

Be a Veg Explorer



Northern NSW
Local Health District





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Introduction

Research shows that only one in 20 New South Wales children aged 2-15 years eat the recommended amount of vegetables each day. Encouraging children to eat vegetables can be challenging. Using sensory exploration through nutrition learning experiences in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services can support children to eat more vegetables. This may include looking, listening, feeling, smelling or tasting both familiar and unfamiliar vegetables each day. These activities familiarise children with vegetables which can lead to an increased willingness to try them. The greatest benefits are seen in ECEC services that schedule these learning experiences for at least four consecutive weeks.

Children are natural explorers. They are always asking questions and learning about the world around them. There are endless opportunities to explore vegetables with children in exciting ways. The activities in this resource can support children to learn about the five senses while exploring different vegetables. They will provide children with the opportunity to use science tools, identify colours and shapes and to develop language and fine motor skills.

The importance of food language

When talking about vegetables (and food in general), try to use neutral language. This means avoiding words such as yuk or yum, like or dislike, good or bad, healthy or unhealthy. Instead, talk about characteristics such as the colour, flavour or crunch of a specific vegetable. For example, instead of saying “do you like beetroot?”, you could say, “this beetroot is bright purple. Has anyone tried it before?”. This supports children to explore vegetables at their own pace in a safe and pressure free environment.

If parents or children use the phrase “I don’t like it”, a useful response may be “that’s OK, your taste buds may still be learning to like that vegetable”. Like learning to read and write, it takes time for children to learn to eat and enjoy a variety of different foods.

It is important to remember that fussy eating behaviours are a normal part of child development. Avoid labelling a child as a ‘fussy eater’. Children who are labelled as a fussy eater can start to believe that they are fussy and will continue to display these behaviours. Using neutral language and providing a child with support and encouragement will help overcome fussy eating behaviours.

How to use this resource

This resource provides suggestions on how to introduce the five senses to children. There are a range of learning experiences that use vegetables as the focus to explore the senses. These learning experiences are designed to encourage children to be inquisitive about, and engaged in, sensory exploration of vegetables. A list of materials is provided for each learning experience. Simply modify the activity to make it more suitable if necessary. The activities are designed to be used again and again so children can practice and build on their knowledge and skills as they develop.

How *Be a Veg Explorer* relates to the National Quality Standards and Early Years Learning Framework

This resource provides a range of learning experiences and activities that promote healthy eating. Encouraging children to explore and eat vegetables relates to the National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework in the following areas:

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS

Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

Opportunities to provide children with experiences that actively promote or initiate the investigation of ideas and thinking about healthy eating.

Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety

Standard 2.1 Health - Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted

NQS 2.1.3: Healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- › Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing
- › Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- › Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
- › Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- › Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
- › Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- › Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes
- › Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
- › Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
- › Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work

Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking

Under the National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework, there are opportunities for educators to:

- › Engage children in experiences, conversations and routines that promote relaxed and enjoyable mealtimes
- › Model, reinforce and implement healthy eating and nutrition practices with children during mealtimes
- › Support children to show an awareness of a healthy lifestyle and good nutrition

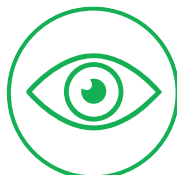
Introducing and exploring the five senses with children

Young children are able to understand and identify many sensory concepts. The five senses include sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. These can be introduced using vegetables as the focus. Identifying specific characteristics such as colours, textures, shapes and types of smells and tastes (sour, sweet, bitter) is a great way to explore the five senses.

Each sense can be connected to something already known to children. Use the following information to introduce each sense to the children. Then progress to the nutrition learning experiences. Have fun!

Sight

The sense of sight is the ability of the eyes to see objects around you. It is also the ability to perceive colour, brightness and depth. Sight uses light reflection to help us to see. This is why we find it more difficult to see in the dark.



Introduce the concept of sight to the children:

- › What part of the body do we use to see?
- › What happens if we close our eyes?
- › Is it harder to see in the dark?
- › Why do you think we have two eyes and not one or three?
- › We can use our sight to help us describe vegetables e.g., is a vegetable green or yellow, large or small, whole or chopped, dirty or clean?

Encourage children to start thinking about their sense of sight by playing games such as I Spy. Use sight-based characteristics such as colour, texture, shape, size and location to describe the objects seen. Experiment with blindfolds and eye patches, allowing children to explore what happens when we lose our sense of sight.

