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Family Matters

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Taste Testing Seasonal Produce

By Jessica Clifford, MS, RDN, Extension Nutrition Specialist



Ahhh, the smells and tastes of fresh seasonal produce in July. Fresh fruits of summer are one of the season's greatest treats. Berries, cherries, melons, peaches, and plums are plentiful in summer because summer is their season! Summer vegetables include beans, greens, cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers.

Generally, "in-season" means produce harvested in the season it is naturally meant to be harvested. Strawberries and tomatoes, for example, may be available in grocery stores all year round, but that is because they are grown and harvested in other places around the world and shipped to Colorado. In many areas around the United States, however, strawberries and tomatoes are truly only "in season" in summer.

Benefits of Seasonal Produce:

- Seasonal produce is usually more flavorful
- Seasonal fruits and vegetables can be more nutritious
- Local produce bought in season helps support local farmers and businesses
- Often, seasonal produce is less expensive than the same produce purchased out of season



I like to recommend taste testing a variety of different seasonal fruits and vegetables so you can explore the flavors and find your favorites. Preparing fruits and vegetables in different ways also offers different experiences.

Taste testing new and different foods can help "expand your palate." In the food world, this means to step outside your comfort zone and try new foods. When we try new foods, it helps to expand our tastes and likes for different foods. This is a good thing, because we need a variety of foods and nutrients to stay healthy.

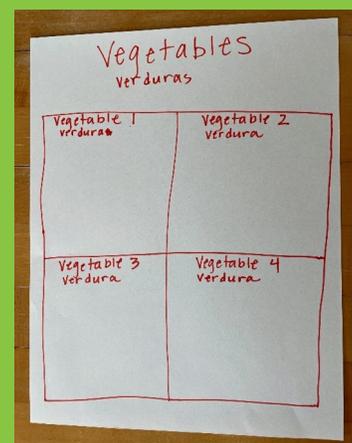
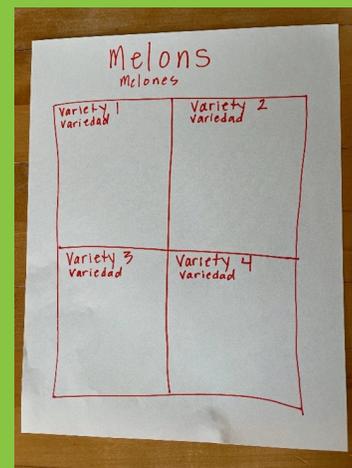
Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

Taste testing different fruits is a great way to get children to start expanding their palates, because fruits are naturally sweet and juicy. Then, you can taste-test different vegetables, too!

A fun way to approach this activity is to draw a chart like the one below, then prompt your children to use their senses when tasting each food. You can either have them taste four different varieties of one type of fruit or vegetable, like in the melon chart below, or you can have them try four different types of fruits or vegetables, like in the vegetable chart below. This is a great activity for kids, because it allows them to use all their senses and be mindful when tasting new or familiar foods.

1. Choose four different seasonal fruits or vegetables to try (e.g., cucumbers, tomatoes, green beans, and peppers) or four different varieties of one seasonal type (e.g., watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, canary melon).
2. Draw a chart →
3. Have your children use their senses to SEE, SMELL, HEAR, FEEL, and TASTE each variety or type. For each variety or type that they taste, use these prompts:
 - Draw what you see in the corresponding box (whole or cut up).
 - Use words to describe what you smell (strong, earthy, like summer, etc.).
 - Then have them take a bite and ask what they hear (crunch, squish, etc.).
 - Ask what they feel in their mouth (slimy, soft, juicy, etc.)
 - Have them describe what they taste (sweet, sour, bitter, etc.)
 - After you have gone through all four varieties or types, ask which one was their favorite.
4. Remind children of these things when trying new or familiar foods:
 - Remind children to be polite about how they think a food tastes to them, so they don't ruin someone else's experience. "Don't yuck my yum."
 - Suggest they avoid negative words if they don't like or want something.
 - Instead say "no thank you" or "I don't prefer that."
 - If your child doesn't like a food, have them politely remove the food from their mouth with a napkin.
 - Remind them that our tastes change, and even if we used to not like something, we may like it again at a later time.



Recipe for Success

Confetti Salad

Serves: 4-6

Ingredients:

- 1 cucumber
- 1 sweet bell pepper or another variety of sweet pepper
- ½ red onion
- 1 tomato (optional)
- 3-4 Tablespoons of seasoned rice vinegar
- 1-2 Tablespoons of fresh cilantro, chopped (optional)

Instructions:

1. Wash your hands and work surfaces with soap and water.
2. Rinse all vegetables and chop into bite size pieces. Add to a bowl.
3. Add vinegar and toss.
4. Add cilantro and toss again.

For more information, ideas and recipes visit the Colorado State University Food Smart website at: foodsmartcolorado.colostate.edu

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