



Cooking in the Classroom: Best Practices Guide

Leading Successful Cooking Classes

ASAP has partnered with chefs and teachers to identify key components of a bringing a successful cooking class to students. We share these tips with both the teachers and the chefs in our program.

Make Connections

As you begin planning your cooking class, ask yourself what curriculum components you would like to cover. Cooking in the classroom is only sustainable when it directly connects to lessons you are already teaching. How can you introduce information about the cooking class or its ingredients ahead of time to make it more successful? Is there a children's book you can read about an ingredient and how it is grown? Refer to ASAP's recipes for ideas on journal assignments linked to cooking classes. If you are collaborating with a chef, establish good communication with him/her and share your ideas. Talk with him/her about your expectations and goals for the cooking experience and gather the information you need to introduce the recipe and its ingredients ahead of time.

Plan and Prepare

When planning your class, choose a recipe that includes fresh ingredients you and the students can easily source. Break the recipe into clear steps and identify activities that the children can do themselves, hands-on, throughout the process. Determine what supplies will be needed for each step and gather and organize those tools. Depending on the age group you are instructing and how much time you will have with the children, you may need to ask a volunteer or parent to prep some ingredients ahead of time.

Recruit Extra Hands

Ask parents to come help with cooking classes. If parents cannot help, turn to community groups or colleges. Many community clubs and organizations, such as Kiwanis clubs, church groups, and Lions clubs, focus on helping in schools and are eager to find volunteer opportunities. You can also connect with college students through school's service learning offices. Consider ASAP a resource, too. We're connected to lots of individuals who are eager to help in the classroom. Hands-on activities are possible in the classroom when you have extra people to help with set up, supervision, and clean up.

Prepare a Back-Up Activity

Often in the cooking process, there are a few minutes when the students are waiting. One group may finish their designated activity before the others, or the entire class may be waiting for the dish to cook. To fill this time, plan an activity connected to the recipe. For example, if you are preparing a salad, give the students worksheets with a big empty bowl and ask them to draw the vegetable and ingredients they would put in their salads. Bring children's books, ask the students to illustrate the steps of the recipe, give them journal topics, etc.

Practice at Home

Before you prepare a recipe with a group of children, we recommend testing the recipe or cooking the dish at home on your own or with your children or grandchildren. Cooking the recipe will help you to determine what aspects of the project students may need guidance with and what parts of the project they can do on their own. As you prepare the recipe, think specifically about how to adapt it to children, what their challenges might be, and how to best refine the instructions to fit the age level and abilities of the students.



Clear Communication

Break it Down into Steps

With any recipe, clear and concise steps are key. As you plan and make a sample of your recipe, note the key steps and practice communicating those steps out loud. Being able to recognize and simplify the steps of a recipe is a vital component of a successful cooking class.

Use Appropriate Vocabulary

This point has two parts: 1) Do your best to explain the steps of the recipe using language familiar to the children. 2) Assume that most students will not be familiar with cooking terms. As you are reviewing your recipe, identify one or two cooking terms you can explain during the demonstration. You can print those terms and their definitions to present during the class.

Feature Local Food

Choose a recipe that features ingredients you can source locally. Tell the students where you bought the ingredients and where they can buy locally grown ingredients too. (Look for the Appalachian Grown logo at Ingles and other grocery stores, shop at your local tailgate market, etc.) You can also give out ASAP's Local food Guides or ASAP's promotional materials including, farm profiles, and farmers market schedules.

One Step Ahead

When students are working on their steps of the recipe, stay tuned to their needs through careful observation of their progress. This will help you anticipate when the children might need a suggestion, change of direction, praise, or assistance. You may notice that there is a recurring question or teachable moment. This may be a good time to stop the whole class and explain or praise what a particular student is doing.