A fun activity to introduce sight to children is by creating a “Who do these eyes belong to?” poster. Take pictures of each child’s eyes and create a collage. Hang it up and see if the children can guess everyone’s eyes.

Hearing

Ears allow us to detect sound. Sound can be described in different ways such as loud, quiet, high, low, hiss, rustle, growl or chirp.



Introduce the concept of sound to the children:

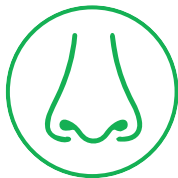
- › What part of the body do we use to hear?
- › What happens if we cover our ears?
- › Invite children to think of words that describe sounds
- › Ask children to share how those words make them feel. A growl might make them feel scared, a chirp might make them feel happy and a rustle might make them feel inquisitive about what is making that noise.

Encourage children to explore their sense of hearing with items in the room. Try clapping hands, closing a book, rolling a ball, or tapping two blocks together. Ask children to describe these sounds. Change the tone and volume of your voice, for example, whispering when telling parts of a story. You could even use vegetables to make different sounds such as crunching a carrot.

A surprising number of sounds can be heard in a room when everyone is quiet. Background sounds such as birds, traffic, aeroplanes and building construction often go unnoticed until you really listen for them. Ask the children to sit quietly and listen carefully. What do they hear?

Smell

The sense of smell can help make sense of what's going on in the world around us. We can smell things that might appeal to us like dinner being cooked. We may also smell things that are not so pleasant, like dirty socks.



Our nose also helps us to taste. Most people think of the tongue when they think about taste. But you would not be able to taste anything without your sense of smell!

Introduce the concept of smell to the children:

- › What part of the body do we use to smell?
- › Can you touch your nose? Can you wiggle your nose?
- › What words do we use to describe smells?
- › Do foods taste different when we block our nose?

Encourage children to start thinking about their own sense of smell. Put items with interesting smells into individual bottles. Have children open the lid and try to guess the smell. Select different scents like some fresh citrus juice, peppermint, onion or a hardboiled egg. If the service has a vegetable garden, encourage children to touch, squeeze and smell the leaves and vegetables. Smelling foods can encourage children to taste unfamiliar foods.

Touch

The touch sense responds to anything that touches the skin. The skin is a very clever organ. It responds to much more than touch. It sends sensory messages regarding touch, pain, temperature and vibration. Without the sense of touch, you would not feel your feet touch the ground when you walk or pain when you are physically hurt. Some ways to express how things feel include hot, cold, wet, dry, painful, pressure, heavy, light, rough, smooth, lumpy, bumpy, fluffy, furry, soft or hard and all things between.



Introduce the concept of touch to the children:

- › What parts of the body do we use to feel?
- › What is the main part of the body we use to feel? (Our fingers)
- › Why do you think we feel all over our body? (To keep us safe e.g., heat, pressure etc)

Encourage children to start thinking about their sense of touch. Ask children to touch items in the room around them. You could use a sensory board, or have children make one! Ask them to describe what they are feeling.

Taste

Taste is a very important sense in relation to food because it helps identify flavour. The ability to taste has historically been linked to survival. It can give an indication of whether a food is safe to eat or if it may be poisonous or rotten.



Most taste buds are on the tongue, but they are also found in other parts of the mouth. Humans have approximately 10,000 taste buds. Each taste bud has between 50 and 150 receptor cells. Children have about twice as many taste receptors as adults. This may be why children react more strongly to new foods and can be described as fussier eaters!

Introduce the concept of taste to the children:

- › What part of the body do we use to taste?
- › What happens if we pinch our nose and taste something?
- › What are some ways to describe different tastes? (Sweet, sour, salty, bitter, savoury, spicy, bland)

Encourage children to explore their sense of taste. A fun way to learn about taste is to learn about your tongue! Have children wash their hands and sit or stand in front of a mirror. Ask them to stick their tongue out. How far they can stick it out? Can they move it in a circle, up, down, left or right? How does it feel? What colour is it? Can they see / feel the bumps on their tongue (these are the taste buds!)?

Continue to introduce the concept of taste by talking to children at mealtimes. Encourage children to be mindful and notice flavours. Start discussions by asking children to describe how foods from their lunchboxes or meals taste. General discussions are always a great way to progress to structured tasting adventures!

Putting it all together

The five senses work together to shape the way we experience food. Although many of the following nutrition learning experiences focus on one sense specifically, children will often use other senses throughout that activity. The last three experiences, 'Eat the Rainbow', 'Gate to Plate' and 'Kids in the Kitchen' incorporate the whole Be a Veg Explorer journey and use all the senses.

