

Kids in the Kitchen

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Children can help in the kitchen in many ways, starting as early as pre-school age. How can you help your child learn his way around the kitchen? Can he learn to create safe, tasty and nutritious meals?

Knowing the capabilities of each age will help you plan the best activities for your child.

Pre-School Children

Three- and four-year-olds can help with “big muscle” activities.

They can:

- tear lettuce,
- snap beans,
- wash fruits and vegetables,
- spread soft ingredients,
- set the table (help with knives), and
- wrap foods for storing or heating in the microwave.

You can make it a great experience by:

- allowing them to work by themselves – try giving them their own bowl and spoon,
- limiting activities to 5-10 minutes,
- encouraging interest by letting them identify colors and shapes of foods as you work,
- measuring liquid ingredients in small containers so your child can pour them into a bigger bowl,
- keeping sponges close so kids can wipe up spills,
- using cookbooks with simple recipes and pictures, and
- helping them develop language skills by asking them to tell you their “recipe” for a favorite food.

Primary School-Age Children

Smaller muscles are more coordinated at this age.

Allow them to:

- shuck corn,
- peel shrimp,
- peel cooked eggs,
- roll out cookie dough,
- mash bananas, and
- mash cooked beans.

When working with children of any age, remember these tips:

Take time to show young cooks how to use different appliances and kitchen tools safely.

Demonstrate safe knife use.

Make sure your fire extinguisher works and is easily reached and operated by a child.

Help your child put together a basic step-by-step cookbook of simple menus and nutritious recipes. Keep a supply of ingredients on hand so they can help prepare these meals.

Discuss kitchen safety and cleanliness with your young cook so you will feel more confident when he uses the kitchen.

Wash hands with soap and water before cooking or eating.

Supervise young cooks.

Read recipes all the way through. Make sure you have the equipment and ingredients before you start. Follow directions exactly.

Children have short attention spans. Give them quick, simple jobs to do. Give them instructions one at a time.

They may get excited and forget a step or two. Repeat directions as often as needed.

Use a plastic cutting board, not the counter, for slicing and dicing.

Clean up as you go. Make sure everything is clean and put up when cooking and eating are finished.

Turning a child into a “celebrity chef” takes time and practice, but the rewards are worth it: you will have help in the kitchen, your family can prepare tasty meals together, and you will have a more responsible young person who is aware of nutritious food.

For more information, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.