

# Eating Well Sustainably: A Guide for Early Years Settings



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**This resource is provided for information only and individual advice on diet and health should always be sought from appropriate health professionals.**

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First Steps Nutrition Trust is a charity which provides clear, evidence-based and independent information and support for good nutrition from pre-conception to five years of age. For more information, see our website [www.firststepsnutrition.org](http://www.firststepsnutrition.org)

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Key terms for sustainable food

### **Environmental damage**

Destruction of naturally occurring plant and animal ecosystems.

### **Food chain**

The system that describes how food gets from a natural state (for example in the ground) to the plate.

### **Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**

Gases from fuel combustion, industrial processes, agriculture, land use change and waste including carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide which contribute to global warming.

### **Intensive farming**

Food production that relies heavily on high inputs of technologies and chemicals to produce a large scale output.

### **Local food**

Food that is grown, processed, packaged and sold locally. Local is often used to describe food which is produced, traded and sold within a defined geographic radius, often about 30 miles.

### **Organic**

Food produced using organic farming methods without the use of pesticides or routine antibiotics, and processed without the addition of non-organic ingredients or artificial additives.

### **Seasonal food**

Food that is naturally abundant in certain seasons.

### **Sustainable**

Meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

## Introduction

Providing more sustainable food in Early Years settings is an important aspect of encouraging better food for all. The food that children and those working in Early Years settings eat not only has an impact on the health of everyone in the setting, but also on the health of the planet. Sustainable food is about food culture and how decisions made about growing, buying, storing, cooking and wasting food today will impact future generations.

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming's working definition is that 'good food' - should be produced, processed, bought, sold and eaten in ways that:

- **Provide social benefits**, such as safe and nutritious products, which improve people's experiences of good quality food. For instance by growing and cooking food to enrich our knowledge and skills, and our cultural diversity;
- **Contribute to thriving local economies** that create good jobs and secure livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries.
- **Enhance the diversity of both plants and animals** (and the welfare of farmed and wild creatures), protect natural resources such as water and soil, and help to tackle climate change <sup>1</sup>

By providing sustainable food your Early Years setting can make a positive contribution to society, the economy and the environment.

Introducing sustainable food to Early Years settings is an opportunity to connect children, staff and families to more environmentally friendly habits and to nurture a sustainable food culture. The information presented here provides a guide for Early Years settings to enable them to adapt current food provision into more sustainable systems of providing healthy food to young children. The idea is to help different types of Early Years settings make progress towards offering sustainable food. How different settings buy, cook, store, grow, waste and plan the food they serve will be very variable, but we hope that everyone will be able to reflect on their current practice and find some areas where they can make change.

One of the easiest ways of ensuring that the food you provide is sustainable is to join a scheme such as the Soil Association's **Food for Life Catering Mark**. A bronze, silver or gold award will tell everyone that you offer healthy and sustainable food. For more details see: <https://www.soilassociation.org/certification/the-food-for-life-catering-mark/>



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<sup>1</sup> [www.sustainweb.org.uk](http://www.sustainweb.org.uk)

## What is in this guide?

The guide provides simple guidance on:

- planning sustainable menus
- shopping for food
- waste and storing food
- cooking and preparing food
- growing food

Each section has some key principles on sustainable food including examples of how an early years setting has put the principles into actions and links to resources and organisations that can help you provide more sustainable food in your Early Years setting.

A theme that runs throughout is 'supporting children and families to take messages of sustainability home'. A core value of sustainability is encouraging everyone to get involved with creating positive impacts on society, the economy and the environment. Each section contains recommendations that encourage this and throughout there are examples of how other settings have put some of these ideas into practice.

At the end of the guide there is an example menu and some recipes that show the principles in action; a sustainable food checklist and an audit tool to help you work out how to improve the sustainability of food in your Early Years setting.

**This guide should be used alongside current national guidance on food and nutrition in the early years which should be followed by all early years settings:**

**In England, Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England** can be found at <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/resources-and-publications/information-guides/eat-better-start-better/>

**In Scotland, Setting the table: Nutritional guidance and food standards for early years childcare providers in Scotland** is available at: <http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/30341-Setting%20the%20Table.pdf>

**In Wales, Food and Health Guidelines for Early Years and Childcare Settings** can be found at: [www.wales.gov.uk/docs/phhs/publications/foodandhealth/090414guidelines.pdf](http://www.wales.gov.uk/docs/phhs/publications/foodandhealth/090414guidelines.pdf)

**In Northern Ireland, Nutrition matters for the early years: Guidance for feeding under fives in the childcare setting** can be found at: [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/nutrition-matters-early-years-guidance-feeding-under-fives-childcare-setting](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/nutrition-matters-early-years-guidance-feeding-under-fives-childcare-setting)

## Key principles of sustainable food provision

These are taken from the report 'Setting the Table' produced in 2009 by The Sustainable Development Commission.<sup>2</sup> Many of the recommendations aim to reduce the amount of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, that is the amount of damaging carbon dioxide and other gases that are known to be associated with global warming and environmental damage.