Although this document uses the senses to explore vegetables, there is scope to scaffold general learning about vegetables. Children are inquisitive learners after all! Here's some general questions related to vegetables that might be interesting to explore through your Be a Veg Explorer journey:

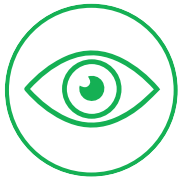
- › Which of these vegetables are the roots of a plant?
- › Which are the leaves of a plant?
- › Which are the stems?
- › Which are the seeds?
- › Which grow above the ground, which grow under the ground?
- › Do you eat them raw or cooked?

Now comes the fun part – putting it into action through nutrition learning experiences!

Nutrition Learning Experiences



Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Colour Using Vegetables



What is it about?

Colour is a great way to start using the sense of sight to explore vegetables. It provides children the opportunity to learn about different colours and then link these colours to a variety of vegetables.

What you need:

- ✓ Patches of colour e.g., green, white, brown, red, orange, purple, yellow
- ✓ Pictures of a range of vegetables from each colour group (or actual vegetables).

What to do:

- ✓ Ask children to identify the colour patch
 - › Can they think of something that is the same colour?
 - › Can they think of vegetables that are the same colour?
- ✓ Ask children to identify each of the vegetables
 - › If they can't identify it, give them clues and research it with them
 - › What colour is it? Ask children if they have eaten the vegetable before.
- ✓ Provide each child with one or two pictures of vegetables and ask them to match the vegetable to the colour. As a group, create a rainbow with the vegetables.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Are all green vegetables exactly the same colour? Why might they be different greens?
- ✓ What would happen if all vegetables were the same colour? Do you think they would all taste the same?

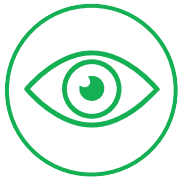
EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Explain that each colour gives certain foods special superpowers for our body. This is why we should try to eat a rainbow of vegetables (and fruit) each day. Examples include:

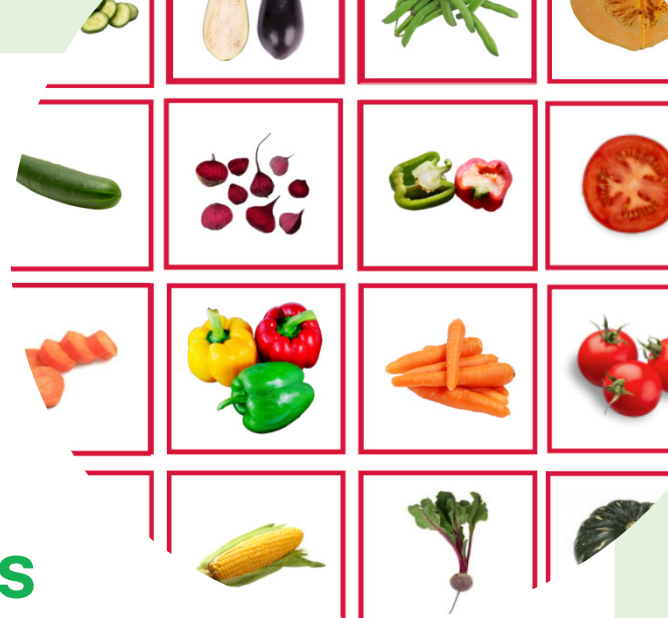
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| ✓ Red food gives you a strong heart | ✓ Green food helps you fight off sickness |
| ✓ Orange food helps you see in the dark | ✓ Blue and purple foods give you brainpower |
| ✓ Yellow food helps your body heal cuts and wounds | ✓ White foods give you energy |

See the 'Exploring the Vegetable Rainbow' activity later in this resource for more ideas.

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Vegetables on the Outside and Inside



What is it about?

Vegetables often look completely different on the inside, compared to the outside. Create an opportunity for children to use their sense of sight to discover the secrets hidden inside different vegetables!

What you need:

- ✓ A selection of fresh whole vegetables that can be cut in half. Examples include potato, zucchini, pumpkin, tomato, eggplant, cucumber, capsicum, cabbage
- ✓ Picture cards that show whole and cut vegetables. You can download a set at <https://healthupnorth.info/vegiemonthresources>.

