

# FOOD, *glorious* food

There is no such thing as too many cooks in an early years settings, so get your children involved, says dietician, chef and founder of Grub4Life, **Nigel Denby...**

**C**ooking is a fantastic activity to do with young children: they can learn and practise a wide range of skills, and it gives them an understanding of food and where it all comes from. But even more important than that, it's one of the most fun, therapeutic and interactive activities you can do.

## **Basic skills for under-fives**

Being able to cook is a great skill to have, and whilst it can sometimes feel like a chore to adults, it's an exciting and fun activity for children. It's also a terrific way to get children interested in food in general, or to help children with food issues to feel comfortable with ingredients they don't currently eat. Start by teaching children the following basic cooking skills:





## findoutmore



For more ideas and recipes to try in your setting, go to

[grub4life.org.uk](http://grub4life.org.uk) or contact Nigel Denby at [Nigel@grub4life.com](mailto:Nigel@grub4life.com)

- Buttering a slice of bread.
- Cracking eggs by tapping the centre of the egg over the rim of a small bowl, and then using thumbs to pull the two halves apart.
- Decorating fairy cakes or biscuits – spreading on the icing butter or just adding the sprinkles or other toppings.
- Kneading and rolling out dough using a rolling pin.
- Cutting shapes out using cookie cutters.
- Using a sieve – by holding over a larger bowl and gently shaking.
- Cutting soft fruit or vegetables, for example, a banana, with a non sharp knife.
- Grating cheese – especially good if you've got a rotary grater.
- Crushing biscuits for bases or non-cook chocolate recipes – in a plastic bag with a rolling pin.
- Rubbing in butter and flour for crumble.
- Crushing garlic in a garlic press.
- Greasing and lining cake tins.
- Mashing bananas with the back of a fork for banana bread/cake.
- Mashing potato with a potato masher.
- Peeling vegetables with a vegetable peeler.

### The recipe for success

#### Choose what you make carefully:

For children under three, choose something like an easy biscuit recipe or a fresh fruit salad – nothing that takes too long or is too involved. As children get older, they can concentrate for longer and you can move on to more complicated dishes and eventually entire meals.

#### Plan ahead:

Make sure you have all the ingredients before

you embark on a session in the kitchen. Involve the children in choosing a recipe, shopping for the ingredients or planning the shopping list, making the food and finally eating it. It's amazing how children are more likely to eat foods that they have been involved in making.

#### Allow plenty of time:

Don't think you can do anything quickly when you've got little helpers in the kitchen. Things tend to take a long time, so don't squeeze a cooking session in between other sessions.

#### Expect mess:

You're going to have to expect some mess even with the neatest of children but once you're in that 'messy frame of mind' it's easier to turn a blind eye to that layer of goo developing on the floor. You can always have a good clear up later, but allow time for the clear up when you plan the cooking session. Unless you have a full change of clothes handy, don't forget aprons for everyone!

#### Decide on key learning outcomes:

We might take it for granted that eggs are laid by chickens and that sugar, cocoa, rice and flour all come from plants, but children may be amazed to learn just where their food comes from, and how it is produced.

#### Extend the learning:

A trip to a local farmers market, farm shop or better still a farm where you can pick your own fruit and vegetables will also open children's eyes to the variety of foods available in the UK.



## Give me five!

If you're finding it difficult to persuade children to eat healthily, why not try using these fun five-a-day easy-dress tabards from Pretend To Bee? Suitable for ages 3–7, choose from a banana, strawberry, pineapple, carrot and pea pod. There is a 10% discount available to Ofsted registered settings and schools. Visit [www.pretendtobee.co.uk](http://www.pretendtobee.co.uk)



Try these tasty and nutritious recipes...

## Bread

Bread is really easy and satisfying to make. Here's a recipe for making bread dough – you can make a simple loaf or try some rolls.

**Ingredients (makes 12 rolls or a 2lb loaf)**  
**425g/15oz strong white bread flour (or use any combination of strong white/wholemeal/granary bread flour)**  
**2 tbsp melted butter, olive oil or vegetable oil**  
**1 ½ tsp sugar or honey**  
**½ tsp salt**  
**1 ¼ tsp fast action dried yeast**  
**260ml/9fl oz warm water or milk**

- Put the flour into a large bowl, add the butter/oil and mix well, then stir in the sugar, salt and yeast. Make a well in the dry ingredients and add enough of the water/milk to make a soft (not sticky) dough. If the dough is too sticky, just add a little more flour, or add a drop of water if the dough is too dry. Knead for 5 minutes and then cover and put aside to rise for around 45 minutes. Knead again and put into a greased 2lb loaf tin. Cover and leave for a further 30 minutes.
- Bake at 200C/Gas 6 for about 30 minutes. Turn out and cool on a wire rack. Alternatively cut dough into about 12 pieces and make into bread rolls. Bake for 10–15 minutes.

