



Indoor Food Activities

The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance believes in exploring nature around us. Science is hands on and being stuck indoors doesn't mean that must stop. Below are a few simple ideas for hands on family time with a purpose. Add some writing, math, storytelling, or art and have fun.

Kitchen hunt (Early elementary)

Take your children on a kitchen hunt for fruits and vegetables. Check counters, tables and fridge for a variety of 3-6 different options. Gather them together, wash them together, and set them on the table.



Try everything! Eating is an amazing way to use so many senses making the experience richer and more meaningful for any age. You can discuss the following together as you cut (or your child cuts if able) pieces of the fruit/vegetable. Even if they can't cut everything they can still rip a piece of lettuce or maybe crack a carrot in half.

Look- describe how the food looks. Color, shape and so on.

Smell- does it smell sweet, sour, maybe like soil or like a plant.

Taste- take a bite. Take another. And another! The first bite your mind is figuring out what you are eating. The second your mind is figuring out if you like it or not. Take your time for each bite. At the third bite your mind is deciding if you like it or not. Food habits can be taught- even if you don't like it now studies have shown that repeated exposure to a food helps us develop a liking for it.

Blindfold guessing game- Can your kids guess which food they have with their eyes closed or a blindfold on? Maybe have them smell it first, then touch it, then taste it.

If the food had seeds in it show your children what each seed will turn into. Place slices of tomatoes next to their seeds, or apples next to their seeds and so forth. Talk about which seeds you can eat and which you can't.

Focus on language, descriptive words. Focus on touch and motor skills if needed.

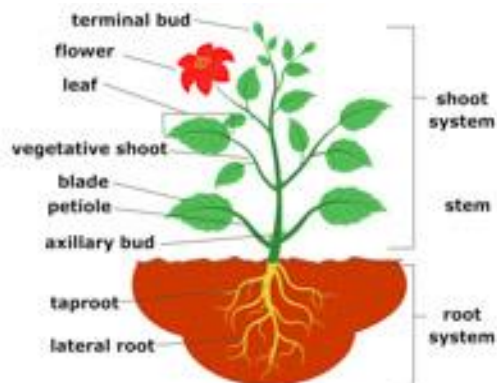
Save the seeds for later exploration.

What part am I eating? (Upper Elementary)

The idea is to determine if the foods you can gather from your house are fruits or vegetables. After you gather a variety of what you have on hand, or finding pictures online, wash and lay out on the table.

Draw a plant on a piece of paper (or have your child draw it) and discuss/label each part: roots, stem, leaves, flower, fruit.

You can get more technical for older children (see example to the right) Just remember that terms like terminal bud or taproot might not have been taught and simply describe more precisely the parts they represent. They might require more explanation, or a chance for your child to go online and find the information themselves!



Take what you found and lay it on the paper by what part it is. If you don't have an example of a part go online and find an example and write it down. Or list more examples for each part as you go anyway. Some examples are below.

Roots- carrots, beets, potatoes, onions

Stems- celery, lettuce stalks

Leaves- lettuce, herbs, beet tops (which will also have the stems)

Flowers- broccoli is unopened flower buds

Fruit- apples, oranges, pears, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, avocado, banana, lemons, limes

At this point you can discuss what makes a fruit versus a vegetable. A fruit is defined as something with seeds. (bananas have seeds, they are small and not very visible until the banana is very ripe where they get slightly darker than the surrounding banana flesh) Even though when we talk about food we tend to call peppers and cucumbers vegetables they are not. A vegetable is a leaf, root, flower, or stem.

Go back and ask if each item you have or have listed is a fruit or a vegetable.

For an extension you can have your child look up the function of each plant part and write it down.

They can also look up a simple recipe with some of the produce you have been using and you get to eat their lesson! Maybe discuss fractions as you cut up items such as apples.

Early ED Seed Study

Look through your fridge. Do you have any foods with seeds, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, apples, pears, watermelon, and so forth. As you use these SAVE the seeds. (note- rinse the seeds and lay them on a paper towel to dry) Frozen peas or dried beans are seeds also so don't forget to raid the freezer and pantry also.

Once you have two or three types of seeds lay them out on a paper towel or plate. Let your children examine each seed. Many will be small, and they might need help picking them up or holding them and you can work on fine motor skills.

Focus on them building vocabulary to describe the seed

-What color is it?

-How does it feel? Rough, smooth, bumpy, fuzzy

-What shape is it? Round, oval, long

-Which seed is bigger? Maybe line them up biggest to smallest then smallest to biggest

-Which is your favorite seed? Why?

Have them draw pictures of their seeds. Talk about how the seeds grow into plants. If you still have the food item the seeds came from make the connection between the seeds and the food.

Tell silly stories about the seeds growing up into plants. Make the connection that plants grow just like people (animals) do. That seed will grow just like your child will.

You can try growing seeds but beware that many supermarket items have been stored in ways that reduce the likelihood that seeds will germinate. You can place the seeds on a damp paper towel and place in an unsealed ziplock bag. Keep damp and watch for any growth. You can put each type of seed in its own bag.



Germination- the process by which a plant grows from a seed.

It's a big word but don't be afraid to use it! Maybe write it out and have them copy the letters and practice penmanship. Or have them draw germination pictures of their seeds turning into baby plants, then adult plants with fruit.