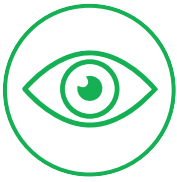
What to do:

- ✓ Explore fresh vegetables: select one vegetable at a time
 - › Can children identify the whole vegetable? What colour is it? Have they tried it before?
 - › Can children guess what colour the inside will be? What will it look like?
 - › Cut the vegetable open
 - › Invite children to describe what they see
 - › Can children draw a picture of the inside of the vegetable?
- ✓ Inside out bingo or matching game
 - › Create a bingo set or matching game using the picture cards. Challenge children to match the cut version to the whole version of each vegetable. Try matching cut or whole vegetables to their plant!

Question prompts:

- ✓ Do you think most vegetables look different on the inside than the outside?
- ✓ Were you surprised that a pumpkin was green on the outside and orange in the middle?
- ✓ Did you notice any seeds inside vegetables?
- ✓ Do you know why there are seeds? What do they do?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Under a Magnifying Glass

What is it about?

Magnifying glasses are a great way to activate children's curiosity and for children to look closer at the world around them. Use magnifying glasses to explore the skin, stalks, leaves, seeds and flesh of vegetables. The children will be excited and intrigued by what they discover.

What you need:

- ✓ A selection of vegetables and herbs; leaves, stalks, whole and cut vegetables. Consider choosing vegetables that have different colours and textures
- ✓ Magnifying glasses
- ✓ Tweezers (optional).

What to do:

- ✓ Explain to children what a magnifying glass is. Let them use it to look at a picture and ask them whether it makes the picture bigger or smaller
- ✓ Have groups of 5-6 children per table
- ✓ Set a selection of vegetables on a tray for children to examine. Include whole and cut vegetables, leaves, seeds, stalks, roots and peel
- ✓ View cross sections of vegetables such as the veins in a cross section of celery or the circular patterns in a carrot
- ✓ Ask the children to look for seeds and examine them. They may be able to count them!

Question prompts:

- ✓ What did you see through your magnifying glass? Are you surprised?
- ✓ What shapes, colours, textures, patterns and sizes of different vegetables did you see?
- ✓ Did all parts of the vegetable look the same or were they different? For example, was the skin the same as the inside, was the root the same as the leaf?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

If there is access to a microscope or binoculars, use it to look even closer at different parts of vegetables.

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Vegetables Through Song



What is it about?

Songs and rhymes are a great way to start building interest and familiarity with different types of vegetables. Below are some songs that have a vegetable theme, along with an adaption of Old MacDonald had a Farm.

[The Big Veggie Crunch theme song - The Vegetable Plot](#)

[Hot Potato - The Wiggles](#)

[“Breakin” Brussels Sprouts - Veggie Boogie](#)

[Root for Radish – Healthy Kids Music Factory](#)

[Five Little Pumpkins - Super Simple Songs](#)

[The Farmers Plants the Seeds - The Kiboomers](#)

Old MacDonald Had a Farm – the Vegetable Edition

*Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee i ee i o
And on his farm he had some carrots, Ee i ee i o
With a crunch-crunch here, And a crunch-crunch there
Here a crunch, there a crunch, Everywhere a crunch-crunch*

*Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee i ee i o
Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee i ee i o
And on his farm he had some beans, Ee i ee i o
With a snap-snap here, And a snap-snap there
Here a snap, there a snap, Everywhere a snap-snap*

*Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee i ee i o
Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee i ee i o
And on his farm he had some tomato, Ee i ee i o
With a squish-squish here, And a squish-squish there
Here a squish, there a squish, Everywhere a squish-squish
Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee i ee i o*

More songs can be found at <http://www.childfun.com/themes/food/vegetables/>

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Vegetables Through Music



What is it about?

Use vegetables in a novel way... use them to make music! This is a great way to explore the sense of hearing (and also touch). This will spark interest and show children how fun vegetables can be.

What you need:

- ✓ A smart phone / tablet with sound recording apps installed
- ✓ A selection of vegetables that make different sounds. Some ideas include cherry tomatoes, popping corn, carrot, pumpkin (whole), lettuce, broccoli and a bunch of herbs or spinach.

What to do:

- ✓ Listen – use the vegetables to show the children different sounds e.g., snap a carrot, rustle herbs or spinach, pop corn, tap a pumpkin
 - Ask children to describe the sound. Does it sound hollow? Does it sound crunchy?
 - Take the children for a walk through your service's garden and ask them to listen to what they can hear. Can they hear rustling? Buzzing bees? Birds chirping? The crunching of rocks under-foot as you walk through the garden?
- ✓ Explore – now create an opportunity for the children to explore the sounds they can make with vegetables. Challenge them to make new and exciting sounds. Ask them to describe the sounds.
- ✓ Record – use your smart phone / tablet to record sounds that the children make with vegetables and play the sounds back. Some examples include:
 - Tomato squishing
 - Carrot snapping
 - Hollow pumpkin tapping
 - Popcorn popping
 - Lettuce crunching
 - Herbs / spinach rustling
- ✓ Make music – use a voice loop or custom soundboard app to create your very own Vegie Band and make music using the sounds you have recorded.