Action	Why?
<b>Reduce consumption of meat and dairy foods</b>	Cattle are the major contributors to GHG emissions in the food system; the feed needed for cattle often means a waste of agricultural land and cattle use significant amounts of water.
<b>Reduce consumption of processed foods high in fat and sugar</b>	Processing foods uses additional energy to that used in the production of fruit, vegetables and cereal crops. Additionally highly processed foods are associated with poor health and diets of lower nutritional value.
<b>Waste less food</b>	Wasting food damages the economy as well as the environment; it also means that the energy used in the production of this food has been of no use.
<b>Increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, particularly seasonal and field grown</b>	Field grown fruit and vegetables, including potatoes and cereal crops reduce the need for artificial heat and those grown in fields are less fragile and easily spoiled.
<b>Only eat fish from sustainable stocks</b>	Some fish species have been overfished and could become extinct. Fish should be from un-endangered species and should be from sustainable stocks that are fished and managed responsibly.
<b>Shop, cook and store food in a sustainable way, using as little energy as possible</b>	Reducing the amount of food shopping by car reduces GHG emissions; reducing food bought shipped from overseas reduces air freight; greater efficiency in how we store and cook food can reduce the GHG emissions in the home and workplace.
<b>Increase consumption of foods produced with respect for wildlife and the environment e.g. organic food</b>	A reduction in use of fertiliser and pesticides is better for the environment; organic farming preserves soil quality and limits soil erosion and protects wildlife essential for food production such as bees.

<sup>2</sup> [www.sd-commission.org.uk/data/files/publications/Setting\\_the\\_Table.pdf](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/data/files/publications/Setting_the_Table.pdf)

## Planning Menus

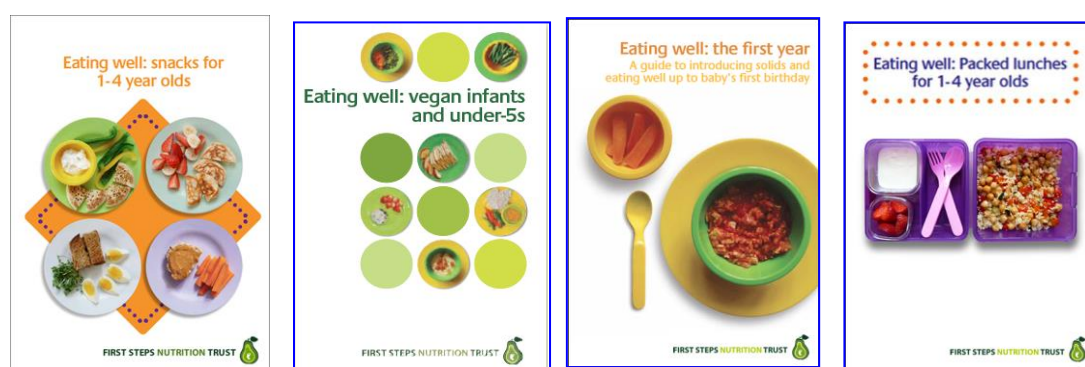
Planning menus is where sustainable food for early years begins. Most settings will plan meals and snacks for a number of weeks at a time to ensure that a good variety of dishes are served.

### Key principles for planning sustainable menus:

- **Have fewer meat dishes.** Serve less meat and meat products. The national guidance for early years settings in England suggests early years settings have at least one meat free day a week.
- **Use sustainable fish.** Serve oil rich fish once a week and buy from sustainable sources.
- **Avoid including processed foods in menus.** For example, readymade cakes, biscuits, puddings, processed meat and meat dishes such as sausages and pies and readymade sauces.
- **Use seasonal produce.** Plan menus around the produce that will be in season.
- **Base meals and snacks on local starchy foods.** Potatoes and bread are local and sustainable source of energy in the UK and should feature regularly in menu plans.
- **Peas, beans and lentils** are sustainable foods and very versatile in meals and snacks.

