Serving a Variety of Vegetables on a Budget

Are your menus boring or unappealing to both young children and adults? Would you like to add some spark, but don’t know where to start? Start with vegetables to add variety to your menus and increase appeal to young children. Vegetables come in all shapes, textures, colors, and varieties. Not only are vegetables quick and easy changes for the menus, but they can be prepared and presented in numerous ways. This month, we will focus on tips and strategies for planning and serving vegetables without affecting the budget.

Vegetable Group
When first planning menus, think about the major colors of vegetables. There are five vegetable subgroups: dark-green, red and orange, dry beans and peas, starchy, and other. Each group provides a variety of different types of vegetables. In addition, each group provides different essential nutrients for young children. Check out the commonly eaten vegetables in the subgroups below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dark-Green Vegetables</th>
<th>Red and Orange Vegetables</th>
<th>Dry Beans and Peas</th>
<th>Starchy Vegetables</th>
<th>Other Vegetables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>Acorn Squash</td>
<td>Black Beans</td>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>Artichoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collard Greens</td>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Kidney Beans</td>
<td>Field Peas</td>
<td>Cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kale</td>
<td>Pumpkins</td>
<td>Lentils</td>
<td>Green Peas</td>
<td>Celery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard Greens</td>
<td>Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td>Pinto Beans</td>
<td>Plantains</td>
<td>Okra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romaine Lettuce</td>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>Split Peas</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Zucchini</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vegetable Parts
Planning a variety of different ways to use vegetables is a cost effective measure for maintaining your current budget. As you plan menus, think of the edible parts of each vegetable and the different ways in which they can be prepared and served. Some examples of common edible parts are leaves (cabbage), flowers (artichokes), roots (carrots), seeds (lima beans), stems (celery), and fruits (cucumbers). Different parts of the vegetable can be used for a variety of different dishes. For example, broccoli’s common edible part is the flower, but the stem and the leaves can be used for the same dish or other dishes.

Preparing Vegetables
It’s important to prepare vegetables in the most appealing way. Overcooked vegetables can lose some of their essential nutrients. They may also become mushy making them less appealing to young children. In addition, adding heavy gravies or sauces will add fats and calories causing a potentially unhealthy dish. This is why it’s important to pay special attention to preparing nutritious, appealing, and tasty vegetables.

When first preparing vegetables, cut away bruised, wilted, or damaged areas. Prepare vegetables with very little or no salt or solid fats, such as butter and stick margarine. Use “no salt added” or “low sodium” canned foods. If this option is not available, rinse canned vegetables in water to remove the high sodium content. Explore herbs and salt-free spices while preparing vegetables. Add parsley or chives to carrots or garlic or nutmeg to broccoli to add a blast of flavor to the dish. Sprinkle cooked vegetables with reduced fat cheese or a low sodium seasoning blend.

Next, think about the cooking methods. There are numerous ways to cook vegetables. Prepare and serve vegetables fresh instead of fried or breaded. Steam green beans, carrots, or broccoli and add a dash of seasoning or combinations of herbs and spices. Roast root vegetables, such as beets, carrots, and turnips. Grill vegetables, such as asparagus or corn on the cob. Other cooking methods include broiling, sautéing, poaching, and baking.

Presenting and Serving Vegetables
Vegetables should be presented to young children in the most appealing way to increase their acceptability by young children. First, purchase and use brightly colored plates to add excitement to each meal. Serve vegetables that are easy to recognize by young children. In addition, serve new vegetables with well-liked foods. Encourage children to try each component including the vegetables, but don’t force or pressure children. Explore family style dining and encourage young children to serve themselves. Incorporate tablecloths, center pieces, child-sized utensils, and other materials that assist in making family style dining successful.
15 Tips for Adding a Variety of Vegetables Without Adding Cost

There are many strategies for adding a variety of vegetables to the menu without adding cost. Let’s look at 15 tips for adding more vegetables without increasing the cost.

