

Portland Tribune

Mealtime food fights? Battle back with fun

Eating-oriented events entertain kids while they teach

By Audrey Van Buskirk

The Portland Tribune, Apr 18, 2008



Courtesy of the Merry Kitchen

For a recent Star Wars-themed cooking class, Julie Merry of Northeast Portland's Merry Kitchen channeled her inner Obi-Wan Kenobi to inspire her young chefs.

Picky eaters are made, not born.

At least that's the theory. It can be hard to believe when confronted with a child who won't eat anything colored or anything not colored ... well, nearly all children have some sort of food phobia.

And while there are few things more important for a child's future well-being than instilling the habit of a healthy, complex diet, it's just so easy sometimes to take the mac and cheese and pb & j route.

Luckily, Portland parents have loads of places to turn to for help in convincing their offspring that beets are sweet and greens are keen.

— *Audrey Van Buskirk*

Cooking classes

As generations of family cooks know, there's no easier way to get children to eat something than to have them make it themselves. While turning the spatulas, mixing spoons and knives over to the kids can seem like a dicey proposition, there are several places where they can learn and experiment with glee (and safely!).

Julie Merry, creator of the Merry Kitchen (www.themerrykitchen.com, 503-946-8357), says, "This is my passion, teaching kids to cook."

In her Northeast Portland home, the registered dietitian and Western Culinary Institute graduate teaches a fun variety of weekly classes for different age groups, starting at age 3. She also coordinates private events and birthday parties.

Her classes (\$30 each) have kid-friendly themes: Food in Narnia attendants make Tumnus' Tea Cakes; Story Book Foods include Three Little Pigs in a Blanket, Hogwarts Table chefs craft butterbeer and cauldron cakes. She recently did an Intergalactic Food from Star Wars party with eight boys who made Princess Leia Danish Buns.

She'll also be offering weeklong summer camps covering Food Across America.

Visit the Web site for schedules.

Sur la Table (1102 N.W. Couch St., 503-295-9685, www.surlatable.com) offers occasional cooking classes for kids throughout the year and some intensive summer camps for ages 6 to 12 and 13 to 18.

The focus here is on learning real skills like chopping, grilling and baking, so while \$350 may seem expensive for the camp, the investment may pay off by expanding the roster of cooks in your household. Camps include aprons, knives and other necessary supplies.

The Portland Farmers Market (www.portlandfarmersmarket.org) offers Kids Cook classes for aspiring cooks ages 7 to 11 every other Saturday in June, July and August. Classes are taught by local chefs including Heidi Boyce of P.B. & Ellie's Cafe and Cory Schreiber, the Wildwood founding chef who's now the Farm to Schools Program coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Cost is \$15 per child and classes last from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Down on the farm

While taking your family along to one of Portland's many farmers markets is an easy way to expose them to the places their food comes from (see www.portlandtribune.com/sustainable for a current list), a couple of local farms offer more hands-on experiences.

Zenger Farm (11741 S.E. Foster Road, 503-282-4245, www.zengerfarm.org) is a nonprofit urban farm with the mission of "connecting kids to the food they eat."

School groups and other organizations visit throughout the year; summer brings weeklong camps covering life on the farm and cooking from produce grown and harvested there. Camps cost \$210 to \$230 and scholarships are still available.

At the summer camps at Old McDonald's Farm (1001 S.E. Evans Road, Corbett, 503-695-3316, www.oldmcdonaldsfarm.org) school-age children learn about animal care, gardening and farming on 68 acres stocked with 307 animals. The nonprofit farm also serves many at-risk children throughout the year by providing them with a rural experience.

If they pick it, will they eat it?

U-pick farms provide hands-on experience, literally, and can be a great way to get kids to try something new. For the freshest local options, visit www.pickyourown.org or www.tricountyfarm.org.

Copyright 2009 Pamplin Media Group, 6605 S.E. Lake Road, Portland, OR 97222 • 503-226-6397