**A variety of meals and snacks** across each week will make it easier to meet children's nutritional requirements and provide a good variety of colours, textures and flavours.

You can find out more about providing healthy meals and snacks for children in these publications below, all available at <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-resources/>





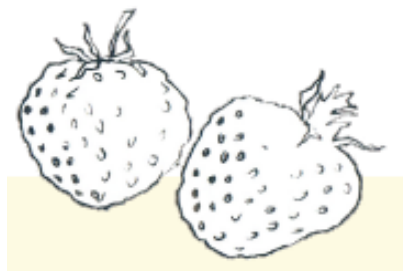
## Sustainable food principle in action

One nursery school in North Yorkshire has a sustainable food policy that was developed by parents and carers, the catering team and nursery staff. The policy is posted on a large notice board by the door where children are collected. There are five basic points to their sustainable food policy:

Our sustainable food policy is:

- Eat less meat
- Buy local food where possible
- Buy seasonal food where possible
- Buy organic food where possible
- Aim to use very few processed foods

Next to the sustainable food policy on the notice board, a copy of the weekly lunch menu plan is also posted along with a 'recipe of the week'. This allows parents and carers to see how the sustainable food policy is applied to the food served in the nursery. The 'recipe of the week' is sent home with each family to encourage involvement outside the setting.



## Shopping for food

### Key principles:

- **Think local** Buy foods which have been packaged and processed as locally as possible
- **Buy organic foods where this is affordable Buy sustainable fish** Ensure the types of fish included on the menu are sustainable
- **Bulk buying** for best value

If you can shop without the use of a car this can reduce GHG emissions. More sustainable shopping methods include:

- Ordering food on the internet for delivery
- Delivery by local box schemes
- Organic food delivery schemes
- Buying at local markets, farmers markets or farm shops

Buying food in bulk is a good way of cutting down the number of shopping trips, providing care is taken that food can be stored safely and used by sell by dates to reduce waste. If you buy food from a wholesale supplier talk to them about where they source their food and request more sustainable versions of foods and ingredients where possible. Recent food scares mean that many families are keen to know the 'provenance' of their food – or where their food comes from – and you can ask suppliers to provide you with this information.

Joining a scheme like the Food for Life Catering mark will give you support in procuring food for your setting more sustainably.

### Taking the message home

- Publicise the provenance and sustainability of food served in your setting through newsletters, posters and details of local sustainable suppliers;
- Organise trips to local food producers for the children you look after and encourage families to come along.
- Integrate aspects of sustainable food shopping into activities and play.
- If you have links with local producers, see if they would be interested in supplying a food co-op or box scheme for families that attend your setting.

## **Sustainable food principle in action: Food co-ops and fruit and vegetable box schemes**

A group of child-minders in Northampton collectively order weekly organic fruit and vegetable boxes from a local food producer's co-op. In using a 'box scheme' they get a better price on organic fruit and vegetables as they are buying in bulk straight from the producer. The children can enjoy a range of seasonal produce that has the Soil Association Organic Standard.

To find a local food co-op in your area go to [www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/finder/](http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/finder/)

In Wales access food co-ops at [www.foodcoopswales.org.uk](http://www.foodcoopswales.org.uk)

To find a box scheme go to <https://www.soilassociation.org/boxschemes/>

Families who are entitled to Healthy Start food vouchers can often also use these at farmers markets, food co-ops and with organic box schemes.



## Accreditation schemes

There are a number of schemes which are designed to help consumers spot foods which are produced in a way that is better for the environment and which you can use to guide you when shopping.

The table below gives you an overview of food labels to look out for when shopping.

	<p>Food with a Soil Association Organic Standard symbol on means that it has been produced in accordance with organic standards: <a href="http://www.soilassociation.org/whatisorganic/organicstandards">http://www.soilassociation.org/whatisorganic/organicstandards</a></p>
	<p>Leaf – Linking Environment and Farmers is an organisation that promotes sustainable farming practices. When you see this symbol it means that food has produced with care and to high environmental standards: <a href="http://www.leafuk.org/leaf/home.eb">http://www.leafuk.org/leaf/home.eb</a></p>
	<p>The Marine Stewardship Council symbol lets you know that the fish you are buying has been fished sustainably and from sustainable sources: <a href="http://www.msc.org">http://www.msc.org</a></p>
	<p>Freedom Foods is the symbol to let you know farm animals have been kept to strict RSPCA animal welfare standards: <a href="http://www.rspca.org.uk/freedomfood">http://www.rspca.org.uk/freedomfood</a></p>
	<p>Organic Farmers and Growers is a government supported organic assurance scheme: <a href="http://www.organicfarmers.org.uk">http://www.organicfarmers.org.uk</a></p>
	<p>The Aquaculture Stewardship Council logo (appearing on labels in 2013) indicates that fish has been responsibly farmed: <a href="http://www.asc-aqua.org">www.asc-aqua.org</a></p>
	<p>Fairtrade means that farmers in developing countries get a good and fair deal for the food they produce: <a href="http://www.fairtrade.org.uk">http://www.fairtrade.org.uk</a></p>