Answering "Why?" and Telling a Story

Being able to communicate enthusiastically the "Why" behind the recipe will pique students' interests and prompt them to participate. Talk with the students about ingredients you have chosen, farms you have bought ingredients from, and the importance of healthy eating. The more the kids hear the "story" of the recipe and can connect it to their experience cooking, the more they will want to try it in the classroom and make it again at home. Is this something you cooked with your mom or grandmother? Did a neighbor give you the recipe? Who grew the food? What might the farm have looked like? Always share your enthusiasm for the recipe you are offering and how it connects to local food and healthy eating.

Recognizing Opportunities for Learning

Introduce new vocabulary, new skills, and new ideas throughout the project. Read a children's book as a part of the cooking class or develop journal activities around the experience.

Be Understanding and Encouraging

We have seen that children need to be offered a new food a number of times before they accept it. Forcing children to try new foods may only make them more resistant to tasting anything new or unusual. If a child doesn't want to try the recipe, encourage him/her to smell it or ask another student to describe how it tastes. Never draw attention to a child who does not want to sample the recipe, but gently encourage everyone to try just a taste.



Ways to Encourage Children to Have Positive Attitudes about Food

Food Preparation and Snack Time Activities are a Shared Responsibility

- Have a positive attitude toward foods and the mealtime experience. Remember, a negative attitude expressed by adults and children may influence other children to not try that food.
- Introduce new and fun ways to eat vegetables and fruits with creative recipes.
- When introducing new food to children, serve a small amount of the new food along with more popular and familiar foods.
- Include children in the food activities to encourage them to try new foods and to gain self-confidence.
- Serve finger foods. Foods cut smaller are easier for children to handle.
- Do not force a child to eat. Children often go through food jags. It is normal for a child to ask for second helpings of food one day, yet eat very lightly the next day.
- Provide a comfortable atmosphere at mealtime. Mealtime is also a social activity. Therefore, allow children to talk with others.
- Encourage children to eat food or new foods in a low-key way. For instance, read a book about a new food that will be served that day, and serve the new food at snack time when children are hungrier.
- Introduce a new food five or six times over a few weeks, instead of only once or twice. The more exposure children have to a food, the more familiar and comfortable it becomes and the more likely they will be to try the food.
- Offer the new food to a child who eats most foods. Children usually follow other children and try the food.
- Have staff eat with the children. Have them eat the same foods that have been prepared for the children.
- Do not offer food related bribes or rewards. This only reinforces that certain foods are not desirable. Respect refusals.

Caregivers are responsible for:

- What foods are offered
- When foods are offered
- Where foods are offered

Children are responsible for determining:

- What foods they eat
- How much, or even if, they eat



Tips for Cooking With Students

- Choose a recipe that includes familiar ingredients the kids and their families can find at any grocery store or tailgate market.
- Feature locally grown products. Tell the children about the farms in their area. Linking food with farms will encourage students to try new things, and will encourage them to make healthy choices.
- Pick a recipe that matches the children’s abilities and attention span.
- Print copies of the recipe so students can share it with their parents.
- Break recipes into steps, and be sure you have adequate tools for the number of children in your cooking class. Pictorial recipes are great for younger children.
- Wash your hands before getting started, and ask the students to wash their hands as well. Highlight food safety and proper handling of food and tools throughout the class.
- If the class setup allows, organize “stations” where the kids can complete different steps of the recipe. Organize the cooking tools by station. Involve the students in the preparation of the recipe.
- Give a quick (and enthusiastic) description of the recipe you will be making. Read the recipe aloud or explain what you will be doing first, second, and so on to prepare the food.
- Show the children the ingredients, and tell them something about the key components of the recipe—which farm you bought it from, why you like to cook with it, why it is good for you, etc.
- Ask the students what they know about farms. You can ask: *Has anyone ever been to a farm? What did you see there?*
- If you are working with vegetables, hold the vegetables up for everyone to see and identify the part(s) of the plants they will be eating and which parts they will be cutting off and discarding.
- Ask sensory questions like *What does this smell like? What does it look like? Does it taste bitter or sweet? Does it feel soft or rough?* Especially for younger kids, it is helpful to ask them “either-or” questions instead of open-ended ones.
- Have plenty of ingredients so that all of the kids can participate.

