeds (when relevant) for the items that were most popular. Once seeds arrive, use the packets to continue the excitement and learning by reading and organizing the seeds.



MINI MAPLE SYRUP MAKERS

(ADAPTED FROM *CULTIVATING JOY AND WONDER, SHELBURNE FARMS PROJECT SEASONS FOR EARLY LEARNERS*)

Originating Idea

Children role-play the maple syrup-making process and build connections between the natural and physical world. This activity introduces the early scientific process with observing, classifying, and experimenting. It also offers opportunities to share culturally inclusive and Indigenous practices.

Materials

- *Maple Moon* by Connie Brummel Crook
- Brown paper or brown paper bags, cut lengthwise
- Masking tape
- String and canisters for “sap” buckets (clean, empty coffee or soup cans work well)
- Crumpled-up red and orange construction paper or tissue paper for simulated fire
- Ladles
- Large pot
- Funnels
- Cardboard box “stove”
- Empty plastic bottles, gloves, and aprons (if available)
- Multiple varieties of maple syrup grades (for tasting)

Activity

Read *Maple Moon* by Connie Brummel Crook to learn how Michigan’s Indigenous peoples, the Anishinaabe and Algonquin, gathered sap to make maple syrup and sugar and continue to do so to this day. Explain that the classroom is set up as a sugar house, just as in the book.

Create four stations: a tree-tapping area, a boiling area, a bottling station, and a tasting area.

For the tree-tapping area, tape brown paper to walls (a brown paper bag cut up the sides can become a tree trunk and taped to the wall). Wash out empty coffee cans or soup cans, tie string around them to create sap buckets, and place buckets on the floor in front them. Slowly add water to each bucket to simulate the flow of maple sap.

For the boiling area, create a wood stove using a cardboard box and red and orange construction or tissue paper to “start the fire” and reduce the sap into syrup. Ask children to carefully combine all “sap” into bucket (pour the smaller cans into the pot) and take turns stirring while it “reduces.”

For the bottling station, use ladles and bottles to scoop the “syrup” into bottles.

For the tasting area, set out small cups of different types of maple syrup for children to try or to dip into with apple slices.

Spring

Planning in the Garden (April–June)

Plant cold hardy crops in April and May for an early summer harvest.

During April, you can plant the following from transplants:

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Collards
- Kale

During May, you can plant the following from transplants:

- Basil
- Eggplant
- Peppers
- Tomato

Between April and June, you can plant the following from seed:

- Beets
- Carrots
- Cilantro
- Head lettuce
- Peas
- Radish
- Spring mix



Starting Your Garden for the Season

Spring is the perfect time to get children outside and in the garden! To start your garden, use 50/50 compost and topsoil for any new garden beds you are establishing or add a few inches of compost over top any existing beds to boost nutrients for the growing season. Add air to the soil using a digging fork. Break up any large clumps of dirt and smooth soil to a flat, even surface prior to planting. When children participate in the act of planting seeds and plants, it helps them make early math connections, deepen vocabulary, and develop fine motor skills.

Purchasing in Season

Purchase these spring products locally from your local farmer, farmers market, food hub, or look for signs at your grocery store indicating they source from local farmers:

Spring Seasonal Items

- Asparagus
- Beets
- Carrots
- Collards
- Herbs (dill and cilantro)
- Kale
- Lettuce
- Peas
- Spinach
- Strawberries



Cooking

EASY KALE CHIPS

MAKES
8
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
5
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
40
MINUTES



Recipe and Photo Source: [Michigan Fitness Foundation, n.d.](#)

CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

A one-quarter cup serving equals one-quarter cup of vegetables.

INGREDIENTS

Kale, one head or bunch (two cups of raw greens makes about one-half cup cooked)

1 tbsp. olive oil

Salt, to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Rinse kale. Remove and discard the ribs and stems.
2. Tear into bite-sized pieces. Pat dry.
3. Massage kale gently with olive oil until all leaves are shiny.
4. Sprinkle with salt.
5. Spread on a baking sheet. Do not overlap leaves. Bake at 250° F for 20 minutes. Flip leaves and bake another 15–20 minutes or until kale is crisp but not brown or burned.

