



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Nutrition and addressing obesity are concerns that start in early childhood. According to the Hawai'i Department of Health's Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division, "obesity is an epidemic in Hawai'i...about one in every three children entering kindergarten in our state is already overweight or obese." Their report further explains that eating healthy foods is one of the main ways to prevent obesity and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

Children develop a natural preference for the foods they enjoy the most, so the challenge is to make healthy choices appealing. Children's early experiences can affect how they eat as they get older. That's why it is so important to introduce them to a variety of healthy foods from the very beginning.

To address this issue, there has been a push for "Farm to School" activities. The goal is to increase children's access to healthy, local foods and give them educational opportunities such as gardening and cooking. These Farm to School activities empower children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.

In 2011, the Farm to Keiki curriculum was developed by Tiana Kamen, MSW. This Hawai'i based resource was developed to guide caregivers in raising healthy children, by nurturing healthy habits in them as they are developing lifelong food preferences. This book includes gardening, cooking, and nature-based experiences for young children.



By using this book as a guide to provide healthy nutrition practices with the keiki you care for, you can successfully improve the health of all Hawai'i's children. This newsletter will share ideas and activities from Kamen's book for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, including:

- ♥ Healthy cooking with children
- ♥ Growing a Garden
- ♥ Eating from Farm to Table

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Infants learn about their world through their senses: touch, sight, sound, taste and smell. As a caregiver, you have the opportunity to help your child form positive relationships with both humans and the natural world around them. Creating a safe outdoor environment that offers the opportunity to explore and experiment with the natural world depends on your comfort level to encourage your child to interact with the environment and model that interaction yourself.

You may think that your child is “too young” to be involved in gardening, but as soon as he can sit up without support, he can certainly be engaged through watering, harvesting, digging and tasting. The best way to help infants benefit from a garden experience is through their senses.

Here are some ideas to engage your child’s senses. If you are concerned about mouthing, you can offer him a pacifier during this activity. Make sure to wash hands before and after gardening:

♡ Provide soil (from your yard or potting soil) in a



raised planter so he can pat the soil and feel it fall through his fingers.

- ♡ Plant herbs and crush a bit in your hand so he can smell the aroma.
- ♡ Potted plants don’t have to be confined to pots. Use items you can find around your house such as croc shoes, plastic food or drink containers, old tires. Paint them with bright colors so your child can see them.

Activity for Infants: *Table Talk – Garden to Table*

What You Need:

Nothing

What to Do:

1. Make mealtime a time of learning by including your child in mealtime conversations.
2. When he is ready to eat solid foods, talk about how different foods look, feel, smell, and taste. For example, “Your poi is purple.” “This sweet potato feels smooth.” “The papaya smells and tastes so sweet.”



! Safety Alert: Follow the recommendations of your health care provider (doctor or nurse) about introducing solid foods to your baby. To prevent choking, be careful about the texture and the size of the pieces you give him. Introduce one new food at a time to identify possible food allergies

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

According to an article from Rasmussen University, gardening is hard to beat for promoting well-rounded development in young children. Whether the garden is in pots on an apartment balcony, a community patch or right out the back door, children who engage with it are harvesting a lot more than food and flowers.

There are lots of benefits to introducing gardening to your child even from an early age. Gardening encourages him to eat healthier. It also promotes engaging, moderate exercise. For example, when your child digs, rakes and turns compost he uses a variety of muscles in his upper and lower body. It builds a sense of confidence and it relieves stress.

Remember, gardening with toddlers is all about the process. Your child may drown the plants while watering, thus creating mud, or pull up the plant in excitement before it is ready. He is learning so much throughout the process that even if the plant doesn't grow, it is still a win!