## Reducing food waste and storing food wisely

*“There are two main reasons why we throw away good food: we cook or prepare too much or we don't use it in time... If we all stop wasting food that could have been eaten, the benefit to the planet would be the equivalent of taking 1 in 5 cars off the road.”*

Love Food, Hate Waste (2013)

Food can be wasted along the whole food supply chain from farm to fork. Recycled food waste provides compost and nutrient rich soil to grow food from. Wasted food in landfill sites creates gases which contribute to climate change. These are some of the ways food might be easily wasted in early years settings and ideas about how to avoid this:

How food is wasted	How to avoid wasting food
<b>Buying too much food that cannot be used before it goes off or goes past the use by date</b>	Planning menus in advance, using shopping lists and being aware of use by dates.
<b>Buying food that goes off very quickly</b>	Unless you are planning on using it straight away, don't buy food with a short shelf life.
<b>Cooking too much food for the number of children present</b>	Know how many children you are expecting to feed on any given day.
<b>Giving children portions which are bigger than their appetites</b>	Use current guidance to know what appropriate portion sizes are for different aged infants.
<b>Storing food inappropriately</b>	Make sure you know how different foods should be stored.
<b>Miscalculating how much food is needed at holiday times</b>	Clarify in advance how much food will be need at holiday times.

### How to store food sustainably

It can be useful to freeze food in season for later use, or as a method of safely keeping excess food that might otherwise be wasted, Frozen food does however take a lot more energy to store than non- frozen foods. And some frozen foods travel longer distances and therefore have a larger environmental foot print than non -frozen foods

**Having the fridge set at either too warm or too cold a temperature can waste energy and spoil food, so regularly check it is at the correct setting – between 0-4°C.**

## Taking the message home

Encourage staff, children and families to be more aware of the simple things they can do to reduce food waste

- Display information on how your setting reduces their food waste.
- Encourage recycling and composting principles through activities with children.

## Sustainable food principle in action: portion sizes

Knowing the sorts of portion sizes that are needed by infants and under 5s can help with shopping for planned menus. You can find information about suitable foods and amounts of foods for infants here

<https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-infants-new-mums>

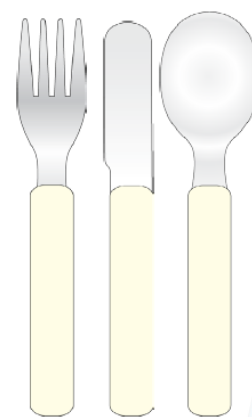
For information on portion sizes for children aged 1-4 years see the publication **'Good food choices and portion sizes for 1-4 year olds'**

<https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-early-years>



## Cooking and serving food

Being aware of energy use in the kitchen and knowing how to prepare food efficiently can have a big impact on sustainable food in your early years setting.



Key principles:

- Use energy efficiently
- Make sure staff have adequate cooking skills to ensure food is cooked well and without unnecessary heat waste

Cooking food uses energy and we can reduce the amount of energy we use by thinking about the most efficient method of cooking.

- Generally speaking it costs 2-3 times more to cook on the hob and 3-4 times more to cook in the oven than in the microwave, so this can be the most cost and energy efficient method of cooking some items.
- If you are cooking something on the hob, you can use the steam from this to cook vegetables simply by placing a colander over the pan and covering with a lid.
- If you have the oven on for one item try and use the remaining space for other items to use the energy efficiently.
- Stir frying in a wok or large pan and 'one pot cooking' are efficient and quick methods for some dishes.
- Use less water when boiling vegetables and use water from the kettle if hot to reduce time for water to reach the boil. Always cover pans to retain the heat.
- If you have access to a pressure cooker this can be a very efficient method of cooking some dishes.
- Think about whether some parts of meals can be served raw or using minimal heat to cook. Many children like the crunchy texture of raw vegetables or those that have been lightly steamed.

