

*A guide for home  
childcare  
providers and  
daycare  
centers*



# HEALTHY HABITS START EARLY: A TOOLKIT

*Team Nutrition Program*  
Iowa Department of Education



**IOWA**  
Department of Education

*Department of Community and Behavioral Health*  
University of Iowa College of Public Health



**College of  
Public Health**

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# WHAT IS HEALTHY HABITS START EARLY?

It is important to **establish healthy habits early in life** to ensure those habits carry over into adulthood.

**Healthy Habits Start Early (HHSE)** is a **nutrition-based program for home childcare providers and daycare centers** that supports and improves healthy eating practices.

*Mealtime ideas*  
*Garden-based nutrition curriculum*  
*Parent engagement tools*  
*Self-assessment tools*

# DEFINITIONS

**Smarter Mealtime ideas** are designed to increase consumption of vegetables, fruits and whole grains, reducing the consumption of added sugar and saturated fats and allowing for nutritious substitutions. Menus and mealtime strategies take cost and practicality into consideration.

**Grow It, Try It, Like It!** is a free, garden-based nutrition education curriculum for child-care settings. Through fun activities, preschool children experience new fruits and vegetables, learn how plants grow, and connect foods at the table with the farm, orchard, and garden.

**Family newsletters** share consistent nutrition messages between children, families, and child care providers.

**Go NAP SACC** is an online tool that walks child care providers through simple steps to make healthy changes to their programs through self-assessment, planning, and action.

**Iowa Smarter Mealtime Scorecard** is an assessment tool to help improve menu planning, mealtime experience, mealtime environment, and provider involvement.



# WHY PARTICIPATE?

With Healthy Habits Start Early, providers have **increased** their **NAP SACC scores** and **number of best practices met**, according to a University of Iowa study.<sup>1</sup>

*“A lot of [the parents] were like, ‘**Oh, my gosh. I can’t believe they ate a tomato.**’ They’ve never eaten a tomato.”*

*“The food that they are now eating that they would not have eaten six months ago **is just astronomical**, before we would have vegetables left over left and right. Now we’re lucky if we have enough vegetables for a third serving if the kids want some.”*

*“Sometimes I think we do a lot of things already with the kids, and you’re like, ‘Oh, one more thing,’ **but I think it added to it and it was fun.**”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>In a [2019 University of Iowa report](#), ten home providers and 12 day care centers completed both pre-and post-HHSE intervention assessments in the online NAP SACC tool. On average, the home providers increased their score 5.8±4.3 points and increased their number of best practices met by 13.7%±11.5%. The day care centers increased their score by 5.3±5.8 points and increased their number of best practices met by 11.5±11.5% (Table 5).

<sup>2</sup>Quotes from in-depth interviews reported in the document linked above.

# SMARTER MEALTIME IDEAS



## Encouraging healthy foods

Talk about food **shapes and colors**.

Use **taste and texture words** to describe foods, such as: sweet, salty, crunchy, creamy.

Be **positive and excited** when introducing a new food.

**Don't assume** that a child won't like a food because it's new or different, and **praise children** when they do try a new food.

Serve a new food along with a familiar food, and ask children to point out **the similarities** between the two foods.

If a food is not accepted after several tries, **change the way it is prepared and/or served**.

When children **do accept** a new food, **serve it again soon** so they get used to it.

Use **fun food names**, and invite children to come up with their own.

Ask children, **"What would your favorite superhero eat?"**

## Getting children involved

### Age 2

Wash and tear lettuce and salad greens, carry unbreakable items to the table

### Age 3

Mix ingredients, rinse fruits and vegetables, spread hummus or peanut butter

### Ages 4-5

Measure dry and liquid ingredients, peel hard boiled eggs, mash soft vegetables

# INSTEAD OF... TRY THIS!

"See that didn't taste so bad did it?"

"Do you like that? Which one is your favorite?"

"Jenny, look at your sister. She ate all of her bananas. You have to take one more bite before you leave the table."

"Is your stomach telling you that you're full? Has your tummy had enough?"

"No dessert until you eat your vegetables."

"We can try these vegetables again another time. Next time would you like to try them raw instead of cooked?"

---

## Creating a positive meal environment

Provide **child-sized tables, chairs, dinnerware, and utensils.**

**Before mealtime,** try activities to help children slow down, such as coloring, reading a story, or setting the table.

Offer a **variety of different colored foods** on the same plate.

Prepare different varieties of the same food in a dish, such as **different shaped pasta or different colored beans.**

Let children **follow their hunger cues** and allow them to leave food on their plates.

