

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Sowing Seed – The Growing Time

Spring is a time for sowing or planting. Child care providers can take opportunities to teach children in their care where food comes from and how it is grown. You can grow food in a garden or if space is limited for growing food outside, you can have an indoor garden that can work very well.

Before starting, show the children what items are needed for indoor gardens. Talk to them about having an indoor herb garden. Herbs are used to season and give food flavor. Have children plant, care for, and harvest the herbs. There may be a future farmer in the classroom. Teach children about growing food so they will know where it comes from and that it doesn't just appear in the grocery store. Consider taking children to visit a farm, which will allow them to see a larger part of our food system.



Let's talk about how children can learn about planting and growing food in a classroom, then maybe at home. How can you get started? Begin by asking the children these questions:

- Where does food come from?
- Do you know what a garden is, or is there a garden where you live?
- Has anyone heard of or seen a greenhouse?

If the answer is yes to these questions, ask them to tell you where they have seen a garden or what a greenhouse is.

If the children say no, explain and describe gardens and greenhouses, and perhaps include pictures. Tell the children the class will have a small container garden where they will grow herbs. (Items needed will be paper cups, trays or pans, potting soil, popsicle sticks and colorful crayons.)



Below are some questions that can assist you with your class:

What is a greenhouse?

A greenhouse is a building that allows certain types of plants to grow year round. The purpose of the greenhouse is to protect plants from excessive heat and cold. It is made of materials such as glass or a thick plastic that keeps out the damaging sun rays but keeps the heat in. Many greenhouses have vents in the top to let some of the heat out.

What are herbs and spices?

In general, people often use the words *herbs* and *spices* as though they mean the same thing. However, they are different. While they both enhance the taste of the food, herbs are the soft portions of plants and have a pleasant and distinctive smell. They are plants with leaves, seeds, or flowers that are used for flavoring food, medicine, or perfume. Spices come from the roots, buds, flowers, fruits, bark, or seeds of plants; have a strong or powerful taste; and are used to flavor food. Each herb and spice has its own unique taste or flavor. When using herbs or spices, remember to start with a small amount. Dried herbs should be added to the food at the beginning of cooking and fresh herbs at the end. Too much of a good spice may be too strong and cause the children to dislike it. Once children start growing food, they may become interested and ask about having their own garden at home.

There are many different types of gardens other than herb and spice gardens. Examples of these gardens are vegetable, flower, and rock gardens and too many more themes to mention. Perhaps you want the children to choose the theme of the garden, or you may want to choose a garden that will be easy for you and the children to care for. Remember that gardens come in all sizes, from window sill containers to many acres of food being grown.



These are steps to creating a simple herb garden.

Growing Herbs

1. Choose the Herb.

2. Choose a window that allows for light/sunshine to come in, and you can place the containers on the sill.

3. Choose the herb seeds that you want to grow.

Please check your roster for any students with allergies to food or any items you may be using in this activity to avoid any allergic reactions.

Peppermint

Rosemary

Lemon Balm

Sweet Basil

Sweet Mint

4. Read a list of items needed and have the children help you gather all materials.

List of Items You Need!

Seeds (8-10 per cup)
Paper Cups
Tray

Potting Soil
Popsicle Sticks
Crayons

5. Engage in a fun planting activity.

Have children

- Decorate planting cups and label with their names.
- Put the name of the herb on popsicle stick.
- Scoop the dirt into the cup. Use a measuring utensil to scoop the exact amount.
- Put the seeds in, cover with dirt, put the cups on a tray, and water the plants.

Bonus Activity

Cut a paper ruler for the children to measure the growth of their plant each week. Teacher should put $\frac{1}{4}$ inch measurement marks on paper to make a ruler.

Teachers Note: Follow instructions on the seed packets for proper planting. Make the paper ruler 4 to 6 inches.

Try these herbs!

Chives, Lavender, Lemon Grass

These vegetables are great for outdoor container gardens, but can be started indoors: green beans, lima beans, black-eyed peas, English peas, garlic, and/or squash/zucchini!

Seeds

Potting Mix

Popsicle Sticks

Cups

Make
Drainage
Holes

Homemade
Ruler

Colorful Crayons

Write Child's
Name On Cup

Decorate
Cups

Read stories to children about growing plants or food. Let them know you can grow inside and outside of your home or center.

You may need:

- Pictures of herbs
- Pictures of how to plant seeds
- Pictures of steps to take to grow indoors
- List of items needed

Check out USDA's garden-themed nutrition education kit, *Grow It, Try It, Like It!* Nutrition Education Kit

www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it

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