GINGERED CARROTS

MAKES
6
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
5
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
15
MINUTES



Recipe and Photo Source: [Institute of Child Nutrition, n.d.](#)

CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

A one-quarter cup serving equals one-quarter cup of vegetables.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups water

2 cups fresh carrots, peeled and sliced diagonally

1 tbsp. honey

1 tsp. fresh lemon juice, squeezed with seeds removed, or bottled lemon juice

1 tsp. parsley, dried (optional)

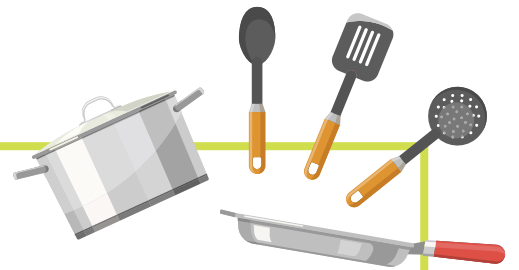
1 tsp. margarine, unsalted, trans-fat free

½ tsp. fresh ginger, grated

⅛ tsp. table salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Add one to two inches of water to a small stockpot with a steamer basket or a double boiler. Bring water to a rolling boil.
2. Add carrots to the steamer basket or double boiler and cook until carrots are tender but not mushy, nine to 10 minutes. Heat to 140 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
3. Prepare ginger glaze while carrots are cooking by combining the remaining ingredients in a medium mixing bowl.
4. Pour the carrots into the ginger glaze and stir until honey and margarine melt.
5. Serve one-quarter cup.



INVOLVING CHILDREN IN COOKING

Younger children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Wipe up counters and tabletops.
- Brush ingredients with oil.
- Mix batter or add ingredients.

Older children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Use a peeler on washed fruits and vegetables.
- Clean up after the meals and throw trash away.
- Set the table.

Engaging in Activities

BEAN PLANT DRESS-UP

(HOYLER & WELLINGS, 2014)

Originating Idea

Children can discover parts of the plant through this activity, learning that each part of the plant has a unique and supporting role. This activity involves dramatic play and creative expression to support social-emotional development and create a connection to the natural and physical world.

Materials

- *The Big Yellow Sunflower* by Frances Barry
- Two large paper leaves cut from construction paper, newsprint, or grocery bag
- White paper petals cut from regular printer paper and strung into a necklace using tape, hole punches, and yarn
- Large paper green beans cut from long, thin ovals of green construction paper or green cloth, such as a green T-shirt or sweatshirt
- Clothes pin
- Straws looped through a string



Activity

Introduce the activity by reading *The Big Yellow Sunflower* by Frances Barry.

Fill your class with various plants, flowers, herbs, or vegetables for the children to observe.

On outdoor walks at your ECE, observe plants including grass, trees, weeds, or whatever is growing. Begin conversation about plants by asking children what they see, feel, and smell about these plants. What do they notice is similar among the various plants? What is different? Can they identify some parts of plants?

Ask for a volunteer who would like to be turned into a bean plant.

Building on the children's observations of the plants, ask for suggestions about how a plant grows, or how a seed turns into a plant. Leaves, roots, and stem might be a few suggestions.

As children offer responses, such as roots, tie straws that have been attached to string around the volunteer's ankles to represent the roots that stabilize the plant and suck up moisture from the soil, explaining what the straws represent and what they do. The child's legs will represent the plant stem, which moves food and nutrients throughout the plant as it stabilizes the plant.

Place a green cloth or paper leaves over the child's arms. These represent the first true leaves of a young plant.

The volunteer's head makes the perfect stigma—the center of a flower. The petal necklace can be placed around the child's neck to complete the plant's flower.

Explain that the flower needs to be pollinated to produce a bean. Have another child approach the flowers and pretend to be a bee after pollination. Explain that the flower needs to fall off (take the flower off) and beans will start to grow. Gently place "beans" on the volunteer.

Continue to explain to children that as the bean grows, it develops seeds. These seeds can be eaten or saved for planting next spring!

Engage in a conversation guided by these discussion questions:

- What are the different parts of the plant?
- What do the different parts of plants do?
- How do other plants grow?
- Where can you find seeds in other plants?



“The children absolutely LOVE it and it's been such a wonderful addition to our days.”

WORM DELIGHT!

(HOYLER & WELLINGS, 2014)

Originating Idea

Children will demonstrate an understanding of the life cycle as they are introduced to early STEM concepts, including observing, classifying, experiments, and engaging with the natural world with this activity.