**Sit and eat with children,** and try new foods in front of them.



# SAMPLE CACFP MENU

## Cycle 1 Meal Plan

### WEEK 1

Monday			
Component	Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Milk	1% or fat-free	1% or fat-free	
Fruits	Mandarin oranges	Kiwi	
Vegetables		<i>Garden Pita</i>	Carrots
Grains	Cold cereal	<i>Garden Pita</i>	
Meat or meat alternate		<i>Garden Pita</i>	String cheese

Tuesday			
Component	Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Milk	1% or fat-free	1% or fat-free	
Fruits	<i>Berry Bonanza</i>	Strawberries	
Vegetables		Spinach	Red peppers
Grains	<i>Berry Bonanza</i>	Brown rice	Whole grain rice cakes
Meat or meat alternate		Unbreaded fish fillets	

Wednesday			
Component	Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Milk	1% or fat-free	1% or fat-free	
Fruits	Banana slices	Apple slices	Pineapple chunks
Vegetables		Baked sweet potatoes	
Grains	Toast	Whole grain dinner roll	
Meat or meat alternate		<i>Nom Nom Nuggets</i>	Hard boiled eggs

Thursday			
Component	Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Milk	1% or fat-free	1% or fat-free	
Fruits	Blueberries	Mandarin oranges	
Vegetables		Broccoli	<i>From the Garden Salad</i>
Grains	Whole grain pancakes	Whole grain pasta	Whole grain crackers
Meat or meat alternate		Baked whole turkey breast	

Friday			
Component	Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Milk	1% or fat-free	1% or Fat-Free	
Fruits	Peaches	Grapes	Apple slices
Vegetables		<i>Pizza My Heart</i>	
Grains	Oatmeal	<i>Pizza My Heart</i>	
Meat or meat alternate		Real cheese cubes	Non-fat yogurt

# SAMPLE CACFP RECIPE

## COWPOKE CHILI

Meal Type: Lunch or Supper			
Ingredients	10 Servings	50 Servings	100 Servings
Ground turkey	1 lb.	4 lb. + 11 oz.	9 lb. + 6 oz.
Black beans, canned	1/3 cup + 1 Tbsp.	1 1/4 lb.	2 1/2 lb.
Kidney beans, canned	1/3 cup + 1 Tbsp.	1 1/4 lb.	2 1/2 lb.
Onion, chopped	3/4 cup	1 1/2 lb.	3 lb.
Light brown sugar	1/2 cup + 2 Tbsp. (packed)	3 cups (packed)	6 cups (packed)
Diced tomatoes, canned	3/4 cup + 1 Tbsp.	2 1/4 lb.	4 1/2 lb.
Carrots, chopped	1/2 cup + 2 Tbsp.	1 lb.	1 3/4 lb.
Green bell peppers, chopped	1/2 cup + 2 Tbsp.	1 lb.	2 lb.
Corn (fresh, canned, or frozen)	1/2 cup + 2 Tbsp.	1 lb.	2 lb.
Tomato paste, canned	1/3 cup + 1 Tbsp.	2 cups + 1 Tbsp.	4 cups + 2 Tbsp.
Garlic, minced	1 Tbsp. + 1 tsp	1/3 cup	3/4 cup

### Directions

1. In a Dutch Oven or large pot, brown turkey over medium heat. Remove turkey when cooked and set aside.
2. Chop onions and carrots. In the same cooking vessel, sauté onions and carrots for about 3 minutes.
3. Add garlic and sauté for another 3 minutes.
4. Add the remaining ingredients and cook for 30 minutes (until heated thoroughly) over medium heat, uncovered. Stir occasionally.

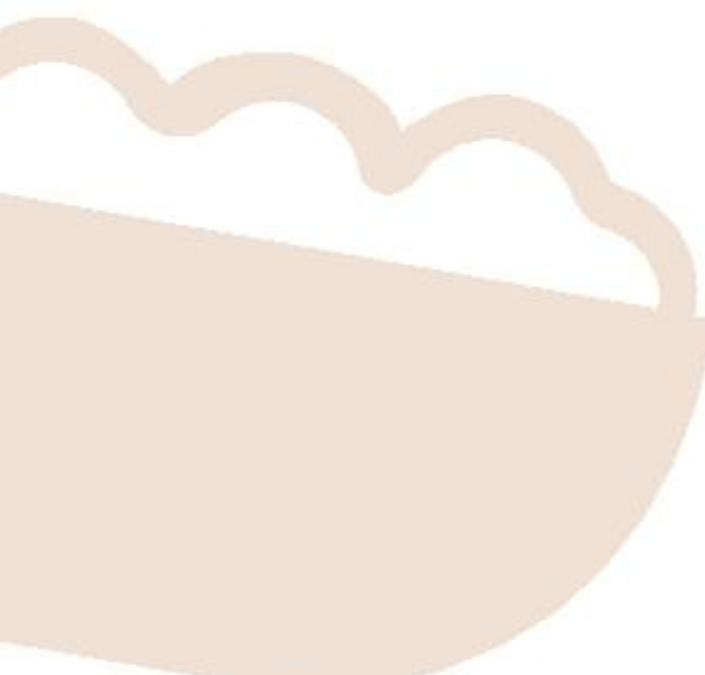
### Serving Sizes

Age Group	Serving Size
Ages 1-2	1/2 cup
Ages 3-5	3/4 cup
Ages 6-12	1 cup

### Food Components Used

Vegetable

Meat or meat alternate



**For more recipes and menu cycles,** click here to visit the [CACFP Menu Planning Guide](#).

NOTE: The number of servings is based on Ages 3-5; Number of servings may increase or decrease based on the ages of the children served.