## Savoury Flapjack

These flapjacks are simple to make and great for snacks.

**Ingredients (makes 10–15 flapjacks)**  
**2 eggs**  
**50g butter or unsaturated spread**  
**150g grated cheese (use less cheese or reduced fat cheese if preferred)**  
**150g porridge oats**

- All you need to do is mix the ingredients and press into a greased 8-inch/20cm tin. Get your children to join in if they fancy it. Then bake for about 30–40 minutes at 180C/Gas 4 until golden brown. Once it's cool, cut it into slices.
- Variation: add some grated or finely chopped veg.**

## Pizza

There's nothing like the taste of freshly cooked pizza, and once you've got used to making your own, you'll never want to go back to buying frozen pizzas again!

If you want to cheat and save a bit of time, you could use one of the following to make the base:

- Mini or full-sized pitta or naan bread
- Crumpets
- Halved baguettes, bagels or muffins

- Tortilla wraps
- Pizza base mix

If you have more time, have a go at making your own scone base (makes two pizzas):

**Ingredients**  
**225g self-raising flour**  
**50g butter or unsaturated spread**  
**1 egg**  
**milk**

- Rub the flour and butter together until they resemble breadcrumbs. Mix in the egg and then add enough milk to make a soft dough and knead lightly.
- Divide the dough into 2 pieces, or 4 pieces if you want smaller pizzas, and pat out into rounds. Place on greased baking sheets.

Or try making a traditional bread base (makes two pizzas):

**Ingredients**  
**225g of strong plain flour**  
**100ml of water**  
**1 tsp fast action dried yeast**  
**1 tsp sugar**  
**½ tsp salt**  
**1 tbsp olive oil**

- Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl and knead until you have a smooth dough (add a little more flour if the dough is too sticky). Cover the bowl with cling film and allow to prove for around 30 minutes. If you have a bread maker, use the dough setting.
- Divide the dough into 2 pieces, or 4 pieces if you want smaller pizzas, and pat out into rounds. Place on greased baking sheets.

## To start off all pizzas:

Tomato purée or tomato ketchup or passata  
 Dried mixed herbs, oregano or fresh chopped basil

- Spread the tomato over the pizza bases, sprinkle with the herbs. Top with grated cheese and get the children to decorate with your choice of toppings.
- Bake in a preheated 200C/Gas 6 oven for 5–10 minutes if using one of the quick options, or 15–20 minutes if using a scone or dough base, until golden brown.

## Fruit Kebabs

**Ingredients**  
**Chunks of seasonal fruit**  
**Kebab sticks**

- Thread the chunks of fruit (pineapple, banana, apple, peach, apple, mango, melon, strawberries, grapes...whatever is in season) onto wooden satay sticks (take care with the

sharp ends). Serve with yoghurt, cream or ice cream.

- For a hot alternative, heat 2 tbsp orange juice, 1 tbsp honey and a good pinch of ground cinnamon in a small saucepan until just bubbling. Brush the orange juice glaze over the fruit and grill the kebabs for a couple of minutes each side. Pour the remaining glaze over the fruit and serve.

## Weetabix Cake

This is a great recipe for children to help with – they love crushing the Weetabix!

**Ingredients**  
**300g self raising flour**  
**25g sugar**  
**200g raisins (or any other dried fruit)**  
**2 Weetabix (crushed)**  
**½ – 1 tsp mixed spice**  
**275ml milk**  
**1 medium egg (beaten)**

- Measure out all the dried ingredients into a large bowl. Pour in the milk and egg, and mix well (the mixture will look like a lumpy batter). Pour the mixture into a greased and lined loaf tin.
- Bake at 130C/Gas 3 for around 1hr 15 mins, until it is firm to touch, golden brown and a skewer or knife comes out clean. Once cooked, turn out of the tin onto a wire rack and remove the greaseproof paper. Cut into slices when cool.

## Fairy cakes

This recipe can be summed up as “the 4-4-4-2 recipe”, which once you know you will never have to look up again!

**Ingredients (makes 12 cakes)**  
**100g/4oz butter or unsaturated spread (softened)**  
**100g/4oz self-raising flour**  
**100g/4oz caster sugar**  
**2 eggs**

- Put the oven onto 180C/Gas 4. Whisk all the ingredients until creamy, and spoon into a bun tin or bun cases. Cook for 10–15 minutes until cooked. To check they are cooked just press gently and they should spring back. Once cooled, the cakes can be decorated.

- To make icing, mix icing sugar and (a tiny bit) of water to and spread it on the buns when cold. Decorate with anything you like (sprinkles, sweets, cherries). The children will love this bit – and eating them, of course!

- Once you've got the basics you can do anything with these. Try adding some cocoa to make chocolate buns. Add choc-chips to make choc-chip buns. Add raisins to make raisin buns. Add lemon zest to make lemon buns.