

Cooking with Students

Cooking with students is a foundational piece of Farm to School curriculum. It gets students engaged in the classroom, encourages them to try new foods, develops positive lifelong habits, and so much more. According to the [CDC](#), “there is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads to people through food,” but safe practices are still important when working with students around food. Below are some COVID-related suggestions to continue cooking with your students while remaining safe.



THE BASICS

All Students, At All Times, should be

- Wearing a mask as recommended by the [VT Department of Health](#).
- Maintaining physical distancing whenever possible. At least 6 feet away from each other for 7th grade and up, or at least 3 feet away for grades Pre-K through 6th.
- Practicing proper handwashing at the beginning and end of each session.

STUDENTS IN THE GARDEN

- If possible, set up a station for hand washing and rinsing produce.
 - It's encouraged that tasting produce in the garden happens at the end of the activity.
- If it's not possible to do hand washing, students should wait until they're back inside before eating any produce.
 - In some instances, hand sanitizer can replace handwashing. Although, if a student's hands are visibly dirty, hand sanitizer is not a proper replacement. For more details, visit [this CDC page](#).
- For more detailed garden guidance, see [this resource page](#) from the Vermont Community Garden Network.

COOKING IN THE CLASSROOM

- Create workspaces with adequate physical distancing or appropriate barriers.
Plexiglass/other barriers are not a substitute for physical distancing of less than 3 feet.
- Provide materials and workspaces for each student so that materials do not need to be shared (eg: cutting boards, knives, plates, etc.). If materials do need to be shared, make sure that they are sanitized and hands washed between uses.
- All standard food safety protocols should be followed.
- Hand washing needs to follow all cooking, in between tasks, after contact with skin, and tasting activities

EATING IN THE CLASSROOM

- Teachers, wearing gloves, should prep ingredients to portion out to individual students.
- Students should not share food. Consider ready-to-eat recipes that individual students can make and consume on their own.
- Produce that will be consumed raw should be washed and not shared among students (you pick it, you eat it).
- Recipes that will be heated above 140°F can be done as a group (while maintaining physical distancing).
 - Wearing gloves, a teacher should serve students once the dish is cooked.
 - Students should not serve themselves or other students from shared dishes.

COOKING OUTSIDE

- Many cooking activities can be done outside for additional safety.
- A handwashing station is helpful and can be made from a bucket or jug with a spigot.
- If you have access to an outdoor oven, fire pit, Coleman stove, hotplate, etc. (and proper safety protocols for their use), use recipes that can be cooked outside.
- When cooking around a fire, have a system in place to ensure proper physical distancing of students.
- A spray bottle with sanitizing solution can be helpful for keeping materials properly sanitized.

UTENSIL SANITATION

- Trays, utensils, and dishes/cups may be reused after proper sanitization.
- During a lesson, students should all have their own materials and tools.
 - If this is not possible, sanitize shared materials between uses and ensure proper handwashing techniques before and after using shared tools.
- Just as importantly, maintaining clean hands and not touching your face or mouth during cooking is essential in reducing the spread of disease.

Prepared by

This resource was made by Food Connects in partnership with the VT Farm to School Network to help inform decision making by schools and teachers interested in cooking with students. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, VT Agency of Education, and VT Department of Health resources, along with advice from public health professionals, were used to compile this resource. This resource is not intended to be a substitute for government health guidelines and recommendations. Created 10/26/20.