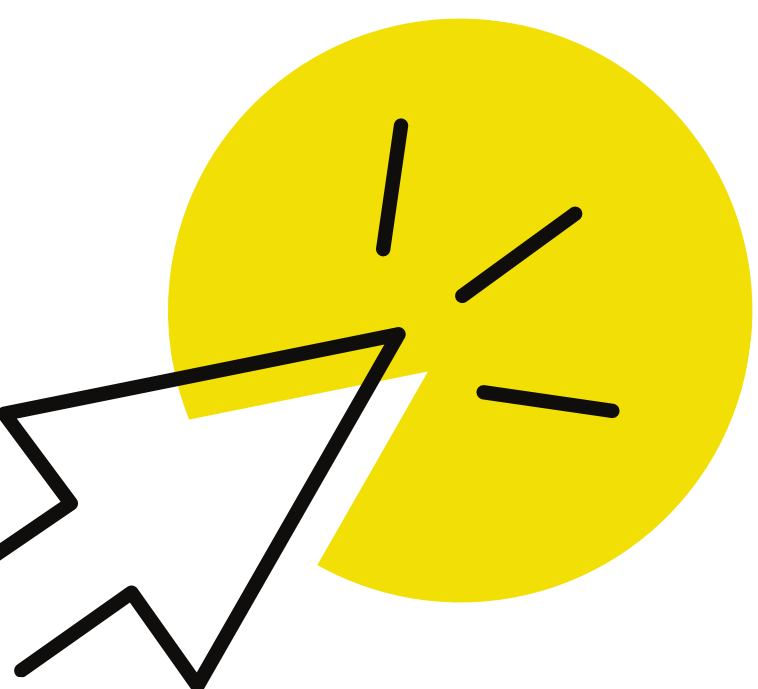
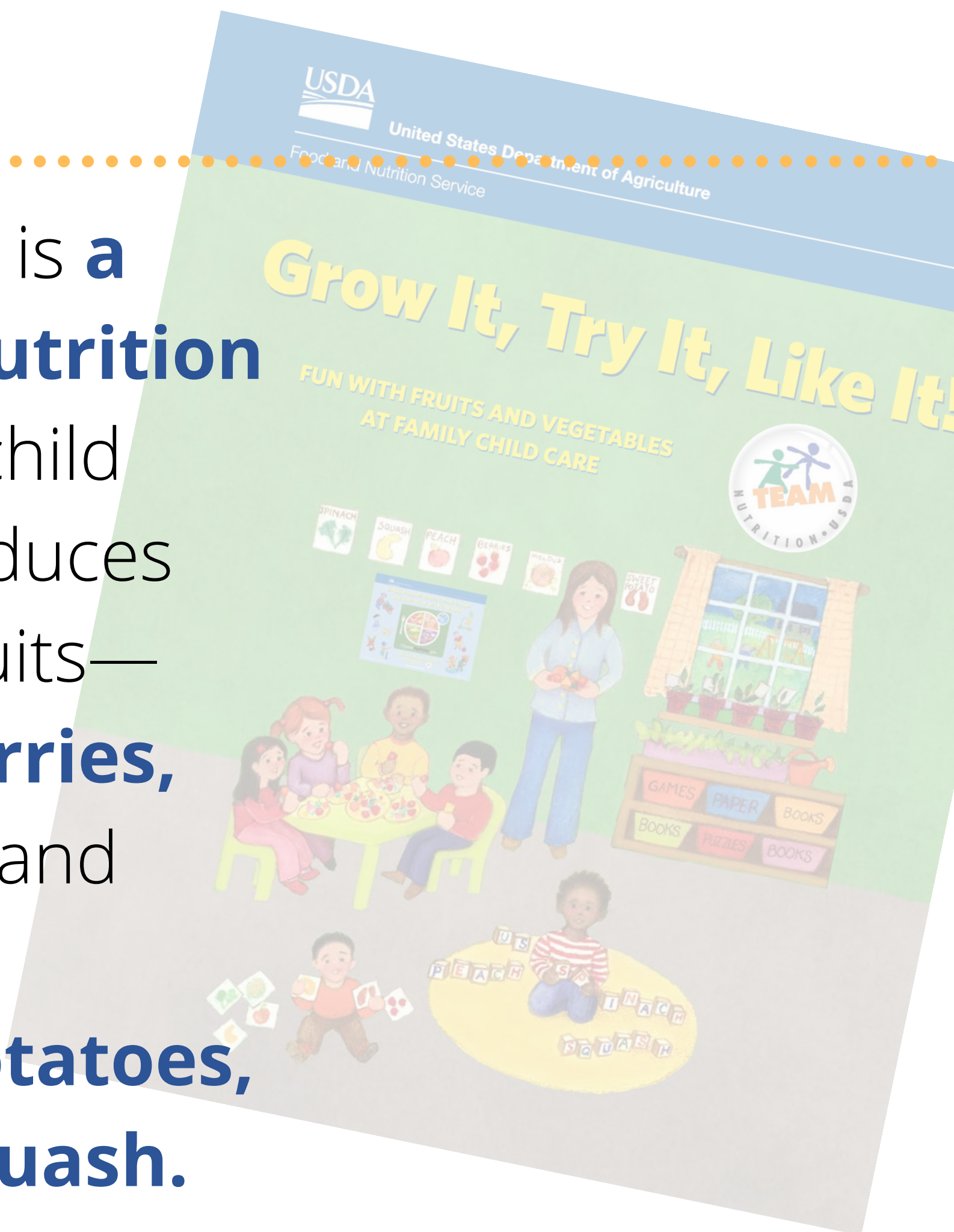
Recipe adapted from Thomas, R., Khoiuri, L., Fenton, W. Nutrition in the Kitchen. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia 2nd ed.; 2008. [www.chop.edu/export/download/pdfs/articles/healthy-weight/healthyweight-pdf-nutrition-kitchen-complete-book.pdf](http://www.chop.edu/export/download/pdfs/articles/healthy-weight/healthyweight-pdf-nutrition-kitchen-complete-book.pdf). 2010. Updated and revised: June 30, 2017.

