

Guidelines for Hosting a Successful Taste Test in Early Childhood Settings

The goal is to help students eat better; improve their eating habits and health. Think about the long-term impact of your taste tests and focus on foods you are studying. Can the food be added to your regular lunch or snack offerings?

Tips for Successful Classroom Taste Tests – for teachers

- ❖ Provide multiple opportunities to explore a food
- ❖ Have teachers/staff taste test, too. This is important role modelling!
- ❖ Reinforce messages about making better food choices.
- ❖ Take advantage of the taste test as a time to communicate core messages about the featured foods, especially their health benefits.
- ❖ Make the taste tests fun and inviting
- ❖ Place signs and posters throughout the classroom to generate interest in the taste test.
- ❖ Play relaxing music as part of the taste testing to generate excitement.
- ❖ Include games related to the foods being served: play “Match the Grain Game” (asking students to look at whole grains in their original form and see if they can identify them), or play the “Mystery Game” (placing fresh fruits and vegetables in a paper bag and asking students to identify them by touch).
- ❖ Ask servers to wear costumes or dress in the color of the food you’re serving.
- ❖ Show where the food is grown on a state or county map.
- ❖ Tie the taste test to other subjects, like math. For example, show students a purple carrot with the top on, have them estimate its weight, then have them weigh it. Or use an apple to learn fractions. Ask children to guess the color after it is peeled.
- ❖ Invite a farmer to bring his or her local food and discuss how it is grown or made.
- ❖ Be sure to communicate regularly with parents about what their children are trying – they won’t believe it!
- ❖ To increase the consumption of vegetables, invite classes to experiment with recipes and create names for new dressings and dips, for instance.
- ❖ Use this time to teach kids about the nutritional value of the food and emphasize the healthy benefits it has on the body, including aiding in digestion and preventing sickness and disease.
- ❖ Keep the school food service aware and involved in your classroom taste tests – they might be able to provide some of the raw ingredients, connect you with local farmers that they work with, and feature the foods in their breakfasts and lunches.

Things You Need in the Classroom:

- ❖ Food safety protocol
- ❖ Ideally a sample of raw whole produce to show students the real thing before processing
- ❖ Food to sample
- ❖ Spray bottle with chlorine water /disinfectant wipes
- ❖ Gloves for prepping and serving
- ❖ Serving utensils (tongs, folks, spoons etc.)
- ❖ Hand sanitizer (optional)
- ❖ Plastic produce bags for leftovers
- ❖ Taste test ballots or graphing charts
- ❖ Paper towels
- ❖ Aprons
- ❖ Serving platters
- ❖ Compost bucket
- ❖ First aid kit

Sample discussion questions:

- ❖ Have you had (food) before? – If yes, how did you have it? (Raw? Steamed? Roasted? Sautéed?)
- ❖ Did you know that (food) is a type of ...?
- ❖ Which part do you like better, stem or leaf? Can you eat the stem or leaf?
- ❖ How do you describe the flavor of each part? Sweet, Sour, Savory, etc.
- ❖ Can you imagine how it grows in the ground? (On vine, root below ground or above ground)
- ❖ What is your favorite way to eat (food)?
- ❖ Have the kids observe with their senses. What does the food look like, what it smells like and what it feels like, the sound it makes when eating, etc.