Question prompts:

- ✓ What vegetable made the loudest sound?
- ✓ Did all vegetables make the same sound?
- ✓ Why do they think vegetables make different sounds?
- ✓ What vegetable made your favourite sound?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

If your service has a vegetable break (some services call this Crunch Time), ask children to crunch on their vegetables at the same time and see how loud it is.

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Vegetables Through Craft



What is it about?

Craft is an excellent way for children to explore and use vegetables in different ways.

What you need:

- ✓ Food art: paper, paint, a selection of vegetables (chopped or whole) that children can use as stamps or to paint with. Some ideas include: celery leaves, base of celery (stamp), potato, carrots, carrot tops, cross section of capsicum. Be imaginative! Look for vegetables that are on special or in surplus from your garden
- ✓ Corn counting activity: paper with a corn cob drawn / printed on it, corn kernels (preferably tinned)
- ✓ Veg faces / placemat art: a selection of chopped vegetables that can be used to make a 'face', rice cakes and dip or printed placemats similar to those available for download from <https://www.superherofoodshq.org.au/shop/>

What to do:

- ✓ Food art: give children paper, paint and vegetables. Encourage children to explore how they can use each vegetable to create patterns and pictures. For a more structured experience demonstrate how to make a certain picture (e.g., a lady bug using a chopped potato). There are lots of vegetable art ideas available online
- ✓ Corn counting activity: provide each child with a piece of paper with the shape of a corn cob drawn on it. Ask them whether they recognise the vegetable and encourage them to colour it in. You can integrate a counting activity into this experience by decorating the corn with corn kernels and asking children to count the kernels they've added to their corn cob (be mindful of choking hazards)
- ✓ Veg faces / placemat art: use a selection of chopped vegetables to decorate placemats or create rice cake faces. Children may like to eat their created face for morning tea. It is okay if they prefer not to eat it as the focus of this experience is to familiarise them with touching different vegetables.

Question prompts:

- ✓ What other vegetables could you use for painting?
- ✓ Can you see different patterns when you stamp your vegetables down? What does the capsicum outline look like? What does the potato stamp look like?
- ✓ What vegetable could you use to make eyes for your vegetable face? How about ears?
- ✓ How many colours did you use in your vegetable art? Can you name them all?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring the Texture of Vegetables



What is it about?

Exploring textures can be a non-threatening way to introduce vegetables to children. Without pressure to eat the vegetable, children become curious exploring the weird and wonderful differences between how vegetables feel.

What you need:

- ✓ A selection of vegetables and herbs. Try to choose a variety of different textures.

What to do:

- ✓ Ask children to touch the vegetables and describe how they feel. Focus on the texture of the whole vegetable or herb. Some examples are spiky rosemary, soft basil leaves, smooth cucumber, bumpy cauliflower or broccoli
- ✓ Compare the texture of vegetables when they are whole vs when they are chopped. For example, a smooth cucumber can become moist and slippery when chopped
- ✓ Compare textures of vegetables in raw and cooked forms.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Why do vegetables have different textured skins or outsides?
- ✓ Do vegetables soften when cooked?
- ✓ What happens to spinach leaves or carrots when we cook them?
- ✓ Why do you think vegetables feel different when we cook them?

Nutrition Learning Experience



A Vegetable Mystery Bag



What is it about?

Vegetables can be used to teach children about scientific concepts such as weight, texture, size and colour. Using a variety of vegetables to learn about these different concepts helps children become familiar and comfortable around vegetables without an expectation to eat them.

What you need:

- ✓ A 'mystery bag' - we use a decorated pillow case
- ✓ At least 4-5 vegetables with different characteristics, e.g., broccoli, cucumber, beans, snow peas, corn cob, capsicum, lettuce and tomato.

What to do:

Explain to the group that today we are going to use the 'mystery bag'.

- ✓ Place the vegetables into the mystery bag
- ✓ Select one child to come up and put their hand into the mystery bag
- ✓ Get them to feel inside the bag and select one item (keeping their hand in the bag and not looking!).