# GROW IT, TRY IT, LIKE IT!

*Grow It, Try It, Like It!* is a **garden-themed nutrition education kit** for child care staff that introduces children to three fruits—**peaches, strawberries, and cantaloupe**—and three vegetables—**spinach, sweet potatoes, and crookneck squash**.

Each set of lessons contains: **hands-on activities, planting activities, nutrition education activities,** and **tools for family involvement.**

*There are two kits*—one designed **for child care centers** and one **for day care homes.**



# SAMPLE EXCERPTS

## Grow Your Own Great Ideas!

Read this bountiful list of Garden Art and Crafts. Let the ideas germinate while you plan your lessons from *Grow It, Try It, Like It!*

### Garden Art:

#### Decorated Garden Bags

Create paper bags with images of fruits and vegetables, perfect to send a seedling home or carry a special snack.

#### Garden Bookmarks

Mark favorite stories and recipes with produce-illustrated bookmarks.

#### Produce Placemats

Set a colorful table with placemats promoting fruits and vegetables.

#### Garden Scene Note Cards

Cultivate a desire to write with hand-made note cards from the garden.

#### Tasty Acres Mobile

Set into motion great foods—fruits and vegetables!

#### Stamped Wrapping Paper

Give presents a special look or make a bushel basket full for gift giving.



### Garden Crafts:

#### Row Markers

Perk up any garden spot or container with markers to show what is yet to grow.

#### Seed Art

Create an original design with seeds and more.

#### Painted Pots

Decorate clay pots for use in a container garden or for gift giving.

#### Garden Stones

Step into the wonderful world of plants with personalized garden stones.

#### Garden Gloves

Create excitement for young green thumbs with garden gloves of their very own! These gloves make a great handmade gift to cherish.

#### Make a Scarecrow

Celebrate the harvest of learning by making a very special garden friend.





### A3: Crookneck Squash Sandwiches

The children make sandwiches with crookneck squash slices. They explore the feel, smell, and taste of crookneck squash.

#### Objectives

The children will be able to:

- Make a simple snack with crookneck squash;
- Taste a new food featuring crookneck squash.

#### Before the Activity—Hand Washing

- Explain that we always wash our hands before preparing and eating food. Have the children wash their hands (see Booklet 1, Tool Shed Resources, page 43, for directions).

#### Materials Needed

- Crookneck squash, about 1-2 inches in diameter
- Mozzarella or cheddar cheese slices
- Plates and napkins

#### What To Do Ahead of Time

- Prepare crookneck squash—wash the outside of the crookneck squash well and cut into ¼-inch slices, two per child.
- Cut cheese slices into triangles or squares, one slice per child.
- Prepare a plate for each child with two slices of squash and one piece of cheese on the plate.



**Activity Length:**  
10 minutes

#### The Activity

- Have each child seated at the table(s).
- Explain that we always wash crookneck squash under running water before they are eaten. Tell the children you have already washed the crookneck squash.
- Give each child a paper plate with at least two thin slices of crookneck squash and one slice of cheese.
- Tell the children they are going to make a sandwich with crookneck squash.
- Show the children how to place the cheese between the crookneck squash slices to make a sandwich. Have the children note the difference in shapes between the round squash slice and the triangle or square cheese slice in the sandwich.
- Remind the children of the interesting curved shape of a crookneck squash.
- After making the crookneck squash sandwiches, invite the children to eat their snack.
- As the children eat, ask them to describe how the crookneck squash:
  - ▶ smells (mild);
  - ▶ feels in the mouth (cool, smooth, firm, and crunchy); and
  - ▶ tastes (fresh).

#### Words To Grow

Slice	Smooth
Cool	Firm
Crunchy	Round
Triangle	Cheese



### B3: Plant Seeds or a Seed Tape Outdoors

The children plant spinach seeds or a seed tape outdoors. They learn what spinach seeds need to grow into plants.

#### Objectives

The children will be able to:

- Describe the resources needed to grow spinach;
- Experience planting a spinach seed or seed tape.

#### Planting Options:

- Follow the directions on the back of the spinach seed packet to plant seeds directly into the ground.
- If you have grown spinach seedlings from seeds inside and hardened the plants for outdoor planting, you can substitute the plants for the seed tape.