Tips for Selecting Recipes for Children

- Are the hands-on skills age/developmentally appropriate?
- Do you have access to needed equipment?
- Does the recipe connect with children’s interests or classroom projects?
- Does the recipe promote healthy food choices?
- Does the recipe feature seasonal and local products children can find in the garden or on a local farm?
- Is the recipe culturally relevant?
- Is the recipe affordable for all families, and does it use familiar ingredients they have at home?

Tips for Introducing Recipes to Children

- Prepare a simple recipe chart
- Have examples of ingredients in their raw form
- Read the recipe aloud, discussing each step
- Discuss rules and/or safety considerations and have children identify these for specific steps



Tips for Working with Chefs

1. When setting up a cooking class, tell the chef about food allergies in your class and any knife/open flame policies your school or classroom follows.
2. Make sure you are both clear about the time, location, and the date of the cooking demonstration. Check in with the chef several days before the demo.
3. Communicate with the chef about event logistics. What will the class set up be? Will the students be working on desks or tables? How long can the class last? If the chef arrives early to set up will he/she be disrupting anything important?
4. Talk with the chef about the recipe they will be teaching and how students will be involved. Brainstorm how the recipe might connect with aspects of your curriculum and make sure the children's participation is developmentally appropriate.
5. Tell the chef how you will prepare students for the cooking class/demonstration and communicate with him/her about what follow up will take place.
6. Ask the chef if he/she will bring recipes to send home with the children and/or provide a few recipes you may be able to cook in the classroom as a future project.
7. Ask the chef what preparations you or the students will need to complete for the cooking class or demonstration.
8. Plan on assisting during the entire cooking demonstration or class. The chef will need your help managing the students and connecting the cooking experience back to their curriculum.

If possible, recruit a parent or community member to help during the cooking class. Let the chef know how many students will be in the cooking class and how many volunteers will be there to help.



Tips for Working with Teachers

1. When setting up a cooking class, ask the teacher if any of the students have food allergies and ask about any knife/open flame policies the school or classroom follows.
2. Make sure you are both clear about the time, location, and the date of the cooking demonstration. Check in with the teacher several days before the demo.
3. Communicate with the teacher about event logistics. What will the class set up be? Will the students be working on desks or tables? How long can the class last? If you arrive early to set up will you be disrupting anything important?
4. Ask teachers how students will be prepared for the demonstration and what follow up will take place. Experiences are more memorable and meaningful if they build on each other. Ask teachers what they are currently working on in the classroom or if students have recently gone on any field trips to tie your activity into their recent experience. Being able to connect with students on common experience will give you a foot in the door and remove a one-time cooking class from isolation. If the teacher requests that you connect the cooking demonstration to a particular lesson or study topic and you need support with this, contact ASAP. We have tons of ideas and can help.
5. Let teachers know in advance what recipe you are planning so that they have the opportunity to integrate it into their classroom. Children will feel like experts when they arrive to make pumpkin soup if they have been researching pumpkins in the classroom. The broader the experience children have with healthy food, the more impact it will have on their food choices.
6. Help teachers with follow up. Give them recipes to send home with the children and also provide a few recipes they may be able to cook in the classroom as a future project. You may suggest books, field trips or activities that would complement what you introduced in a cooking class.
7. Ask the teacher to assist during the cooking demonstration or class, and give him/her a clear role, even if it's just to connect the cooking class with things the students have been studying.
8. If you feel like you'll need extra help, ask the teacher to recruit a parent or community member to help during the cooking class or call ASAP and ask us to help recruit a volunteer.



General Food Safety Tips

In general, there should be at least one adult to every eight children in a cooking demonstration (we suggest at least one to four for younger children). To achieve this, teachers should recruit a parent or volunteer to help with the cooking class. As with any activity, children tend to get excited and can be impulsive or impatient. It takes a lot of adult patience and reminding to make cooking with children a safe and enjoyable experience. Here are a few ideas about how to keep your students safe:

1. To prevent food poisoning:

- Always wash and dry hands thoroughly before cooking.
- Do not eat raw eggs.
- Wait until the food is cooked before sampling it. Do not sample uncooked foods.
- Always wash cutting boards before and after use.