Ask them questions about how the item feels such as:

- > Is it round or long?
- > Is it smooth or rough?
- > Is it soft or hard?
- > Is it cold?

- ✓ Ask the child to guess what they think it might be
- ✓ Ask the child to take the item out of the bag and have a look and show the other children
- ✓ Choose another child and continue with the activity
- ✓ Once all the vegetables have been selected from the bag look at them in more detail. Use them to discuss:
 - > Weight (heavy or light)
 - > Texture (bumpy, rough or smooth)
 - > Size (big, small or long)
 - > Shape (round or straight)
 - > Colours

You may also use them to practice sorting, for example, order vegetables from biggest to smallest.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Have you ever eaten this vegetable before? What did it taste like? Would you like to try it sometime?
- ✓ How does each vegetable grow (on a bush, tree, underground)?
- ✓ Do you eat it raw or cooked?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Vegetable Sorting by Different Characteristics

What is it about?

Handling vegetables is a simple way to introduce children to unfamiliar vegetables. Activities that involve sorting are a great way to get children to feel and touch vegetables.

What you need:

- ✓ A selection of fresh and / or play-based vegetables
- ✓ Include a range of vegetables with different colours, sizes and textures
- ✓ A selection of vegetable seeds such as beans or peas that are different colours. Bean seeds come in different colours (purple, white and green) so these are perfect for children to sort.

What to do:

- ✓ Ask children to sort the vegetables by colour, size, texture and shape
- ✓ Place a pile of different seeds on the table and ask children to sort them by colour.

Question prompts:

- ✓ What other ways could you sort vegetables?
- ✓ Which vegetable is the heaviest?
- ✓ Is this one heavier than that one?
- ✓ What shape is this vegetable?
- ✓ What other vegetables are the same shape?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Do the “Rot” Thing



What is it about?

Composting is a great way to teach children about food waste and allow them to touch and interact with a range of different vegetables both familiar and unfamiliar. It also supports your service's garden. It can provide an opportunity to link with your local council and other organisations working in the food waste or sustainability sector.

What you need:

- ✓ Compost bin or worm farm
- ✓ Food scraps from lunchboxes / the kitchen
- ✓ Bins to sort waste e.g., non-recyclable, food waste, recyclable.

What to do:

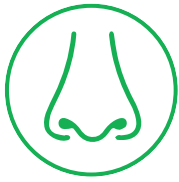
- ✓ Talk to children about the different types of waste they may have in their lunchbox. This includes non-recyclable, recyclable, and food waste
- ✓ Talk about the types of vegetable scraps that are in the food waste bin and allow children to 'feed' scraps to the compost bin or worm farm. Explain that tiny bugs will break down the scraps and turn it into compost
- ✓ Use your compost to support your service garden. Explain to children that the compost keeps your gardens healthy. Remind them that the compost they are using started off as vegetable scraps from their lunchboxes.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Do you think it is important to put food scraps in the green bin?
- ✓ Do you think that worms and bugs like eating your vegetable and food scraps?
- ✓ Do you think the service vegetable garden grows better when we add compost to it?

You can extend this activity by allowing children to use magnifying glasses to compare partly broken down and fully broken-down compost. Consider planting seedlings in normal soil and also in soil that has compost mixed into it. Is there any difference in the way the plants grow?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Smell Guessing Game



What is it about?

The sense of smell and taste are closely linked. Did you know that our sense of smell gets stronger when it's isolated and other senses are removed? Try this guessing game to see how well children can recognise the smell of different vegetables.

What you need:

- ✓ A blind fold
- ✓ A range of vegetables and herbs with strong scents such as:
 - Vegetables: onion (careful not to get too close or the eyes will water!), garlic, shallots, chives, ripe tomato, cucumber
 - Herbs: any herb would work well.

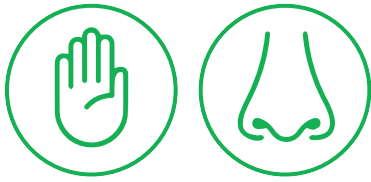
What to do:

- ✓ Once blindfolded, hold items up for children to smell
- ✓ Ask them to describe the smell
- ✓ Ask children to guess the vegetable or herb
- ✓ You may like to try it a few times without the blindfold to get children familiar with different smells.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Do you like the smell?
- ✓ Do you like it better than the previous one?
- ✓ Can you guess what the smell is?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Growing Herb and Vegetable Pots



What is it about?

Growing vegetables and herbs creates a great opportunity for children to explore vegetables through touch and smell. When grown in individual pots, children can take one home to share with the whole family.