#### Materials Needed

- Spinach seeds or a seed tape, or see planting options
- Garden or flowerbed, 12 feet or longer
- Hoe or trowel to make space to plant seed tape
- Garden hose with sprinkler nozzle or watering can

#### What To Do Ahead of Time

- If using a seed tape, prepare the seed tape (see Booklet 1, Tool Shed Resources, Make a Seed Tape, page 54).
- Prepare garden or flowerbed for planting by tilling (breaking up) and fertilizing the soil (see Booklet 1, Tool Shed Resources, Green Thumb-Guide—Gardening Outdoors, page 58).
- Plan to serve spinach in some form at snack or mealtime (see Booklet 1, Tool Shed Resources, Ten Terrific Ways..., page 48).



#### The Activity

- Take the children and the spinach seeds or tape seed outside. Explain that today they will be planting spinach seeds and learning what seeds need to grow into plants.
- Point to the sun. Ask the children how the sunlight feels on their skin. (Warm)
- Explain that the light and warmth of the sun helps spinach seeds grow into plants that will produce more spinach.
- Show the children the soil in a garden or flowerbed. Let them touch the soil. Ask them how the soil feels. (Wet or dry, hard or soft) Explain that spinach seeds need soil to grow into plants.
- Run some water from a hose or pour some from a container and let the children touch it. Ask how it feels. (Wet) Explain that water helps plants grow. Explain that water for plants usually comes as rain. Spinach needs lots of water; farmers and gardeners will use sprinklers in addition to rain to make sure plants have plenty of water.
- Have the children help you lay the seeds or the prepared seed tapes in the soil at the preferred planting depth of ½ inch. Cover with soil and water. Remind the children how far apart spinach plants are planted (at least 6 inches apart).



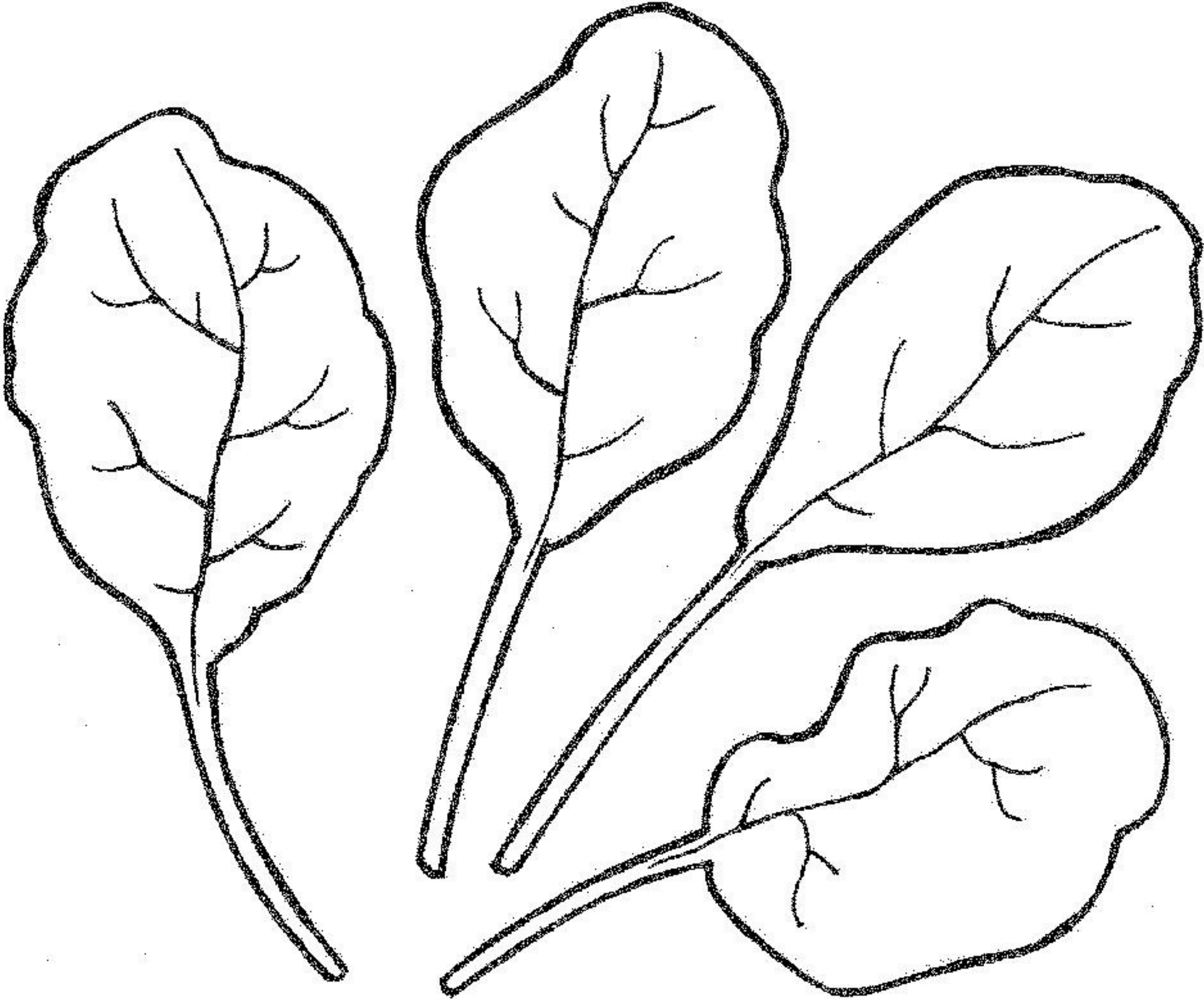
**Activity Length:**  
15 minutes



#### Green Thumb Guide

Is space limited? Spinach grows well in a container (see Booklet 1, Tool Shed Resources, Green Thumb Guides Container Gardens, page 55). To adapt this activity to plant in a container, see Plant a Strawberry Jar, Strawberry Patch B3 for the 8-to-10-inch container option.