2. Work with the chef to create a setup that is safe and appropriate for the children. Bring in small tables if necessary where the children can stand or kneel. Always use secure stools or chairs.

3. Tie back long hair.

4. Expect spills and messes, and clean up spills as they happen. Bring extra hand towels or paper towels to handle messes. If you expect something to be particularly messy (e.g., grating beets) make sure to bring plastic or something to protect classroom carpet and tables.

5. Keep handles of pans, pots, etc. pointed towards the center of the stove. If you are using a hot plate, keep handles pointed toward the middle of the table or counter. This will prevent the children from bumping the handle and knocking the pot off the stove.

6. If the children are using knives, the chef should teach them how to hold and handle the knives properly. Be sure an adult is closely supervising children using knives.

7. Use supplies that will not break, such as plastic measuring cups and stainless steel bowls.

8. For young children (5 or younger), use plastic knives or butter knives for spreading or cutting soft foods. Young children can use their fingers to break or tear foods rather than cutting them with a knife, and choppers are also an effective tool for this age group.

9. Provide constant supervision.

- Always watch students closely when they use knives, mixers, or other equipment.
- Closely supervise the use of ovens, stoves, and other kitchen appliances.
- Remind children that stoves, ovens, pans, and dishes can be very hot.



Safe Food Handling

Before

- If possible, arrange to use the school cafeteria. It will provide more room for the students and is easier to clean before and after the cooking demo.
- Wipe down cooking surfaces, sinks, and prep areas with a bleach solution of one part bleach to 10 parts water. Carefully pour bleach into a spray bottle and then add water. Discard any unused solution after the demo; bleach loses disinfectant power quickly when exposed to heat and sunlight. It's best to mix a new solution each time you use it. **Allow surfaces to air dry before using them.**
- Try to avoid cutting up fresh fruit and veggies until you are ready to use them. If you must prepare items ahead of time, refrigerate them until it is time to use them.
- If harvesting items from the school garden to be cooked, students and staff should wash their hands thoroughly in warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds.
- If you cook items ahead of time (rice, potatoes, etc.) keep them refrigerated until they are ready to be used.

During

- Instruct students to wash their hands with warm, soapy water before handling food. Hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds (the length of the alphabet song or two rounds of the birthday song). Use hand sanitizer after washing if desired, but not as a replacement for washing.
- Wash produce thoroughly before use.
- Instruct students to not touch their hair, face, or clothes after they wash their hands.
- Use caution with raw eggs. Break eggs into a separate container and ensure that there are no shell fragments present. Cook dishes containing eggs thoroughly.

After

- Refrigerate any cooked or cut up foods within two hours.
- Wash cooking equipment and dishes and allow to air dry. Store cooking supplies in a separate cabinet from any chemicals or cleaning supplies.



Knife Safety Tips

Before bringing knives into schools, make sure to find out the knife policy for your school. In some schools knives are not allowed. Small children should never use real knives. Instead, they can use serrated plastic knives, choppers, spoons, and even melon-ballers.

This document is to serve as a reminder of a few tips you should cover with students and children before cooking begins and throughout cooking demonstrations. By taking 3-4 minutes to cover knife safety, teachers, parents, and other supervisors will feel much more comfortable with children using knives. These are also practices the kids can continue when they are cooking on their own at home. When at all possible, have one adult supervisor present for each eight children cooking. If you establish a station where children use knives as a part of your cooking class, be sure to place the teacher or volunteer at that station. When covering these tips, demonstrate the correct and incorrect ways to handle knives. Seeing how to handle the knives will ensure that the students fully understand knife safety. These tips are a starting point. Please add other safety tips and practices you use in your own kitchen.