Materials

- *Wiggling Worms at Work* by Wendy Pfeffer
- Purchase or dig up red wiggler worms
- Wet rag to help worms stay hydrated
- Magnifying glasses
- Trays (cookie sheets with wax paper work for this activity)
- Popsicle sticks
- Spray bottles
- Flashlights (if available)
- Writing materials (paper/journals and pencils or other writing materials)

Activity

Place worms on trays; cover them with a wet rag so they don't dry out. Set out several Popsicle sticks to move the soil and worms.

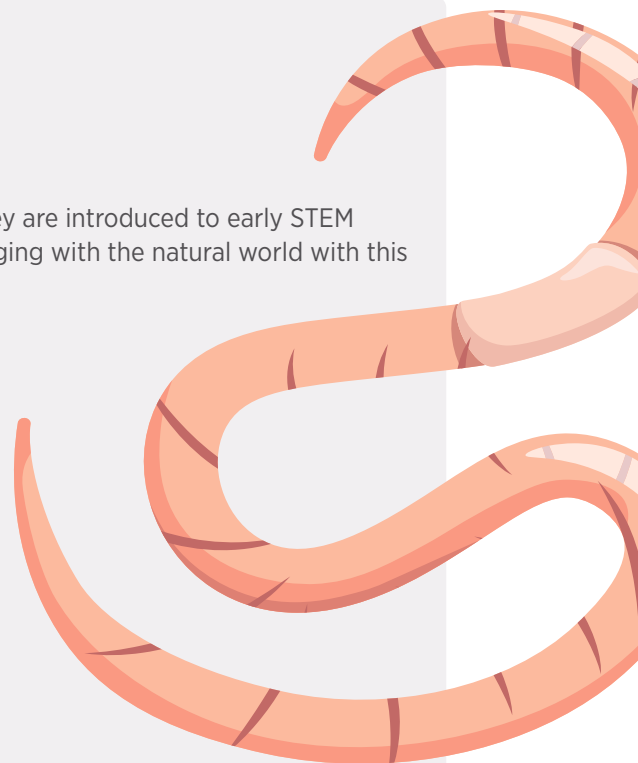
Read *Wiggling Worms at Work* by Wendy Pfeffer to the children and discuss the role worms play in helping our gardens. Ask children, "Who has seen worms? Where did you find them? What were they doing?" Explain that everyone will have the opportunity to observe worms and look closely at them and learn about the worm's body. Encourage them to be gentle and move the soil and worms with care.

Have children share observations of their worms aloud and draw or write about them in their journals. Give them flashlights and spray bottles to see how the worms react to the new elements, reminding them to be gentle with the worms.

Process and reflect on the experience with the children in a conversation guided by these discussion questions:

- What did you notice?
- How did the worms respond to light and water?
- Name three words you would use to describe your worms.
- What are you still wondering about?

Extend the learning by looking for earthworms during walks or in the yard. Encourage children to write down their observations after walks or in the yard as well.



Summer

Planning in the Garden (June–July)

During these months, you can plant the following from seed:

- Corn
- Cucumber
- Green beans
- Pumpkin
- Watermelon
- Winter squash
- Zucchini

Summertime is when the garden is in full swing, and tasks are plentiful. Having clear and simple garden rules can help children understand their role within the garden and how they can contribute. Responsibilities such as watering, hunting for pests, pulling weeds, or harvesting give children a sense of ownership of their food, deepen their empathy, and increase the likelihood of consumption of fruits or vegetables. Finding a volunteer or garden champion can help share the workload that a midsummer garden requires. Involving families in the garden as volunteers can also increase family engagement at home and help with some of the tasks necessary to keep a garden going.