Activity for Toddlers: *Growing Sunflowers*

What You Need:

- Sunflower seeds
- Plastic cups (cardboard egg carton or recycled food containers)
- Soil
- Spray bottle
- Scoop to transfer soil to cup

What to Do:

1. Encourage your child to scoop the soil into the cup. Fill to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cup.
2. Poke 2 holes in the soil.
3. Place a seed in each hole and cover the seeds with soil.
4. Spray the soil with water (this can be done daily).
5. As the plant grows (it usually takes a few days for a small sprout to appear), talk about how the plant is growing.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



Preschoolers

Preschoolers are developing preferences for foods. It can be overwhelming for anyone to eat new foods they have never seen or tasted before. Young children learn what foods are safe to eat by experiencing them multiple times from caregivers they love and trust.

Here are some ways to introduce your child to Farm to Table ideas:

- ♥ Take a field trip to a farm or a farmers' market, and encourage your child to taste foods grown locally.
- ♥ Incorporate activities that describe how food gets from the farm to the tables by reading books, singing songs, and using props to reenact the local food system.
- ♥ Have a tasting party with assorted fruits or vegetables.



Activity for Preschoolers: *Tasting New Foods*

What You Need:

Poster board - on the top write the name of the food he will be tasting (add a picture as well). Create 4 columns with the following picture headings: Happy face, face with no expression, sad face and compost bowl

Stickers

Food cut into small bite size portions (offer a variety of healthy, colorful and appetizing fruits or vegetables)

Plates, forks

What to Do:

1. Show your child the chart and explain the faces –
 - Love it = Happy Face,
 - It's just okay = Expressionless Face,
 - Don't like it or maybe next time = Sad Face,
 - Didn't try it = Compost Bowl.
2. Have the child choose a food to taste and both of you take a bite of the food. Create an atmosphere of excitement about being adventurous in trying something new.
3. Have him place a sticker under one of the faces and encourage them to say why he made that choice by describing how it tasted. Encourage all tasters to place a sticker in the columns.
4. Repeat the process until all foods are tasted.
5. Tally the columns and compare/contrast. Which food did we like the most?

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn to use his body with intention
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to interact with others
- ♥ Develop a close bond with you

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening, and understanding skills



- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem-solving skills

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Magical Purple Unicorn Sweet Potatoes

Adapted from: Farm to Keiki; Cooking, Gardening and Nutrition with Children

Ingredients:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Sweet Potato | A pinch of salt |
| $\frac{1}{4}$ Cup Coconut Milk | Coconut flakes (Optional) |
| 1 Lemon or lime wedge | |



Directions:

1. Your child can use a vegetable brush to gently clean the potatoes and pat them dry. Talk about how this part of the plant grows under the ground.
2. Boil or steam the sweet potatoes, cool until easy to handle.
3. Your child can peel the cooked potatoes with his fingers, the back of a spoon or butter knife.
4. Using a serrated butter knife, your child can cut the potato into bite-sized pieces and put them into a bowl, mortar or poi board.
5. Mash the potatoes.
6. Measure and add in the coconut milk and pinch of salt. Mash together.
7. Your child can squeeze a small amount of lemon juice over the mash. Watch the sweet potatoes magically change color!
8. Mix and serve as-is or topped with coconut flakes

Resources

Trying New Foods

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/eating/?activity=trying-new-foods>

This short video from Sesame Street in Community encourages young children through song to try new foods. Watch this video together with your child and sing along before snacks and mealtime.

Farm to Keiki – Activities

<https://www.farmtokeiki.org/activities/>

This website is full of activities to do with your child such as Cucumber, Taro-Kalo, and Breadfruit activities.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

The Little Gardener by Jan Gerardi

This lift-the-flap book introduces tools and supplies needed to create a garden. Infants and toddlers will interact in this engaging book.

The Tiny Seed by Eric Carle

This book uses simple words and bright illustrations to tell the life cycle of a flower told through the adventures of a tiny seed.

Preschoolers

Kai Goes to the Farmers' Market in Hawaii by Catherine Toth Fox

Kai is hungry, his mom takes him for a walk to the farmers' market down the road. They find all sorts of fresh fruits and vegetables grown right here in Hawaii.

Flower Garden by Eve Bunting

Gardens don't only have to be for food. A girl and her father live in the city and create a beautiful flower garden for mother's birthday.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii