

Fresh from the Garden

COOKING VEGETABLES FOR GOOD TASTE AND GOOD HEALTH

This lesson demonstrates how to prepare fresh vegetables. It may be presented as a general overview of vegetable preparation, or one or more cooking techniques may be included (see steaming, stir-frying and roasting vegetables).

Use the lesson to:

- Teach about the health benefits associated with vegetables.
- Introduce more healthful alternatives to traditional cooking techniques
- Demonstrate how to properly wash, store, peel, cut and cook fresh vegetables

Key presentation points:

1. Nutrition and health benefits associated with vegetables
2. Healthful cooking/preparation techniques
3. Vegetable preparation
4. Basic knife skills
5. Cooking demonstrations
6. Sampling

Additional (optional) points:

- History or origin
- Cultural information
- Interesting or fun facts

Additional (optional) activities:

- Prepare a large fresh, lightly steamed, or roasted vegetable salad containing a variety of vegetables. Depending on the season, the vegetables might include beets, turnips, spinach, and chard, or tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant and peppers.

Preparation:

- Review lesson material.
- Review presentation guidelines.
- Review demonstration checklist.
- Review resources for additional presentation information or activities.
- Select seasonal vegetables for demonstration.
- Prepare vegetables for demonstrations, as necessary.
- Prepare recipes or parts of recipes for demonstration and sampling, as necessary.

The following is a suggested script with step-by-step demonstration activities:

PRESENTATION: VEGETABLE PREPARATION

Introduce yourself and review what you will be presenting with the audience. Discuss the recipe(s), if any, that you will demonstrate.

Note: If you plan to demonstrate recipes some preparation before the presentation may be required,

“For good health it is important to eat a variety of seasonal vegetables. Fresh from the garden vegetables are the best tasting and may be the most nutritious. They are low in calories and packed full of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants (fruits are too). A ½ cup serving of most vegetables is 25 to 50 calories. Starchy vegetables, such as potatoes, corn and peas have 50 to 100 calories per ½ cup. Be sure to eat vegetables every day – 2 ½ to 3 cups or more are recommended. Research continues to show that eating vegetables may decrease the risk of heart disease, some cancers, and other health problems.”

- ☞ Measure out a 1 cup portion and place on a small plate
- ☞ Point out the portion size
- ☞ Display and compare portion size to familiar non-food objects

“Vegetables are available in many varieties with a rainbow of colors and an array of textures. There are many healthful ways to prepare and serve vegetables – fresh and raw, crisply steamed, stir-fried, grilled, roasted, pureed, mashed, sliced, diced or whole. It is possible to lose some of the vitamins and minerals when washing, peeling, chopping, and cooking fresh vegetables, so be sure to prepare and cook them properly. Today’s presentation will demonstrate a few simple techniques for nutritious and delicious vegetables.”

- ☞ Display an assortment of fresh, colorful vegetables

Storage:

“Most vegetables should be stored in the vegetable crisper section of your refrigerator. Unripe tomatoes (technically a fruit) should be stored at room temperature until they have ripened, and may then be refrigerated. Tomatoes lose some of their texture and flavor when refrigerated. Store potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, and winter squash in cool, dry, well ventilated places.”

- ☞ Display refrigerator/crisper graphics and vegetable basket

Washing:

“Always wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 15 to 20 seconds before preparing food.”

☞ Demonstrate hand washing technique

☞ Demonstrate 15 to 20 seconds recommendation by singing “the happy birthday song” twice during the hand washing procedure

“Wash all fresh vegetables thoroughly before eating them. Scrub them under running water using a brush. Washing removes dirt, as well as some bacteria and pesticide residue. Never use soap. It can leave a residue that is difficult to remove.”

☞ Demonstrate vegetable washing techniques

“Never soak vegetables in water for long periods of time or store them in water because Vitamin C, the B vitamins and some minerals can be dissolved in the water, and washed down the drain.”

☞ Display a container with cut-up vegetables stored in water

“For leafy vegetables, separate the leaves remove the tough stems and place them into a bowl of water. Swish the leaves around to remove the dirt. Then lift the leaves out of the dirty water and drain.”

☞ Demonstrate technique for washing leafy greens

Peeling:

“Whether you peel or not depends on the vegetable and your taste. Keep in mind that both fiber and nutrients are found in the edible skin of vegetables, so when you remove peel or skin you remove nutrition. Whenever possible, leave the skin on, but be sure to scrub vegetables well with a brush before eating or cooking.

To peel most vegetables, use a sharp paring knife or a “peeler” to remove a thin layer.”

☞ Demonstrate vegetable peeling technique

Chopping:

“Use a sharp knife to cut vegetables. Contrary to common belief, a sharp knife is safer than a dull one. A sharp blade cuts more easily, while a dull one can slide off the vegetable’s surface causing an accident.”