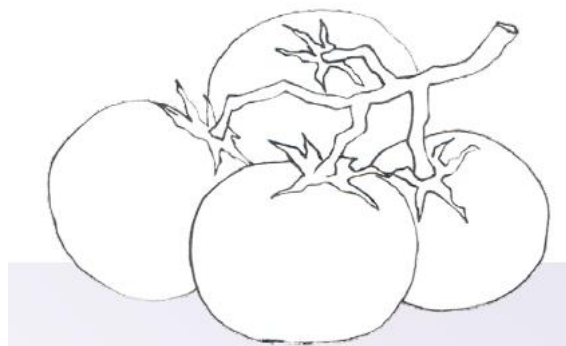
## Taking the message home:

- Talk to children about the food they're eating and how it has been cooked
- Create opportunities for children to be involved with an aspect of preparing food and link to other activities such as gardening, crafts and stories.
- Promote the recipes from your sustainable menu to families.
- Children can learn a lot through play. Role play kitchens are an exciting way to engage children with the principles of sustainable food and cooking. They provide a relevant environment for talking about issues such as not wasting food, introducing the idea of energy use in cooking.

### Sustainable food principle in action:

To support taking the message of sustainable cooking home, Red Hen Nursery in Lincolnshire (<http://www.redhendaynursery.co.uk>) has produced a calendar which includes a seasonal recipe for every month.

All the parents and carers of children at the nursery were given a calendar at the beginning of the year to encourage and promote the idea of sustainable cooking in the home.





## Growing food

Growing food in an early years setting is a great way to engage staff, children and their families with the concept of sustainable food and everyone who engages in food growing finds it a rewarding experience.

### Key principles

- Encourage children to find out where food comes from and how it grows at an early age. This can lead to more interest about the food on the plate and has been shown to be helpful in encouraging children to try and to eat a greater variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Visiting farms, gardens or farmers markets can help children understand where food comes from and that food is part of a food chain.

### Supporting children and families to take messages of food growing home:

- Include families in their child's experience of learning about food and where it comes from by encouraging families to come on trips to farms, urban farms, allotments or other settings where food is grown.
- Do growing activities with children that they can continue at home with the support of their families.
- Create new growing spaces at your early years setting. Even if outdoor space is limited food can be grown in tubs and planters and on window sills.
- Plan a vegetable garden or window box of herbs with children.
- Sprout seeds indoors and grow mustard and cress.

#### **Sustainable food principle in action:**

The nursery classes within a primary school in East London have their own chicken coups and an apple tree growing in their playground. They collect the eggs and give them to the nursery kitchen to use in their lunches. This helps the children understand where food comes from and get a greater connection to food ingredients.

Every year, the children eat the apples which are grown on their tree. By the time these children join the primary school, many are interested in growing food and choose to join the after school gardening club where fruits and vegetables are regularly grown and provided to the school kitchen.

## Indoor growing activity

### Growing cress

Not every early years setting has a lot of space for growing food. However, growing cress is an easy and fun activity that can be done at any point in the year and with limited space.

**Step 1:** Clean some small yogurt pots, peel the labels off and decorate.

**Step 2:** Put some wet kitchen roll at the bottom of the pot and then add a layer of damp cotton wool.

**Step 3:** Sprinkle an even layer of cress seeds over the cotton wool and leave in a warm sunny place indoors, for example, a window sill.

The cress should grow after about a week.



### Growing a salad

There are lots of different varieties of tomatoes that can be grown in small spaces. Planting young tomato plants in a quiet corner of the playground can help children understand what goes into making food grow and provide some very local produce.

For more information on growing food in your early years setting, check out the following links:

<http://mastergardeners.org.uk>

<http://www.rocketgardens.co.uk>

## An example sustainable menu and recipes

Below is an example of a sustainable weekly lunch plan.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Lunch menu</b>	Carrot and lentil dahl with rice	Tuna and vegetable pasta with garlic bread	Seasonal vegetable chilli and rice	Couscous with local vegetables and chickpeas	Home grown egg and cress sandwiches with herby tomato salad and potato salad
	Banana bread	Organic carrot cake	Apple crumble	Stewed local pears and custard	Fruit salad and yoghurt

The recipes below are good examples of how to plan meals along sustainable food principles. All the recipes make about 12 portions for 1-4 year olds.

### Carrot and lentil dahl with rice

*Carrots are a good choice all year around as there are different varieties that can be grown in the UK throughout the year.*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 100g. You can serve this with flat bread and natural yoghurt or with another curry or with rice.