Starting Your Garden for the Season

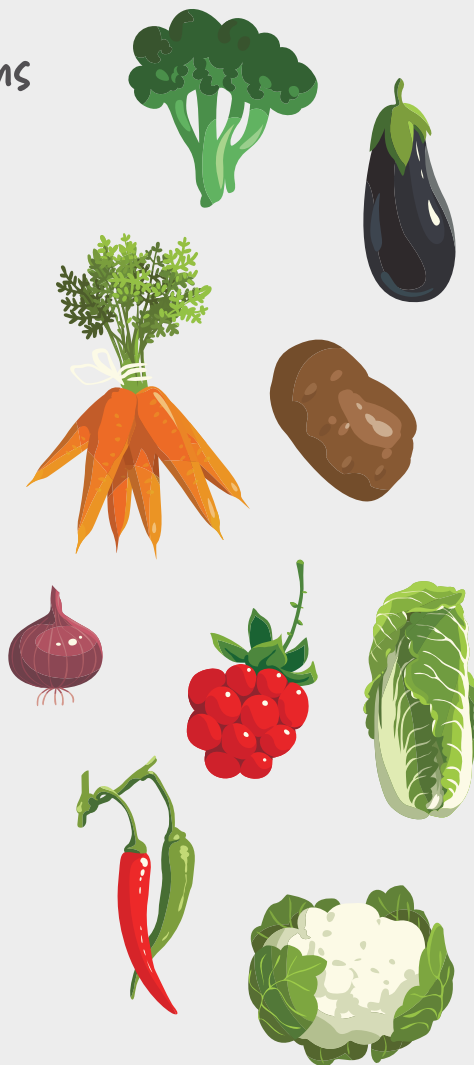
Spring is the perfect time to get children outside and in the garden! To start your garden, use 50/50 compost and topsoil for any new garden beds you are establishing or add a few inches of compost overtop any existing beds to boost nutrients for the growing season. Add air to the soil using a digging fork. Break up any large clumps of dirt and smooth soil to a flat, even surface prior to planting. When children participate in the act of planting seeds and plants, it helps them make early math connections, deepen vocabulary, and develop fine motor skills.

Purchasing in Season

Purchase these summer products locally from your local farmer, farmers market, food hub, or look for signs at your grocery store indicating they source from local farmers:

Summer Seasonal Items

- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Collards
- Edible flowers
- Eggplant
- Herbs
- Kale
- Lettuce
- Onions
- Peppers
- Potatoes
- Raspberries



Cooking

**EVERYTHING BAGEL CUCUMBER**

MAKES
6
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
5
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
0
MINUTES

**CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information**

One-quarter cup of vegetables.

Recipe and Photo Source: Cassie Dulock,
personal communication, n.d.

INGREDIENTS

1 medium cucumber

Everything bagel seasoning

DIRECTIONS

1. Peel and slice cucumber.
2. Sprinkle everything bagel seasoning over the cucumber slices.
3. Serve.

CORN, ZUCCHINI, AND TOMATO PIE

MAKES
6
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
5
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
25
MINUTES



Recipe and Photo Source: [Institute of Child Nutrition, n.d.](#)

CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

One piece provides one-quarter cup of vegetables.

INGREDIENTS

Nonstick cooking spray

1 cup fresh zucchini, unpeeled, sliced ½" thick

1 cup fresh tomatoes, sliced ½" thick

¾ cup frozen corn, whole kernel, thawed

1 tsp. lemon juice, squeezed with seeds removed, or bottled lemon juice

1 tsp. fresh dill weed, chopped

⅛ tsp. table salt

¼ tsp. ground black pepper

3 tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese

¼ cup whole wheat breadcrumbs

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 °F.
2. Lightly coat a medium baking dish (8" x 8") with nonstick cooking spray.
3. Place zucchini slices in the bottom of the baking dish, cover with tomato slices, and top with corn.
4. Sprinkle lemon juice evenly over vegetables.
5. Make seasoning mixture: In a small bowl, mix dill, salt, black pepper, Parmesan, and breadcrumbs.
6. Sprinkle seasoning mixture evenly over vegetables and lightly spray with nonstick cooking spray.
7. Cover with foil and bake for 25 minutes or until zucchini is tender. Heat to 140 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
8. Cut into six even pieces. Serve one piece.



INVOLVING CHILDREN IN COOKING

Younger children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Wipe up counters and tabletops.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with cool water.
- Carry unbreakable items to the table.
- Wash and tear lettuce and salad greens.

Older children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Use a peeler on washed fruits and vegetables.
- Take seeds out of fruits or vegetables with a spoon.
- Cut herbs, fruits, and vegetables with child or safety cooking scissors.
- Shuck corn.



“Our garden is up and going!”



Engaging in Activities

FARMERS MARKET ADVENTURE

(HOYLER & WELLINGS, 2014)

Originating Idea

Children will be aware of different types of produce and products that farms grow and sell. This activity builds connections with the community and how their food is grown.