What you need:

- ✓ Pots for each child. The bottom of milk cartons works well. Alternatively, you can grow vegetables in larger pots that stay at the service
- ✓ Potting mix
- ✓ Various types of seedlings. Where possible, choose types that have a strong scent or an unusual texture when touched such as:
 - › Mint - there are numerous varieties, such as chocolate, plain mint, spearmint and lemon
 - › Tomatoes - the leaves and tomatoes have a strong recognisable scent.

What to do:

- ✓ Have children prepare and plant the seedlings
- ✓ Over time, watch them grow
- ✓ Once developed enough, crush a leaf between your fingers and get children to smell them
- ✓ Invite the children to touch different parts of the plant.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Do leaves from different plants smell different to each other?
- ✓ What do they smell like?
- ✓ How do the leaves feel?
- ✓ Explore the difference between the smell of the leaves of a tomato bush compared with the smell of a tomato. Do they smell the same?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Different Tastes: Raw vs Cooked



What is it about?

This experience is about children exploring the difference between raw and cooked vegetables using their five senses. For some children this may be a new experience.

OPTIONAL –include taste testing. Be sure the size of the vegetable pieces are appropriate to the child's age. Pieces too large or too small can be a choking hazard for some children. Try grating or cutting the vegetables into thin matchstick strips or small pieces. Small fun shapes can also work.

What you need:

- ✓ A variety of raw vegetables; carrots, broccoli, pumpkin, zucchini, potato and cauliflower are good options
- ✓ The same vegetables, but cooked
- ✓ Plates / platter
- ✓ Serviettes, tongs (if including taste testing –optional).

What to do:

- ✓ Place the vegetables both raw and cooked on a plate or platter
- ✓ Explore the difference between raw and cooked versions of each vegetable using the question prompts below
- ✓ OPTIONAL –invite children to taste the difference between the raw and cooked vegetables. Note –do not eat raw potato. It is ok that some children may not wish to taste. They can just explore the changes through sight, touch or smell.

Question prompts:

Ask children questions about each vegetable both raw and cooked. You can extend this experience to cover all of the five senses:

- ✓ Touch –how do raw and cooked vegetables feel? Are they different? Are they soft or hard? Will they mash?
- ✓ Sight –what colour are they? Does the colour change when cooked?
- ✓ Smell –does it smell different when raw compared with cooked? (Broccoli and pumpkin are good examples of this as they have little or no smell raw compared to when cooked)
- ✓ Sound –tap the raw vegetables to see if they make a sound. Can you do this with cooked vegetables?
- ✓ Taste –invite the children to taste the difference between the vegetables. Ask them to share their experience by finding words to describe texture.

Nutrition Learning Experience



Vegetable Tasting Session



What is it about?

Setting up a food taste testing session is a fun way to teach children about the sense of taste. Focus on discussing the flavours, textures and colours of the vegetables, rather than whether they like or dislike them.

What you need:

- ✓ A selection of different vegetables (three is a good number)
 - It is best to include at least one familiar vegetable

What to do:

- ✓ Chop vegetables into bite size pieces and put on share platters. Keep one of each type of vegetable in its whole form
- ✓ Provide children with the opportunity to taste the vegetables (see below for detailed instructions).

Have children sit at their tables in groups. Place one share platter of chopped vegetables on the table for each group of children. Ask children not to try the samples until told. Hold up one whole vegetable. Ask if the children know its name. Help them name the vegetable as needed. Ask children to describe the colour and shape of the vegetable. Let them touch it and then ask them to describe its texture.

Point children to the sample on their platter. Invite them to taste it and ask them to talk about the taste. Discuss whether the vegetables are sweet, crunchy, juicy and whether they enjoy it. Repeat with remaining vegetables.

Ask children why they prefer certain vegetables. Explain that it is okay to not like all foods, but that it is important we give them a try. Explain that sometimes you need to try new foods many times to get used to the taste and decide if you like it. Our sense of taste changes and develops over time which means next year you might like a food that you didn't like today.

Encourage children to tell their parents about the foods they tasted today. Consider scheduling routine taste testing sessions to encourage children to try new foods on a regular basis.

Question prompts:

- ✓ Who tasted something new?
- ✓ Who discovered they liked something they didn't think they would like?

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring the Vegetable Rainbow!