1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
1 tablespoon mild curry powder  
500g carrots, peeled and grated  
250g red lentils  
750ml water  
1 tablespoon coconut paste  
1 teaspoon bouillon powder  
1 tablespoon fresh coriander

1. Heat the oil in a large pan, add the curry powder and grated carrot and stir over a low heat until carrot starts to soften.
2. Add all the other ingredients except the coriander and simmer for 30 minutes until lentils soft and mixture has thickened.
3. Serve with coriander sprinkled on top

## Banana bread

*Banana bread is great for using bananas that might be nearing the end of their life.*

This makes 12 portions of about 50g

150g whole-wheat flour  
1 teaspoon bicarbonate soda  
60g vegetable fat spread  
100g sugar  
1 large egg, beaten  
2 large ripe or over-ripe bananas  
50ml milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla essence

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas mark 4.
2. Grease a small loaf tin.
3. Sift the flour, bicarbonate of soda and salt into a large mixing bowl.
4. In a separate bowl, cream the vegetable fat spread and sugar together until light and fluffy.
5. Add the egg, mashed bananas, milk and vanilla extract to the fat and sugar mixture and mix well. Fold in the flour mixture.
6. Pour the cake mixture into the tin.
7. Transfer to the oven and bake for about an hour, or until well-risen and golden-brown.
8. Remove from the oven and cool in the tin for a few minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool completely before serving.

## Tuna and vegetable pasta

*Remember to use tinned tuna that is MSC approved and local vegetables alongside store cupboard ingredients in this recipe.*

This makes 12 portions of about 140g.

300g pasta shapes  
300g seasonal vegetables e.g. tomatoes, peppers, courgette, green beans, butternut squash, broccoli, cauliflower, sweetcorn  
1 large can (400g) chopped tomatoes  
400ml water  
3 (185g) cans tuna drained (390g tuna)  
2 tablespoons chopped parsley

1. Boil the pasta in boiling water until tender and drain.
2. Chop the vegetables into small pieces and simmer with the chopped tomatoes and water until they are soft and sauce has reduced.  
Mix in the tuna and parsley and pasta until all the ingredients are warm.

## Carrot cake

*You can use local vegetables alongside store cupboard ingredients in this recipe.*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 40g

3 medium sized carrots, peeled  
2 eggs  
150g brown sugar  
125g vegetable oil  
150g wholewheat flour  
1 ½ teaspoons cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon nutmeg  
1 ½ teaspoons mixed spice  
40g sultanas  
1 teaspoon bicarbonate soda  
1 teaspoon baking powder

1. Heat the oven to 180°C/350° F/Gas mark 4 and line the base of a tin
2. Grate the carrots
3. Whisk the eggs and sugar together in a large bowl until thick and creamy
4. Whisk in the oil. Gently fold in the remaining ingredients and mix together
5. Spoon into the prepared tin, level the surface and bake for 20-25 minutes until firm to the touch and golden brown.
6. Cool on a wire tray.

## Seasonal vegetable chilli and rice

*This recipe is good for using produce that might be nearing the end of its life.*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 100g chilli and 80g rice

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
2 medium onions, peeled and diced  
2 cloves garlic crushed or 1 teaspoon garlic paste  
1 teaspoon chilli powder  
2 medium carrots, peeled and diced  
1 courgette, diced  
1 red pepper, cored and diced  
8 medium mushrooms, diced  
1 tablespoon chopped parsley  
1 large can (400g) chopped tomatoes  
400ml water  
350g rice boiled in water until tender.

1. Heat the oil in a large pan and fry the garlic and onion with the chilli powder.
2. Add all the other diced vegetables and the tomatoes and water and simmer for about 20 minutes.
3. Serve chilli with boiled rice.

## Apple crumble

*Apple crumble is a great winter recipe as it uses apples that are grown in the UK at that time of year.*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 60g. You can serve this with custard or with full-fat yoghurt.

1kg Bramley or other UK variety cooking apples  
50g sugar  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
100g plain white flour  
100g wholewheat flour  
100g vegetable fat spread  
50g oatmeal  
80g sugar

1. Heat the oven to 200°C/400°F. Gas mark 6 and grease an ovenproof bowl
2. Peel and slice the cooking apples and place in the dish. Sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon.
3. Place the flours in a bowl with the vegetable fat spread and rub in with finger tips until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Mix in the sugar and oats.
4. Sprinkle the crumble topping on the apples.
5. Bake for about 40 minutes until fruit is soft.