# Spinach



# SAMPLE NEWSLETTER

## FAMILY NEWSLETTER PICKY EATERS

Dealing with children who are picky eaters is never an easy task. Being a “picky eater” can mean several things in children. It can mean eating small meals, eating slowly, showing a lack of interest in food, acceptance of a limited variety of foods, unwillingness to try new foods, limited intake of fruits and vegetables, as well having strong food preferences. These behaviors all lead back to the overall problem of limited food acceptance. Our goal with Grow It, Try It, Like It! is to expose children to a variety of new foods, as early childhood presents a unique opportunity to influence food acceptance and preferences that can influence health over the lifespan.

Additional resources for picky eating children: *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* by Ellyn Satter



The USDA is an equal opportunity provider.

Tips for trying new foods:

—  
Never force a child to try something

—  
Offer food items multiple times

—  
Don't prepare separate meals for children

—  
Encourage children to help in the kitchen

—  
Offer small portions of new things

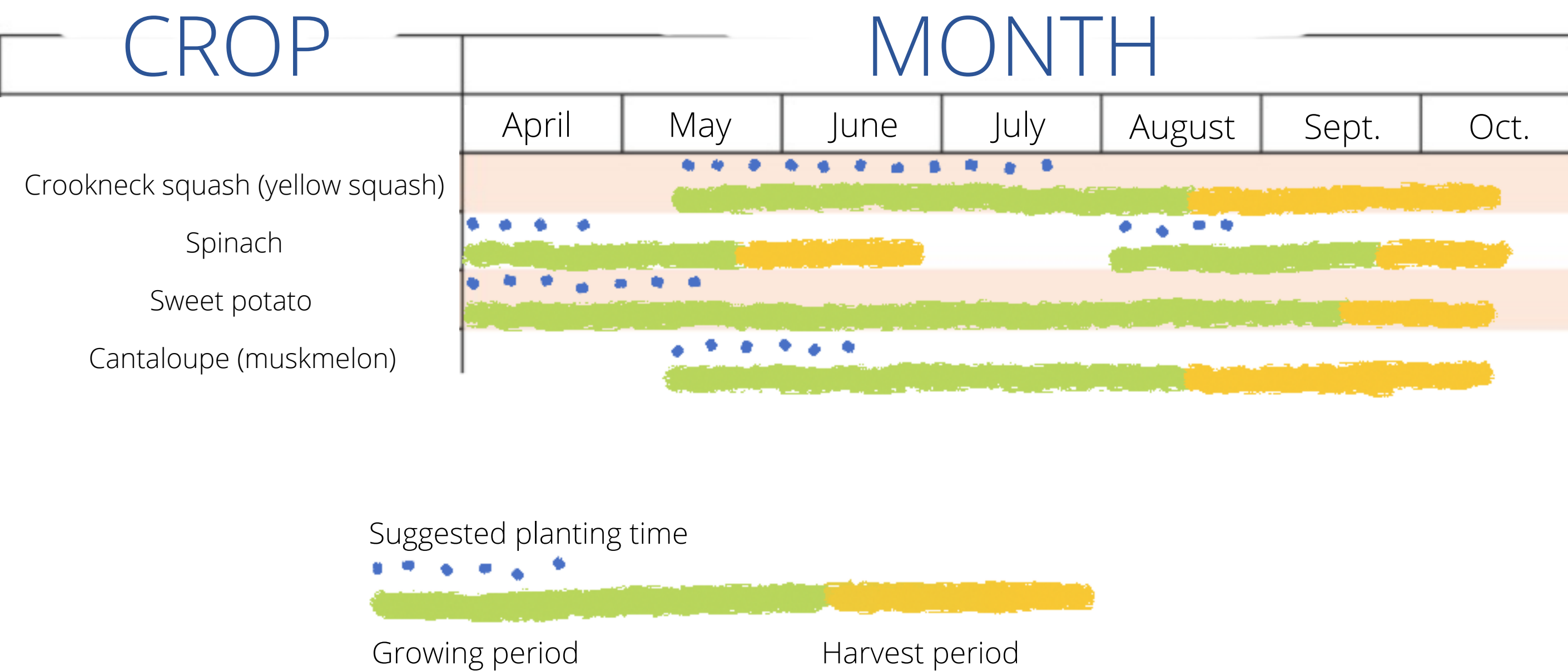
**Monthly family newsletters** share consistent nutrition messages **with children and their families.**

Newsletters include [Cantaloupe](#), [Growing Great Food Tasters](#), [Peaches](#), [Polite Food Taster](#), [Spinach](#), [Sweet Potatoes](#) and more!



