



Choosing and Adapting a Recipe for the Kitchen Classroom

Summary

Our recipes (with the exception of baking) are designed to be flexible in order to maximize seasonality and accommodate student input. Rather than create an entire recipe from start to finish, we often take an existing recipe and adapt it to fit our needs. All of our recipes are vegetarian, and we add greens to just about everything! We create our recipes to be replicable in a home kitchen with basic tools and equipment, and we encourage students to take recipes home.

We choose recipes that can be completed in a single 86 minute class period by a group of 8-10 students. Our recipes are intended to be a generous tasting portion, not a full meal. When possible, we want our students to have seconds or take a sample home in a to-go container.

Choosing a Recipe

What we cook is the central part of every kitchen class. When creating lessons for kitchen class, there are two primary questions we ask:

1. What kitchen skill or life skill do we want our students to learn or practice?
2. Is there a recipe that will highlight a specific academic connection?

Regardless of whether the lesson is academic or life skills based, we choose recipes that will be a tangible reinforcement of the concepts we want to teach.

What is the kitchen skill or life skill we want our students to learn?

When we want to introduce a new knife skill or cooking method to our students, we look for a recipe that emphasizes that specific technique and we select a recipe that allows the maximum number of students to practice that knife skill or cooking method. For example, during our Maki Sushi lesson, we teach our students how to cut vegetables into a matchstick. We provide an array of vegetables, such as carrots, Daikon radishes, and watermelon radishes so that as many students as possible get the opportunity to cut vegetables into matchsticks.

Does the lesson have an academic connection?

For our lessons with an academic link, we choose recipes that will most strongly illustrate the curricular connection. Our recipes support the academic content taught at the Chef Meeting so that cooking becomes a tangible reinforcement of the academic concepts.

When we are teaching a history lesson, we look for recipes representative of a region or ingredients that originated in a particular place. We will often change or adapt these recipes to fit our needs by adding or taking away different ingredients. For example, when we teach a history lesson on the four climatic zones of the Arabian Peninsula, we make



sure that each of the four climatic zones is represented with an ingredient that originated in that zone: pomegranates for the mountains, dates for the oases, wheat for the coastal plains, and yogurt for the desert. We then chose a recipe (or in this case, recipes) that will highlight each of these ingredients.

Adapting a Recipe

Once we decide on a recipe, we adapt the recipe to fit our needs. Many of our recipes in the kitchen are flexible and can be altered depending on the season, the availability of ingredients, or personal preference. Our style at the Edible Schoolyard is to add vegetables! Adding vegetables to a recipe has many benefits. First, it ensures that our students are eating and learning to cook a variety of vegetables. Also, it increases the number of cooking jobs available to students. Lastly, adding vegetables allows us to incorporate more vegetables and herbs that are available in the garden. When adapting a recipe for the Edible Schoolyard kitchen, we ask these key questions:

1. Will the students be excited to prepare the recipe(s) and eat the finished result?
2. Can we complete the recipe(s) in a class period?
3. Are there enough cooking jobs?
4. What can we use from the garden or is there a seasonal ingredient we want to highlight?
5. Will our students be able to make the recipe(s) at home?

Will the students be excited?

We want the students to be excited about all aspects of kitchen, from the preparation of the recipes to eating. One of the best ways to ensure that students are enthusiastic about cooking is to make sure that the food they eat tastes delicious. We test recipes before we prepare them with students to check flavors and timing. Also, introducing new ingredients, knife skills, and cooking methods fosters student buy-in and gets our students excited about trying new foods.

Can we complete the recipe in a class period?

If the class period does not allow for all the cooking time necessary, we have a few ways we speed up the process. For recipes requiring boiling, we always make sure the water is on the stove before the students enter the kitchen classroom, and if we are using the oven we always make sure it is preheated. If time is running tight on a given recipe, we might partially cook or steam denser vegetables, such as potatoes, before the students arrive so that the vegetables cook more quickly once they are added to the recipe.

Recipes such as Soft Pretzels and Hand-made Pasta require time to rise or rest, and we take this as an opportunity for one class to help another. In these cases, students cook with the dough from the previous class and they make the dough for the next class. We make the dough for the very first class of the lesson to get this process started.



We use a similar system when we cook with vegetable stock. When cooking with vegetable stock, students save their vegetable scraps so cooking teachers can make stock for the next class. We make the first batch of vegetable stock for the first class of the lesson to get this process started. We typically keep the vegetable stock warm throughout class to speed up the cooking process.

Are there enough cooking jobs?

During every kitchen class students take part in preparing the ingredients, cooking, and setting the table. We like every student to have the opportunity to try any and all of the jobs they are excited about.

Choosing recipes with plenty of cooking jobs ensures that our students stay focused and engaged for the entire kitchen class. Kitchen jobs, of course, change depending on what is being prepared. When planning a lesson, the kitchen teachers read through the recipe and discuss what the cooking jobs will be. Ingredients typically determine how each recipe is divided up into cooking jobs, but cooking jobs are often flexible and are contingent on the interests and skills of the students.

If there is not enough work to keep all the students engaged for the entire period, we often add vegetables, typically greens, to the recipe. However, if there is still not enough work for all of the students, we will consider adding a second recipe that will complement the first. For example, when we made Quick Irish Soda Bread with our students, the cooking groups finished the recipe so quickly that the students did not have enough to do while the bread baked in the oven. We then decided to add a homemade Chai that could be served with the soda bread.

Once the steps of the recipe have been explained, chef teachers hand the execution over to the students. The chef teacher's role is to ensure safety and cooperation and to prompt students and offer reminders. All the mincing, measuring, stirring, and cleaning should be done by the students.

Sometimes there are lulls once a student has finished his/her task. Here are some examples of auxiliary cooking jobs students complete during down time:

- Create a centerpiece for the table
- Fold napkins
- Slice lemons or harvest mint for the water

What can we use from the garden? Is there a seasonal ingredient we want to highlight?

By using garden produce in every lesson, we hope to instill in students the importance and pleasure of eating seasonally, an important factor when a student is trying something for the first time. Because we cook seasonally we know they are using ingredients at their peak flavor, and eating fresh, seasonal foods is a great way to introduce new ingredients to



our students while fostering a deeper understanding of garden science. This requires working with the garden staff to plan when in the school year certain ingredients might be ready or ensuring that garden produce is available when needed.

Will our students make the recipe(s) at home?

We encourage our students to cook at home, therefore we prioritize recipes that are easy to replicate in a home kitchen with basic tools and equipment. We choose ingredients that are easy to find and affordable to buy. Also, we often write recipes to include optional ingredients, which encourages students to make it their own. The more adaptable and flexible a recipe, the easier it is to duplicate in a home kitchen with available ingredients.