## Couscous with local vegetables and chickpeas

*This recipe uses minimal heat energy to create a tasty main meal as well as using local and seasonal ingredients*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 150g

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 large onion, peeled and diced  
2 cloves garlic or 1 teaspoon garlic paste  
1 courgette, diced  
1 pepper, diced  
2 tomatoes, diced  
1 large can (400g) chickpeas, drained  
1 large handful chopped mint, parsley or other herbs  
400g couscous  
500ml boiling water

1. In a large frying pan, heat the oil and fry the onions and garlic until softened.
2. Add other diced vegetables and gently fry until they soften.
3. Stir in the chickpeas and herbs.
4. Pour the boiling water over the couscous and leave for 5 minutes until couscous has absorbed the water.
5. Stir the vegetables into the couscous.

## Stewed local pears and custard

*This recipe uses minimal heat energy as the pears are cooked using a microwave to create a tasty dessert as well as using local and seasonal ingredients*

This recipe makes 12 portions of 80g of stewed pears and 50g custard

### Stewed pears

6 pears cored and peeled  
3 tablespoons apple juice

1. Chop the pear into small pieces, cover in apple juice and stew gently until soft

### Custard

750ml full-fat milk  
40g custard powder  
30g sugar

1. Blend custard powder with a little of the milk to make a runny paste.
2. Add sugar to the remainder of the milk and bring to the boil in a small pan.
3. Pour the paste into the milk slowly stirring all the time and bring back to the boil, stirring until thick.

## Home grown egg and cress sandwiches with herby tomato salad and potato salad

*This recipe uses cress from the growing task as well as locally grown vegetables.*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 80g of sandwich and 40g of tomato salad

### Sandwiches

10 hard-boiled eggs, shelled  
5 tablespoons reduced fat mayonnaise  
4 tablespoons home grown cress or 1 punnet  
12 large or 24 small slices of wholemeal bread

1. Mash the eggs with mayonnaise and stir in the cress.
2. Fill the sandwiches and cut into fingers.

### Herby tomato salad

500g of tomatoes  
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar  
Handful of herbs: for example, basil, thyme, mint

1. Chop the tomatoes into cubes and take out cores.
2. Cut or tear herbs into small pieces and stir into tomatoes with vinegar.

## **Fruit salad and yoghurt**

*This recipe uses locally grown seasonal fruit.*

This recipe makes 12 portions of about 100g fruit salad and 30g yoghurt

2 eating apples, cored

2 pears, cored

3 plums or greengages stoned

200g of home-grown or 1 punnet of strawberries or raspberries or blackberries or currants

250ml orange juice

360g full-fat yoghurt

1. Chop all the fruit into small pieces and cover with orange juice.
2. Serve fruit salad with yoghurt.



## Sustainable food checklist

Now you have read about sustainable food in Early Years settings, use this check list and to see how your early years setting could improve the sustainability of the food you provide.

	Principle	Action	Do we do this?
<b>Planning sustainable menus</b>	<b>Have fewer meat dishes.</b>	Serve less meat and meat products. The national guidance for early years settings in England suggests early years settings have at least one meat free day a week.	
	<b>Use sustainable fish.</b>	Serve oil rich fish once a week and buy from sustainable sources.	
	<b>Avoid including processed foods in menus.</b>	For example, readymade cakes, biscuits, puddings, processed meat and meat dishes such as sausages and pies and readymade sauces.	
	<b>A variety of meals and snacks</b>	Provide a variety of meals and snacks across each week to make it easier to get in all the nutrients that children need and provide a good variety of colours, textures and flavours.	
	<b>Use seasonal produce.</b>	Plan menus around the produce that will be in season.	
	<b>Base meals and snacks on local starchy foods.</b>	Potatoes and bread can be a local and sustainable source of energy in the UK and should feature regularly in menu plans.	
	<b>Peas, beans and lentils</b>	Use more peas, beans and lentils.	
<b>Shopping for food</b>	<b>Think local</b>	Buy foods which have been packaged and processed as locally as possible.	
	<b>Organic where possible</b>	Where possible plan to include organic food in menus.	
	<b>Sustainable fish</b>	Ensure the types of fish included on the menu are sustainable	
	<b>Bulk buying</b>	Bulk buying for better value.	
	<b>Sustainable food accreditation schemes</b>	Be aware of symbols that indicate food has been produced with sustainability in mind.	
<b>Storing food</b>	<b>Reduce food waste</b>	Ensure that portion sizes are appropriate both for the children you look after as well as others that may eat with the children in your setting.	
	<b>Recycle food waste</b>	Recycle food waste through composting on site or by joining a local council food waste service.	
	<b>Packaging and recycling</b>	Buy food from sources that use minimal packaging, no packaging or packaging that can be recycled.	

