

FOOD PREPARATION IN THE FOUNDATION ENVIRONMENT



Peer into a Foundation environment on a typical day, and you might be surprised to see young children independently using tongs, whisks, mortar and pestles, and even knives. Food preparation is part of the Practical Life curriculum in Montessori classrooms of any age, but it is particularly essential to the Foundation environment where children are establishing a healthy relationship with food, an awareness of reality, and an understanding of a full cycle of work. When we allow our children the chance to do things for themselves, we present them the chance to cultivate a deep and authentic sense of self-worth.

The Foundation classroom provides many different opportunities for the toddler to manipulate food using real child-size utensils, which are easy to hold and control. When children are learning about how their bodies and hands work, real tools give them precise feedback, whereas toys may not. Typical cooking actions are broken down into individual activities allowing the child to repeat, practise, and gain mastery over their hands. Mistakes are expected as part of the learning process so it can get messy! Nevertheless, figuring out how to tidy up effectively is also part of developing problem solving skills. Each activity requires accuracy, focus, and concentration to achieve the final product.

Many of these activities are connected to the daily snack at a communal table where toddlers often gather as a small group because they want to do what others are doing. Just

as it is for adults, food connects the children socially; conversations around the snack area often involve exchanges of gratitude and discussions about food among the children. This is also an ideal time for the adult guide to introduce the tantalising vocabulary surrounding food and the multi-sensorial experience of eating: it is bitter, sweet, salty, sour, spicy, crunchy, soft, hard, sticky, juicy, chewy, refreshing, dense...the world is your oyster! Gentle introduction of the importance of nutrition and balanced diet also begins in these settings. Food provides us with an invaluable connection to family and friends. It is a core part of our identity to our culture and to the cities where we live. Rituals around mealtimes are also central to our daily routines. When Dr. Montessori emphasised the importance of helping the first plane (age 0-6) child become a person of his place and time through his own experiences, she understood that the toddler must learn to adapt to these rhythms of life. We find that children seem to be more open to trying new foods that they help prepare. It is hard to dislike something that you are invested in! Food preparation also conveys the cycles of activity within a Montessori environment. The children become more engaged and connected with their reality because they can see that their individual actions have value and impact on the group. They begin to notice that their own hard work is worth it. These experiences of contributing to the bigger picture also help them to become aware of their sense of self-efficacy. There is something incredibly empowering about being able to make something for yourself with your own two hands.

[Click here](#) for a list of kitchen tools that your child can use at home, from the How We Montessori blog