1. Explore Farm to Child Care.
2. Shop at a local farmers market or Cooperative Extension Program (Co-op).
3. Visit local farms and pick vegetables for your program.
4. Purchase fruits in season.
5. Utilize a kitchen pantry inventory system.
6. Purchase food in bulk and freeze excess food for future use.
7. Minimize waste and purchase what you absolutely need.
8. Grow your own vegetables in gardens or buckets.
9. Join a Community Supported Agriculture Program.
10. Buy generic or store brand foods as opposed to name brand foods.
11. Utilize cycle menus.
12. Bargain shop, using the weekly sales ads.
13. Create a budget and learn basic food math.
14. Don’t shop when you’re hungry to avoid over spending.
15. Avoid purchasing pre-cut, pre-washed, or ready-to-eat vegetables because they tend to be higher in cost.

Nutrition Tip of the Month

Decorate a nutrition themed bulletin board. The key objective of decorating a nutrition themed bulletin board is to highlight all the great nutrition related events taking place in your child care program. Include monthly menus, a list of new foods, and a list of food related celebrations. Display an easy recipe related to the new foods in the monthly menu for parents to try at home. Post pictures of children completing nutrition related activities and pictures of children and/or parents eating during lunch and snack. Be creative and post the board in a high traffic area.

What Are the Facts?

When shopping for groceries, do you pay close attention to the terms and dates listed on foods, such as those in the picture to the right? There are two types of foods that may list dates: perishable foods and shelf-stable foods. Open dating is found primarily on perishable foods, such as meat or poultry. While closed or coded dating may appear on shelf-stable foods, such as cans or boxes of food. There are four types of dating codes you may find on food packages: use-by-date, sell-by-date, best if used by (or before) date, and closed or coded dates.

- **Use-By-Date** is the last date for the product to be used at peak quality and is determined by the manufacturer.
CACFP Rock Star of the Month

The CACFP Rock Star of the Month is Ms. Darlene Vukmanic. Ms. Vukmanic is the Health and Nutrition Supervisor for the Community Action Southwest of Pennsylvania Early Childhood Services. She oversees the Head Start/Early Head Start Child and Adult Care Food Program for two counties (Washington and Greene) which includes 29 classrooms and 650 children. She played a vital role in obtaining the “Cooking Matter’s” grant, and since then she has taken the initiative to teach parents healthful cooking techniques. In addition to her daily role of planning menus, training and motivating her staff, and assisting her colleagues, she plans trainings for parents at grocery stores and parent cooking classes to increase the awareness of the importance of preparing healthful meals in the home. Congratulations Ms. Vukmanic! You are truly a CACFP Rock Star!

Vegetable of the Month

It’s veggie time! The vegetable of the month is the artichoke. Artichokes grow as flower buds in plants, reaching a height of 3 feet and weighing as much as 20 ounces. In the world, there are over 140 artichoke varieties. The most common varieties in the United States are the Green Globe, Big Heart, Imperial Star, and the Dessert Globe. Artichokes are naturally fat-free and cholesterol free, and they are high in fiber and vitamin C. When selecting artichokes, pick plump and heavy artichoke heads with closed leaves. Prepare artichokes for young children in a variety of ways and serve as a single dish or mixed in with other dishes, such as stews and spreads. For more information about artichokes, visit the Fruits and Veggies More Matters website at http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/artichoke
National Conference
The 40th National Head Start Association Conference will be held April 30 – May 3, 2013. The conference will be hosted at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. This conference brings a very diverse group of professionals together for trainings, celebrations, and networking among child care professionals. To register follow the link at https://nhsaannual13.expotracker.net/index.aspx

Week of the Young Child
The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) sponsors the annual Week of the Young Child Celebration. This year the theme is “Early Years are Learning Years”. The Week of the Young Child focuses on young children, their families, child care programs, and services. For celebration tips and ideas, follow the link at http://www.naeyc.org/woyc

National Garden Month
The National Gardening Association sponsors National Garden Month in April of each year. Do you have a garden or need ideas about gardening in child care? There are multiple types of gardens to accommodate small or large spaces, such as raised gardens, gardens in a bucket, hanging plant gardens, and solar gardens. For gardening tips, celebration tips, and other ideas, follow the link at http://www.nationalgardenmonth.org/

If you have other state or national level CACFP news you would like to share, email us at nfsmi@olemiss.edu

Sources