# IOWA GROWING CALENDAR

## Annuals



## Perennials

### STRAWBERRIES

Strawberry types for growing in Iowa are:

**June bearing**, which bear fruit in June;

- Recommended varieties: 'Earliglow,' 'Allstar,' 'Honeoye,' 'Surecrop,' 'Redchief,' 'Jewel,' and 'Kent.'

**Everbearing**, which bear fruit in June and late summer/early fall;

- Recommended varieties: 'Ozark Beauty' and 'Ogallala'

**Day-neutral**, which fruit throughout the growing season (except during especially hot weather).

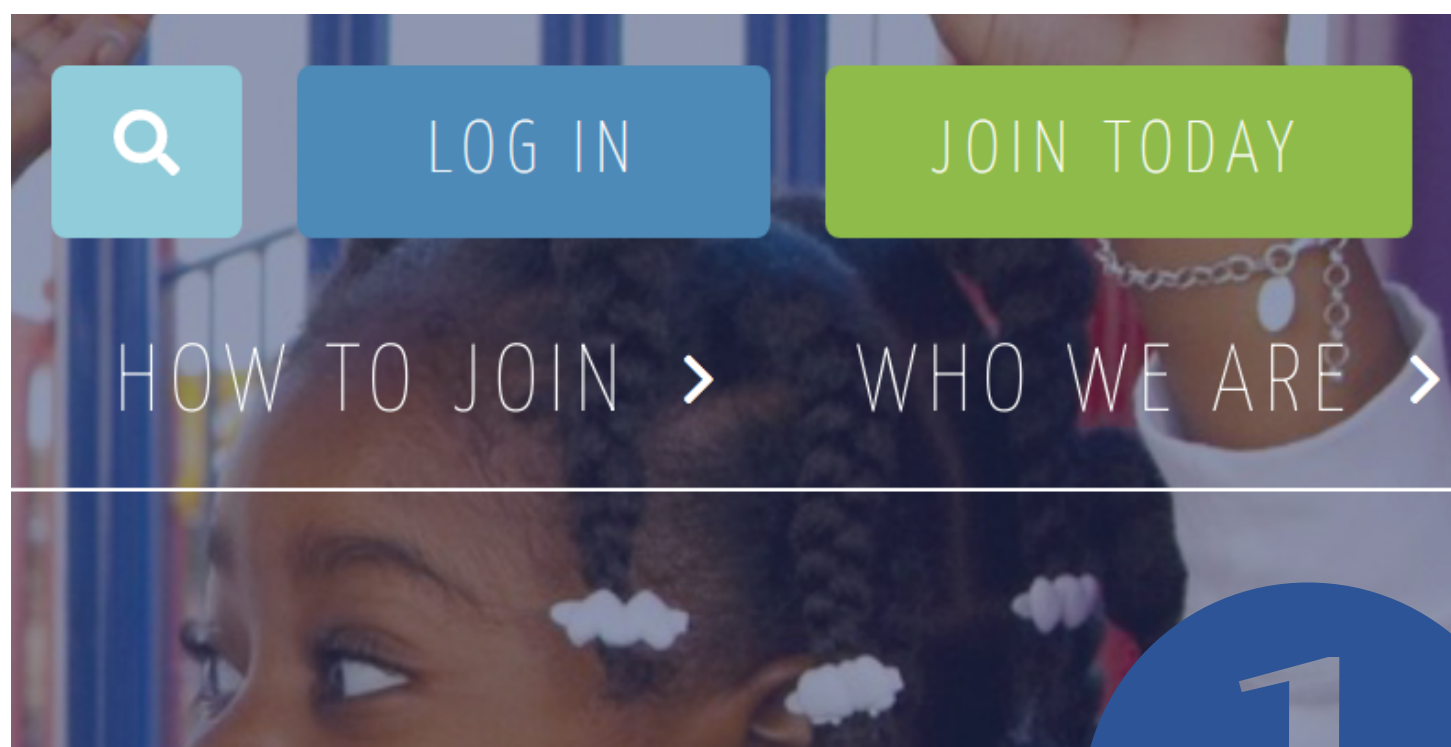
- Recommended varieties: 'Tristar' and 'Tribute'

### PEACHES

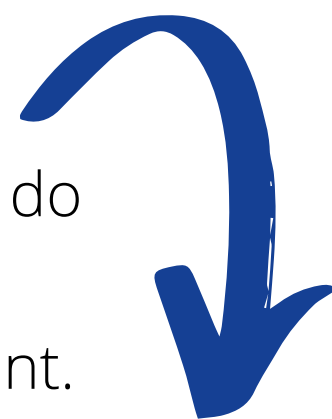
**Growing peaches is challenging in Iowa**, but more-so possible in the southern third of the state. Recommended varieties in Iowa are 'Reliance' and 'Polly.'

# TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS

## JOIN GO NAP SACC!



Go to [www.gonapsacc.org](http://www.gonapsacc.org) and click '**Join Today.**' If you do not have an account you will need to register for an account.



Contact Erin Olson at [erin.olson@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:erin.olson@idph.iowa.gov) to obtain the registration code.