Materials

- *Farmers Market* by Paul Brett Johnson

Activity

Read *Farmers Market* by Paul Brett Johnson and discuss how some families have a job selling produce at farmers markets. Ask if anyone has been to a farmers market. Talk about what they saw and what they bought. Research farmers markets in your community and talk to the children about their locations.

Connect with families to plan to visit a local farmers market. As a group/class, discuss what might be available this time of year. Talk about the things they might see, hear, or smell at the market such as trucks, herbs, and a variety of fruits and vegetables. Discuss making a recipe from what you find at the market. Create a scavenger hunt based on their suggestions!

Attend a market! Divide the children into small groups and give a scavenger hunt list to each group. Have plenty of chaperones so the small groups will be able to go off and explore the market. Determine a time and place to reconnect before heading off.

After the exploration, discuss what they saw, smelled, and heard, and make sure all ingredients were purchased for your class recipe.

Extend the learning by making the recipe from the farmers market as a group (simple recipes are encouraged) or create a “farmers market” in your dramatic play area using baskets and signs of fruits and vegetables.

Process and reflect on the experience using these discussion questions:

- What did you see, hear, and smell at the market?
- What surprised you about the market?
- What do you think was missing from the farmers market?
- What else do farmers sell that you didn't expect?
- How else do farmers sell their produce and products?



COMMUNITY POTLUCKS

Originating Idea

Children can demonstrate an understanding of their own home culture and its value. Children can cultivate an appreciation for the culture and contributions of other children and discover new foods, traditions, and friendships.

Materials

- Access to a kitchen with heating and refrigeration capabilities for storing and serving potluck style meals

Activity

Begin a conversation with children about the foods they eat at home with their families. You may have them draw or write about the kinds of foods they eat at home; do some play cooking, serving, and eating meals; and lead a discussion.

Ask children what foods they eat with their families or others in their home and how they could share those foods from their “home families” with people from their “school family.” If the children are unfamiliar with the idea of a potluck, introduce the idea.

Work with the children to organize the potluck. First, find a space large enough for the children and their families and establish a date and time to hold the potluck. Think about outdoor spaces with shelter that are free and easy to access with plenty of seating. Create and send invitations to families and the community, if appropriate. If there is surplus in your garden, ask the children to help think of recipes and foods that can be made in the classroom and easily transported to the location. Look for donations from local restaurants, grocery stores, and other gardens, if possible.

Identify adults who can help serve and organize the potluck. Children can help prepare food ahead of time, decorate the space, and help with setup, but you will also need plenty of adults!

Host the potluck!

Reflect on the experience with the children by engaging in a conversation using these discussion questions:

- What foods did you try at the potluck?
- What surprised you about the foods that were served?
- What did you enjoy most about the community potluck?



Fall

Planning in the Garden (July–mid-October)

Plant cold hearty crops in mid-July for a fall harvest.

From transplants:

- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Kale
- Onions
- Potatoes

From seed:

- Beets
- Carrots
- Cilantro
- Garlic (plant in October)
- Green beans
- Head lettuce
- Peas
- Spring mix
- Radish



Putting your Garden to Bed for the Winter

It's time to gather your harvest and remove all annual plants and weeds from your garden beds. Harvest time is always a hit with children, so allow them to help collect, sort, and wash your end-of-the-year bounty. Once your harvest is complete, include children in the process of pulling out all annual plants (e.g., tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, etc.). Place all vegetation into yard bags or into a compost pile. By removing the annual plants, you are decreasing the spread of disease and pests for the following season. Because all plants are being eaten or removed from the beds, there is no need to worry about plants breaking or getting stepped on. Plus, the end-of-the-season harvest and clean out is great for both fine and gross motor development. Just have fun, use those muscles, and get dirty!

The final step in putting your garden to bed is to add a layer of nutrients that feed and protect your soil over the winter. Layer a few inches of leaves, straw, or cardboard over all growing areas—an activity fun for all ages!

Purchasing in Season

Purchase these products locally from your local farmer, farmers market, food hub, or look for signs at your grocery store indicating they source from local farmers:

Fall Seasonal Items

- Apples
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Collards
- Eggplant
- Green beans
- Kale
- Onions
- Pears
- Peppers
- Potatoes
- Pumpkins
- Tomatoes
- Winter squash



Cooking



CHICKPEAS AND TOMATOES

MAKES
6
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
5
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
25
MINUTES



CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

One-half cup provides legume as a meat alternative (one and one-half ounce of meat alternative and one-quarter cup of vegetable) or legume as five-eighths of a cup of vegetable).