1. **Always cut with the blade of the knife angled down and away from you.** Sometimes this is a hard rule to follow. If the angle is wrong, the kids may need you to turn the product around or turn the cutting board around. (Demonstrate this.)
2. **Always use a cutting board.** Never cut anything that is placed in your hand, and do not cut something while holding it up in the air, as there is a greater chance of cutting yourself without a stable surface. Use the board and make sure it has ample space for the task. If your cutting board doesn't have rubber feet, keep it firmly in place by planting a damp towel or paper towel underneath to keep it from moving around the countertop.
3. **Show children how to hold knives properly** with the fingers of their dominant hand securely gripping the knife handle and the fingers of their other hand curled under as they hold the food.
4. **Never, ever grab a falling knife.** The best way to avoid a knife falling is to make sure your knife is always completely on your work surface, without the handle sticking out into traffic areas.
5. **Keep knives on the table, and never carry them around the room.**
6. **When you have a knife in hand, keep your eyes on the blade.** Nine times out of ten, when people cut themselves they do so when they are looking away from what they are cutting. The simple fact is: you're unlikely to cut yourself if you're watching the blade, especially the tip.
7. **Make a flat surface on round objects.** Before getting started, demonstrate how to make a flat surface on an object prior to cutting. If the child is young, cut the object yourself and create a flat surface before they begin. For example, a round tomato will be likely to roll and will be difficult for a child to cut. If you cut off the top or bottom to create a flat surface, the child will be able to easily handle and cut the tomato safely.
8. **Remember: graters, zesters, and peelers are sharp too.** Warn kids that they are sharp and show them how to properly hold the equipment before they get started.
9. **Hand-wash your knives and dry thoroughly.** Never put knives into the dishwasher or drop them into a sink filled with sudsy water.



Recommended Cooking Equipment

Contact us at growingminds@asapconnections.org if you would like to borrow cooking equipment.

- Large and small cutting boards
- Saucepans and large cooking pots
- Induction burner
- Colander
- Mixing bowls
- Measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Choppers
- Graters
- Peelers
- Apple slicers
- Serrated knives
- Paring knives
- Plastic knives
- Garlic press
- Tongs
- Metal spoons
- Whisk
- Metal spatula
- Rubber spatula
- Masher
- Ladle
- Funnel
- Tasting cups
- Napkins, plastic forks, spoons, paper plates and bowls
- Apple Corer/peeler
- Extension cord

When organizing a cooking class, we suggest packing enough tools for the entire class. This means bringing six or seven bowls rather than one, ten or twelve knives rather than two, etc. The equipment you need will depend on the recipe you are making with the students. However, for all of the cooking demos, we also suggest bringing the following, must-have items:

- Paper towels/clean dish towels
- Paper plates/sample cups
- Paper cups
- Plastic disposable gloves
- Hand sanitizer



Learning Integration: Connecting Cooking with Curriculum

There are many ways to bring curriculum into cooking in the classroom! You can use these objectives as a starting point for brainstorming how to integrate grade level goals into cooking activities.

Visit growing-minds.org for preK-5 recipe, garden, food, and farm lesson plans. We also offer a searchable database of farm to school themed children's literature to incorporate into your cooking classes at growing-minds.org/childrens-literature/.

English Language Arts

- Introduce new vocabulary words to students that are relevant to the recipe.
- Describe how ingredients smell, look, or taste using descriptive adjectives.
- Read and decipher a recipe.
- Write a review of the completed recipe.
- Listen actively to the recipe steps as they are explained by the teacher or chef.
- Look up a recipe for an item growing in the school garden.
- Write, compile and illustrate a collection of recipes.
- Read a book about cooking or growing the main ingredient.
- Write a letter to the farmer who grew the main ingredient for the recipe.
- Create a creative, rhyming name for the completed recipe.
- Research the main ingredient. Make sure to decipher between facts and opinions!
- Interview a grandparent about their favorite foods and recipes when they were young.