	<b>Frozen food</b>	<p>Follow instructions for freezers so that they work most efficiently. Don't over-stock freezers with food and think about whether or not frozen foods are the best option.</p> <p>Make sure when buying frozen foods you use the same sustainable principles as when buying fresh food.</p>
	<b>Having the right fridge temperatures</b>	<p>Keep fridge at a cool 0-5 degrees and chilled food will stay fresher longer. Use a fridge thermometer to make sure your fridge is at the right temperature.</p>
<b>Cooking</b>	<b>Cooking skills</b>	<p>Ensure person/people responsible for cooking have adequate skills.</p>
	<b>Using energy efficiently in cooking</b>	<p>Think about how food is cooked e.g. Use a microwave oven to reduce cooking times, use the top of the stove rather than the oven, steam food over boiling liquid.</p> <p>Do not use more water than is needed when boiling a kettle or a pan.</p> <p>Food cut into smaller pieces takes less time to cook and therefore used less energy.</p>
<b>Growing food</b>	<b>Growing food</b>	<p>Grow fruits, vegetables or herbs in tubs, window boxes or in the garden of your setting.</p> <p>Include gardening and food growing into activities for children in you Early Years settings to participate in.</p>
	<b>Visit farms, garden or farmers markets</b>	<p>Develop activities around a visit to a farm, urban farm or garden where food is grown.</p> <p>Visit a market and see a variety of locally grown food.</p>

## Sustainable Food Planning Tool

After reading this guide, start thinking about ways that you could nurture a sustainable food culture within your early years setting. Use your answers as a basis to develop a sustainable food policy.

	Existing sustainable practices	Changes we can make immediately	Changes we can plan to make in the future	Overall goal
<b>Menu planning</b>				
<b>Shopping</b>				
<b>Waste and storing food</b>				
<b>Cooking</b>				
<b>Growing</b>				

## Resources

### **Food for Life Early Years Award**

An award scheme for early years settings that supports healthy and sustainable menu planning, food education and growing.  
[www.foodforlife.org.uk/early-years](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/early-years)

### **Friends of the Earth**

Pastures New: A sustainable future for meat and dairy farming (2010)  
[http://www.saiplatform.org/uploads/Library/pastures\\_new-FoE.pdf](http://www.saiplatform.org/uploads/Library/pastures_new-FoE.pdf)

### **Sustain**

Good Food Guide (2013)  
[www.sustainweb.org.uk](http://www.sustainweb.org.uk)

### **Which?**

Making Sustainable Food Choices Easier (2010)  
[www.which.co.uk/documents/pdf/making-sustainable-food-choices-easier-which-report-231317.pdf](http://www.which.co.uk/documents/pdf/making-sustainable-food-choices-easier-which-report-231317.pdf)

## Organisations providing information and resources:

### **Growing food**

**Council for Learning Outside the Classroom** - [www.lotc.org.uk](http://www.lotc.org.uk)

**Garden Organic** -

[www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk)

**Learning Through Landscapes** -

[www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

### **Local and organic food**

**Soil Association** -

[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

**The Local Food Consultants** -

[www.localfood.org.uk](http://www.localfood.org.uk)

### **Reducing food waste**

**Love Food Hate Waste** -

[www.lovefoodhatewaste.com](http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com)

**WRAP** - [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)

**The Community Composting Network**

[www.communitycompost.org](http://www.communitycompost.org)

**Waste Watch** -

[www.wastewatch.org.uk](http://www.wastewatch.org.uk)

### **Seasonal Food Charts**

<http://eatseasonably.co.uk/what-to-eat-now/calendar/>

### **Shopping for food**

**Farmers markets and farm shops**

<http://www.farma.org.uk/>

**London Farmers Markets** -

<http://www.lfm.org.uk/>

**Big Barn Local Food Website** -

[www.bigbarn.co.uk](http://www.bigbarn.co.uk)

### **Sustainable fish**

**Sustainable Fish City** -

[www.sustainweb.org/sustainablefishcity](http://www.sustainweb.org/sustainablefishcity)

**Marine Conservation Society** -

**Good Fish Guide**

<https://www.mcsuk.org/>



**FIRST STEPS NUTRITION TRUST**