☞ Demonstrate sharp knife vs. a dull one

☞ Demonstrate how a dull knife can slide and cause an injury

“Use a cutting board on a flat surface. If it slides around while you’re working, secure it by placing it on a damp kitchen towel or other non-slip surface, like a rubber mat. For example, an inexpensive placemat with a foam bottom or a computer mouse pad will do a good job.”

- ☞ Demonstrate how to prevent a cutting board from slipping with a towel and a rubber placemat or a computer mouse pad

“Some vitamins and minerals can be lost when vegetables are cut or bruised. On the other hand, keeping peeled and/or cut-up vegetables handy in the refrigerator may mean that more will be eaten as snacks, added to salads, or quickly prepared for meals. Lost nutrients can be compensated for by eating more vegetables.

Cut-up vegetables cook more rapidly than whole ones. Quick cooking methods, like stir-frying, usually call for coarsely chopped or thinly sliced vegetables.”

- ☞ Demonstrate vegetable cutting techniques:
 - Coarsely chopped: cut a bell pepper (or other vegetable) into 6 to 8 bite-size pieces
 - Diced: cut coarsely chopped pieces into small cubes – about ¼” in size
 - Finely chopped: cut diced pieces into very small pieces

“Store cut-up vegetables in an airtight container in the refrigerator.”

COOKING

“Eat vegetables raw and cooked. While heat can destroy some nutrients, cooking makes others more available for absorption by the body. A good example of this is tomatoes. Eat them raw for the most vitamin C. To benefit from the cancer fighting lycopene they contain, they should be cooked.”

- ☞ Define phytochemicals and discuss health benefits, if time allows (see “*Nutrition – the basics*” handout for information on phytochemicals)

“Vegetables are best when they are tender but still crisp. They should never be mushy. Overcooking destroys their fresh, natural color and crisp texture, as well as some of the vitamins and minerals.”

- ☞ Display a plate of overcooked broccoli (or other vegetable) and a plate of correctly cooked broccoli
- ☞ Compare the difference in color and texture

“Vegetables should be cooked quickly in the smallest amount of water possible and served immediately. Reheating will destroy some additional vitamins.”

☞ Display vegetable pieces in a glass pot. Add just enough water to cover the vegetables

“Steaming or microwaving vegetables saves more nutrients than cooking in large amounts of water.”


☞ Display graphic of different vegetable steamers

“Cooking vegetables in a covered pot prevents nutrients from escaping with the steam and also shortens the cooking time.”

☞ Place lid on pot

“Save liquid left over from cooking vegetables. Freeze it in small containers and add to soups or stews.”

Never add baking soda (bicarbonate of soda) to cooking vegetables. While it does preserve the bright green color of some vegetables, it can destroy vitamin C and the B group vitamins.”

☞ Display baking soda graphics with red  sign on box

“Cook vegetables until just tender. Most vegetables should be somewhat crunchy rather than soft and mushy. Green vegetables should be bright green rather than olive green. Overcooked vegetables will have poor color, texture, and flavor, and will not be very nutritious.”

☞ Display plate of overcooked broccoli and plate of correctly cooked broccoli again

☞ Compare the difference in color and texture

“Prepare vegetables just before serving. If they won't be eaten right away, cool and refrigerate them. Reheat just before serving time.

Boiling, steaming, stir-frying, roasting, microwaving, grilling, and dry sautéing are methods of cooking vegetables that are considered to be more healthful. Each one has advantages and disadvantages. The most important advice for all cooking methods is **DO NOT OVERCOOK VEGETABLES.**”

☞ Display the “do not overcook” graphic

“Determine how well-done you prefer your vegetables. Some vegetables, such as winter squashes, are not cooked sufficiently until they are very tender. Others, such as green beans or broccoli, should remain a bit firm. The cooking method will affect the texture. Stir-frying and steaming produces vegetables that are crisp. Baking and braising makes them very tender.

The visual appearance of vegetables will give you a clue as to their doneness. Less cooked vegetables have a brighter color than overcooked vegetables.”

- ☞ Point to the display plates of overcooked broccoli and correctly cooked broccoli
- ☞ Ask class which vegetable they would rather eat

NOTE: IF PRESENTATION IS ENDING HERE, SAY:

“Don't "undo" all the nutritional benefits of healthfully prepared vegetables by adding large amounts of salt and fat. Sauces, dressings, and other ingredients can add calories, fat, and cholesterol.

For good health, it is important to eat a variety of vegetables. Eat vegetables every day – at least 2 ½ to 3 cups. The more you eat the better chance you have for a healthy life.

Scientists have found that people, who eat vegetables, may have a lower risk of developing some of the more common cancers.”

- ☞ Ask for questions
- ☞ Thank audience for their participation
- ☞ Conclude presentation

NOTE: IF PRESENTATION IS CONTINUING, DO NOT CONCLUDE. PRESENT ROASTING, STIR FRYING, AND STEAMING MATERIAL –ONE, TWO, OR ALL THREE.

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