Healthful Living

- Discuss proper hand washing techniques before cooking or eating.
- Determine the food groups for each ingredient of the recipe.
- Visit the school garden or look at photos to see examples of the ingredient growing.
- Wait for all students to be served before tasting the finished recipe.
- Discuss the safe use of knives and methods to prevent injury.
- Share a food item equally with a partner.
- Write and discuss rules for cooking as a class or in small groups.
- Choose an item of food, research and report on its path from production through processing to consumption

Mathematics

- Compare quantities, sizes, weights, volume, or mass of ingredients.
- Sort ingredients by color or shape.
- Divide fruits and vegetables into equal sized pieces.
- Double or triple the ingredients in a recipe to make a larger quantity.
- Use nonstandard measurement to measure the ingredients or objects in the classroom. How many apples high are the students?



Science

- Introduce students to cooking tools and units of measure.
- Observe the properties of liquids. What happens when students combine oil and vinegar for a salad dressing?
- Observe the changes of state when an ingredient is heated, cooled, or mixed with another ingredient.
- What might happen if the unit of measurement was changed?

Social Studies

- Highlight recipes and ingredients that are unique to a particular culture.
- Share traditional family recipes that have been passed down among generations.
- Set up a market in the classroom and “purchase” or barter for ingredients.
- Discuss the history of common foods, food preservation techniques, and storage crops. What items are traditionally produced in North Carolina?
- Sample several different types of something (herbs, varieties of apples, etc.) and vote on a favorite.
- Report on the background of specific ethnic foods – where they come from, how they are grown, and how they are used

Journaling with a Cooking Class

Cooking with students presents dozens of opportunities for journaling. Give students time to write in their journals before and after the cooking class, asking them to predict something about the cooking class or reflect on what they have cooked or experienced. With successful journal prompts, you can help them get the very most from the hands-on cooking experience. Below we’ve compiled 10 journal prompts and activities that will get your students thinking creatively. We encourage you to create your own prompts directly related to the recipe you are cooking in your classroom.

Ten Writing Prompts for Cooking Classes

1. What is your favorite vegetable (or fruit)? How does it taste? What does it look like?
2. If you could design your very own pizza/soup/pie, what toppings or ingredients would it have (include at least one vegetable)? How big would it be? Who would eat it?
3. Invent and describe a new fruit that grows on a tree. How big is the tree it grows on? How big is the fruit itself? Cherry size, grapefruit size or even bigger (or smaller)? What does it taste like? When is it ripe? Winter, fall, spring, summer?
4. Invent and describe a vegetable with super powers. Does it make you have x-ray vision? Does it make you fly? What color is it? Where does it grow?
5. Imagine you are a farmer. What would you grow? Where would you live and what tools would you need?



6. Read a children's book that features a local vegetable or fruit that you are cooking with. Ask your students to imagine they are that fruit or vegetable in a garden. Where would you grow? What would you need to live? What other vegetables or fruits would be around you?
7. After the cooking class, write the ingredients of the recipe on the board. Is there any ingredient the students would add more of or take out? Ask the students to re-write the recipe with a change of their own and describe why they would make the change.
8. After the cooking class, ask your students to work in groups and write out the steps of the recipe they learned. Ask them to make a list of each group members' favorite step in the recipe. For younger grades, students can draw a picture of the step they enjoyed the most.
9. Bring several cooking tools to class. Show them to the students and pass them around the room. In their journals, ask the students to first predict how the tool is used in cooking and then to invent a new use for the tool. Younger students can draw the tool being used or you can lead the class in a group discussion on about the tools.
10. If you are cooking with apples show students a whole apple and a piece of dried apple and ask them to describe how each appears. Ask them to predict how the fresh and dried apple will taste. Give them each a bit of the farm fresh apple and dried apple to eat. Guide the students in eating the apple slowly, ask them to smell it and really look at the apple slice before they eat it. Ask them to hold it in their mouths before they chew and swallow it, paying attention to how it feels or tastes. In their journals, ask the students to list descriptive words for the fresh apple and the dried apple. Older students can predict how the apple was dried. What tools were used? How long to they imagine it took for the apple to dry? Minutes? Hours? Weeks?!