

Plants we eat

BACKGROUNDER FOR EDUCATORS

We know that eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is good for our health and can help in preventing certain types of cancer, reducing the risk of heart disease and the risk of obesity. However, most Canadians are still not eating enough fruits and vegetables.^{iv} According to surveys, 70% of children aged 4 to 8 are eating fewer than the recommended 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables.^v Increased familiarity with a variety of fruit and vegetables, in different shapes and colours and how to use them can encourage children and youth to include fruit and vegetables in their food choices.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To foster a willingness to try new foods through developing familiarity with a wide range of fruits and vegetables, as well as an increased understanding of the importance of fruits and vegetables for both human health and the environment.



SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED

- Veggie Cards
- Small prizes (optional)
- Plant Pictures



SAMPLE TIMING AND FLOW

- 15 min Let's Talk About Plants
- 15 min Plant Relay
- 30 min Garden Activity
- 40 min Meal Preparation
- 15 min Meal Sharing
- 5 min Clean-up
- 10 min *Extra time: Salad & Wrap judging and awards*

ACTIVITIES

LET'S TALK ABOUT PLANTS

In this session we're talking about the plants that we eat.

Ask: What foods would we have if we didn't have plants?

Based on the answers, trace each food item back to the source.

- **Hamburgers** - the cows ate grass.
- **Cake** - the sugar came from sugar cane and the flour came from wheat plants.
- **Yogurt** - came from milk, which is from cows that ate grass.

Would we have any food without plants?! Explain how important plants are to give us energy and nutrients to keep our bodies healthy.

Describe that, just like humans have a head, a torso, arms, and legs, plants have different parts too. Use these **Plant Pictures** or real plant examples to show that all plants have roots, fruits, leaves and seeds. Which part we eat depends on the plant. Encourage group discussion.

Ask: How do you know that this beet is a root? Why do you think plants have roots? Why are seeds so small? What role do the leaves play in the growth of plant?

Also point out that we commonly know certain plants as being vegetables, but technically, they are the fruit of the plant. Can anyone name one of these? Answer: tomatoes, peppers, string beans, squash, cucumbers. Point out that many of the foods we eat are made of plant seeds, such as flours made from grains like wheat. Other examples are rice, corn, nuts, beans, lentils and peanuts. Review the purpose of each part of the plant:

- **Roots** - helps anchor the plant in the ground, absorb water and nutrients from soil
- **Fruits** - a home for seeds, attracts animals
- **Leaves** - catch the sun and turn it into food for the plant
- **Seeds** - for replanting and re-growth

To refresh your memory and see a full list of food items organized by plant part [click here](#).

PLANT PART RELAY

This activity is best done outdoors. Set up Plant Part category bins (like kitchen bowls!) in a line. Get them to line up about 15 meters away.

Split the group into two teams (of around 7 or 8), but highlight that the teams will not be competing against each other. They'll be using the same bins.

Have one session leader stand at the start line with the kids. They will be in charge of handing out the **veggie cards**. Have another session leader stand at the other end to help kids choose the right plant category.

Each individual runner/hopper has to sort the produce item they are given into the correct Plant Part bin before coming back and tagging the next person in line. That person then gets their vegetable or fruit from the session leader. They should have an idea of where it goes, but if not, their team can prompt them.

To make things trickier after the first round or if space is limited, have participants hop, skip or jump instead of run.

THE VEGGIE CHALLENGE

Host a friendly competition to make wraps or salads. Create challenges like:

- Must contain one of each of the plant parts
- Must contain veggies of at least 4 different colours
- Must contain at least 4 ingredients local to Nova Scotia.

Bring a “judge” (teacher, volunteer). You can award winners (and honourable mentions) for different categories, such as: appearance, adherence to criteria, taste, imagination, and overall “wow” factor.



EXTRA RESOURCES

- **The Edible Schoolyard Project** provides a platform for food and garden programs from around the world to share resources and ideas.
- This 12 part **Garden Workshop Curriculum** by the *Ecology Action Centre* is a useful tool for any new gardener. Filled with instructions and group activities on how to plan, plant, and care for a garden.
- The **Froogie App** helps track daily servings of fruit and vegetables in a fun and interactive way!



RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Choose vegetable heavy recipes like vegetable wraps or salads. Get tasting as many vegetables as you can. Encourage kids to taste them both fresh and cooked.



SUGGESTED GARDEN ACTIVITY

Continue exploring the plants we eat with the **Name That Plant!** activity.



FOOD FUN FOR ALL!

Several activities in this program are quite physically active, such as the relay race, which may be challenging for some. To ensure that everyone is included, try modifying the activity level (e.g., speed walking instead of running or have the race on a wheelchair friendly floor) or find other meaningful roles (e.g., time keeper, judge, relay course designer).