Under '**Directors & Owners,**' click '**Continue**' and follow the prompts.



Start with '**Child Nutrition,**' then explore the other modules!



Complete the **Go NAP SACC five steps.**

Don't forget to **retake your assessment** later on!

# IOWA SMARTER MEALTIME SCORECARD



## TEAM NUTRITION IOWA™ Smarter Mealtime Scorecard for CACFP

Name of Center/Provider/Classroom \_\_\_\_\_

- Indicate whether the “Best Practice” statement is true by checking the box to the left
- Total the number of checked boxes and write the number at the bottom
- The unchecked boxes are areas to work on and implement in the future

Assess your practices for Menu Planning and Parent Communication Sections for the past month:

Menu Planning	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foods served at breakfast and lunch have a variety of colors
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fresh fruit or vegetable is served once daily
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fruits and vegetables are served in kid-friendly ways <i>(e.g. caterpillar kabobs, delicious dippers, or cut in small pieces)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vegetable options have been given creative or descriptive names
<input type="checkbox"/>	Locally sourced foods are served at least once per month
<input type="checkbox"/>	Menu includes culturally relevant meals and snacks based on the childcare population
<input type="checkbox"/>	Higher fat meats and entrees that are processed are served no more than once per week <i>(e.g. hot dogs or chicken nuggets)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Different entrees are served each day of the week
<input type="checkbox"/>	Type, texture, and consistency of food is appropriate to decrease choking risk
<input type="checkbox"/>	Whole grain foods are served at least half the time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Legumes are served one or more times per week <i>(e.g. black beans, hummus, or baked beans)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	The menu is shared with children as part of daily routine



Parent Communication and Involvement	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Menus are posted and available
<input type="checkbox"/>	Special celebrations are limited to non-food items brought from home <i>(e.g. child's birthday or holiday party)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recipes, information, or activities are shared to promote new foods at home
<input type="checkbox"/>	Invited to participate in the mealtime experience
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have opportunity to share child's mealtime preference
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have the opportunity to provide input on menu items

Assess the mealtime experience, environment and provider involvement in your childcare setting at lunch today.

Mealtime Experience	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children have enough time to eat without being rushed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children decide if and how much to eat
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children are involved with mealtime set up and clean up routine



Mealtime Environment	
	Meals are served family-style
	Serving utensils are age appropriate
	Eating utensils are age appropriate
	Eating utensils are suitable for the meal being served
	The dining area is bright, colorful, and free of clutter
	Tables are washed and sanitized before and after meals
	All food is on the table or plate at the beginning of the mealtime
	Posters or pictures promoting healthy food and physical activity, including children's art work are visible in the dining area
	Hand washing takes place before and after the meal
	Drinking water is available at the table

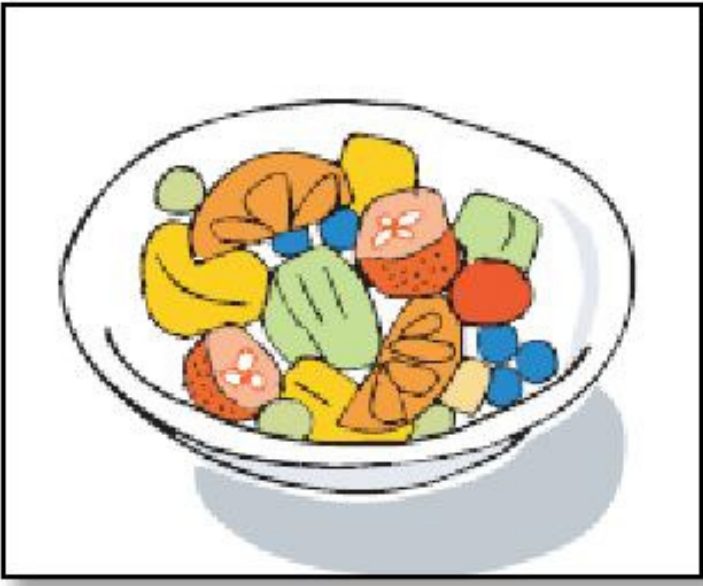
Provider Involvement and Support	
	Greet children with a smile
	Sit at the table with the children and eat the same food
	Model appropriate mealtime behaviors
	Encourage children to try new foods without pressure
	Lead pleasant conversation with children during mealtime
	Avoid making comments about how much or how little food is eaten



Smarter Mealtime Score: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Create an action plan for the top three areas to work on and implement:

Changes to Work On	Action Items to Complete	Date Completed:



Adapted from Minnesota's Childcare Mealtime Assessment Form.  
 USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.  
 (2016)

# TIPS FOR ADAPTING HHSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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While HHSE usually recommends serving meals family-style, **that is not advised right now.** Instead, plate each child's meal individually so that multiple children are not touching the same serving utensils.

When possible, **move HHSE activities outdoors.**

As during normal conditions, caregivers should **wash their hands** before preparing food and after helping children to eat. Sinks used for food preparation should not be used for any other purposes.

Encourage staff to take **everyday preventive actions** to prevent the spread of respiratory illness.



*Gardening  
is a great  
outdoor  
activity!*