Recipe and Photo Source: [Institute of Child Nutrition, n.d.](#)

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 tsp. canola oil | 2½ cups canned garbanzo beans (chickpeas), drained and rinsed (or dry garbanzo beans, cooked) |
| ¼ cups fresh onion, peeled, ¼" dice | 3 cups canned low-sodium diced tomatoes with juices |
| 2 cloves fresh garlic, minced (1 clove is about ½ tsp. minced) | ¼ cup water |
| ½ tsp. fresh ginger, grated (¼ tsp. ginger, ground) | ½ tsp. chili powder |
| | 1½ tsp. cumin, ground |

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat oil in a small stockpot on medium-high heat.
2. Add onions and sauté until soft. Do not brown.
3. Add the garlic and ginger. Stir until fragrant.
4. Add the garbanzo beans (chickpeas), tomatoes with juices, water, chili powder, and cumin. Continue cooking on medium-high heat and bring to a boil.
5. Reduce heat to medium and simmer uncovered for 10 minutes or until there is only enough liquid to cover the bottom of the pan. Heat to 140 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
6. Serve one-half cup.

COLLARD GREENS

MAKES
6
SERVINGS

PREP TIME:
10
MINUTES

COOK TIME:
20
MINUTES



Recipe and Photo Source: [Institute of Child Nutrition, n.d.](#)

CACFP Home Childcare Crediting Information

A one-third cup serving equals one-quarter cup of vegetables.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp. turkey bacon, cooked and chopped (about one slice)

½ cup fresh onion, peeled, ¼" diced

2 quarts fresh collard greens, leaves only, chopped

1 cup water

¼ tsp. liquid smoke (optional)

Nonstick cooking spray

DIRECTIONS

1. Coat a medium stockpot with nonstick cooking spray and heat over medium heat.
2. Heat bacon for three to four minutes, until lightly brown, stirring frequently.
3. Increase heat to medium high. Add onions and sauté until soft.
4. Add collard greens. Sauté for one to two minutes, stirring continuously, until greens begin to wilt.
5. Add water to stockpot, cover, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium. Simmer for five to seven minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in liquid smoke (optional). Remove from heat when greens are tender. Heat to 140 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
6. Serve one-third cup.



INVOLVING CHILDREN IN COOKING

Younger children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Wipe up counters and tabletops.
- Help with the recipe, including talking about what they like and offering suggestions for substitutions.
- Suggest new recipes to try.

Older children can:

- Handwash with warm soapy water while singing “Happy Birthday” for 20 seconds.
- Use a peeler on washed fruits and vegetables.
- Beat eggs.
- Mash fruits and vegetables.

Engaging in Activities

HARVESTING WITH THE SENSES

Originating Idea

Children are more likely to try foods that they have engaged with in the process of growing, harvesting, and preparing. Children will learn how to recognize when a food is ripe and ready to be picked. This activity is ideal for any harvest of the growing season.

Materials

- *It's Harvest Time* by Jean McElroy or *Strega Nona's Harvest* by Tomie dePaola
- Harvesting buckets
- Clean hands

Activity

Introduce the concept by reading harvest-related books such as *It's Harvest Time* by Jean McElroy or *Strega Nona's Harvest* by Tomie dePaola. If the books are unavailable, harvest a few items that will likely be ripe when the children are harvesting for a pre-garden “show and tell.”

Have the children hold the examples and ask questions that encourage the use of their five senses:

- What does the vegetable smell like?
- What does it feel like in your hand?
- What colors are on this plant?



Explain that today is a harvest day and that they will be picking the ripe food that is ready to eat. With harvest buckets in hand, tour the garden together for a five-senses harvest, where they smell, look, listen, feel, and taste (when appropriate) to see if any of the food looks like the ripe ones they saw earlier.

Show the children how to pick each plant and allow them to take turns harvesting or filling each basket. Have children return to the original circle and showcase what they gathered from the garden. Discuss the range of colors in their harvest and why it's important to eat a wide array of colorful foods. Continue with more open-ended questions such as:

- What do all your foods have in common? What are the differences?
- What helped you decide which foods were ripe and ready to be picked?
- What did you notice about the foods that were not ripe yet?