Using a rainbow motif to explore vegetables is a favourite among many children and educators. There are many rainbow activities that can be planned that each of the sense. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- ✓ Start by linking vegetables to the rainbow by using colour! Ask children to identify colours of a rainbow (you can prompt them by reading a book that features a rainbow).
 - Can they think of vegetables from each colour group?
 - Invite families to bring in vegetables to create your very own Veggie Rainbow!
- ✓ Use the sense of sight and touch to explore different coloured vegetables in a variety of forms. Children often make mistakes when identifying vegetables that have been chopped up. Chopping up vegetables removes crucial elements children use to identify them, e.g., shape. This often causes apprehension when it comes to tasting vegetables.
 - Create a board to compare whole, sliced and chopped vegetables and vegetable skin.
 - Children can look and feel patterns, textures and shapes and then taste the vegetables.
- ✓ Eat the rainbow – create a taste testing experience that allows children to ‘eat the rainbow’ (we have included some ideas in the table below). You could eat the rainbow in one day, or build up to it, trialling one vegetable colour each week. As an extension, challenge families to pack a rainbow in lunchboxes each day.

RED	PURPLE/BLUE	ORANGE/YELLOW	GREEN	BROWN/WHITE
Tomato Red capsicum Radishes	Beetroot Red cabbage Eggplant	Carrots Sweet potato Pumpkin Corn Squash	Spinach Asparagus Avocados Broccoli Peas Green beans Lettuce Cabbage Celery Cucumber Green capsicum	Cauliflower Brown pears Mushrooms Garlic Potatoes Onions Ginger Parsnips Turnip

For more “Eat the Rainbow” ideas visit the South Australia Health “[Eat a Rainbow](#)” webpage.

Nutrition Learning Experience



Exploring Vegetables from Paddock to Plate



The 'paddock to plate' concept is a great way to explore the foods we eat. It is about looking at foods from where they were grown, all the way through to when they are eaten. It gives children the opportunity to see the transformation food undergoes, from seed to plant and to the vegetable we eat. Below are a few ideas on how you can use this concept in your service:

- ✓ Encourage children to get outside and explore your gardens. Make binoculars out of paper cylinders and become explorers looking at colours, textures, bugs and everything else your garden has to offer. Ask them to think about the sounds they can hear and the smells around them.
- ✓ Experiment with seeds – chop some vegetables in half and collect their seeds. Dry them, then let them sprout into a new plant. Tomatoes, basil and lettuce work well for this activity.
- ✓ Cook meals using seasonal produce from the gardens.
- ✓ Farmers market – transform your play kitchen into a vegetable farmers market. Talk to the children about how farmers grow foods and then sell them at the market. You can also plan a trip to your local farmers' market or community garden.
- ✓ Transforming vegetables – create a nutrition learning experience around potatoes (or pumpkin). Research how they grow and provide the children with an unwashed potato. They can then wash it, watch you cook it and once it's cooled, they can mash it! Talk about the different ways a potato is eaten (mashed, roasted, fried, chips).
- ✓ Taste vegetables straight from the garden! If the service has a vegetable garden, harvesting together provides an opportunity to taste what has grown which is exciting for children. These tasting sessions are highly anticipated if children have been involved in the process of planting and caring for the plants and watching and waiting for them to grow.

Nutrition Learning Experience



Cooking with Kids in the Kitchen



Children love food preparation! It's exciting, messy and fun! A range of great recipes can be found on the Northern New South Wales Health Promotion recipes webpage or in the Vegie Month recipe eBook.

Below is an example of how children can engage each of the five senses while preparing, cooking and eating food:

- ✓ **Sight:** Lay the ingredients in front of the children. Ask children if they can name the vegetables. What colours are they?
- ✓ **Sound:** During the food preparation process, remind children to listen for different sounds. What can they hear when they wash and dry lettuce leaves? Can they hear sizzling from a fry pan?
- ✓ **Smell:** If children are cooking as part of your Kids in the Kitchen experience, there will be lots of opportunity to use the sense of smell. Can children smell garlic and onion in the fry pan? Can they smell food being cooked in the toaster or oven? Is it a new or familiar smell? If children are preparing herbs, encourage them to handle and explore the different smells.
- ✓ **Touch:** When selecting a recipe, ensure that it includes vegetables. Involve children in handling the vegetables through chopping, grating and peeling. If you are using produce from your service garden, involve children in harvesting the vegetables.
- ✓ **Taste:** Once the food is prepared, have children sit and eat together. Depending on the recipe, you may encourage children to taste raw ingredients as you cook, e.g., tasting tomatoes when you pick them out of the garden before using them on top of pizza muffins.