GOODNIGHT, GARDEN

(HOYLER & WELLINGS, 2014)

Originating Idea

Children will be able to demonstrate an awareness of the plant's life cycle. This activity encourages the development of gross motor skills, body awareness, and problem solving.

Materials

- A garden bed, ideally a vegetable garden, but any flower garden or container bed will work.
- A nearby community garden or family member's garden can also work.

Activity

Explain that you are going to "put the garden to bed" until next spring by harvesting any food that is left and then covering up the garden with a "blanket" of leaves or hay for the winter.

Venture out to the garden and survey what is there. Locate and harvest any remaining food.

Pull the last of the plants and all weeds from the garden to put into the compost pile or yard bags.

Have children lay leaves or hay on top of the beds for the winter blanket. If you have perennial plants such as strawberries, add a few additional inches of mulch to your plants for protection

Return to the classroom and process and reflect on the experience with the children by engaging in a conversation guided by these discussion questions:

- What did we find in the garden? How many different plants can you remember?
- What else might have been here during the summer?
- Why did we take out the old dead plants?
- What will happen to the garden over the winter? What will happen next spring, summer, and fall?
- What was your favorite part of putting the garden to bed?

Resources for Providers

The resources listed below are based on ECE provider feedback and are not exhaustive.

FINDING LOCAL FOOD

- [Taste the Local Difference](#): Taste the Local Difference offers a digital directory to local farms, farmers markets, and other sources for local foods and farmers for field trips and site visits in Michigan.
- [Local Harvest](#): A national website listing farms, farmers markets, CSAs, and other food options searchable by type and location.

MENU CYCLES

- [Michigan Guide to What's in Season Now](#) from MSU Center for Regional Food Systems
- [Seasonal Cycle Menus](#) from North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
- [Iowa Farm to School Cycle Menu](#) from Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative
- [Celebrating Seasonality: Wisconsin-Grown Recipes for the Early Childhood Setting](#) from Rooted

GARDENING RESOURCES

- [Farm to School Tips for Caring for a Garden with Young Children](#) from Georgia Organics
- [Fearless Beginning: Gardening at Your Program](#) from Community Groundworks
- [Growing Minds: Farm to School](#) from ASAP
- [Garden Based Learning for Early Childhood Settings: A Guide for Educators & Caregivers](#) from Keep Growing Detroit Kids
- [Get Growing with Your Young Children](#) from Illinois Early Learning Project
- [Let's Grow Stuff](#) from PBS Wisconsin

MENU CYCLES

- [Grow It, Try It, Like It! Fun with Fruits and Vegetables at Family Child Care](#) from the USDA
- [A Guide to Using the Creative Curriculum to Support Farm to ECE Models](#) from Policy Equity Group
- [Early Sprouts Curriculum](#) from Early Sprouts Institute
- [From Our Farms](#) from Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County
- [Together We Grow Healthy Kids](#) from Northeast Iowa Food & Fitness Initiative (also available in Spanish)
- [Wisconsin Farm to ECE: Considerations for Programs Participating in YoungStar](#) from Community GroundWorks
- [Health at Home](#) from CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health)
- [Farm to ECE Resources for At-Home Activities](#) from Rooted
- [Videos for Farm to Early Care and Education \(2-5 years\)](#) from Small Bites Adventure Club
- [Cultivating Joy and Wonder: Educating for Sustainability in Early Childhood Through Nature, Food and Community](#) by Emily Hoyler and Linda Wellings, Shelburne Farms

Resources for Providers

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

The following list of resources were specifically requested by providers to share with families in support of children's overall health and wellness:

- [Food Allergy Considerations for Infants and Toddlers](#) from Healthy Eating Research
- [Reducing the Risk of Food Allergies](#) from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- [Help Me Be Healthy \(6-12 Months\)](#) from Maryland WIC
- [Developing Taste Preferences](#) from Healthy Eating Research
- [2022 Recommended Immunization for Children from Birth Through 6 Years Old](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Finding Your Way: A Roadmap to Social Systems and Resources in Wayne County](#) from the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan

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VISION

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

MISSION

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

ABOUT

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

Center for Regional Food Systems

Michigan State University
480 Wilson Road
Natural Resources Building
East Lansing, MI, 48824

foodsystems.msu.edu

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