



Children are never too young to start finding out where food comes from.

Here we look at:

- ideas for exploring vegetables, fruit and food from seeds, animals and insects
- ideas for related visits to extend children's knowledge and experiences
- outdoor activities that can add value to your visits.

## All about... vegetables

The edible parts of vegetables can be categorised as leaf (salad, spinach), root (carrots, parsnip), stem (asparagus, rhubarb) flower (globe artichokes, cauliflower), fruit (tomato, courgette) and seed (peas, beans).

- Bring a wide selection of vegetables into your setting and get children interested in talking about them, handling them, cutting them up, sorting them (by size, smell, colour, texture and taste) and tasting them.
- Grow potatoes in tyres or plastic dustbins filled with soil – harvesting them is like mining for gold!
- Plant salad crops in flower pots – they are quick and therefore satisfying to

grow and can be cut for a salad sandwich snack.

### Out and about

- Visit somewhere nearby where vegetables grow in abundance – a farm, allotment or even one of the children's gardens if you have an enthusiastic vegetable-growing parent. The best time to visit is May to July when there will be a great variety of vegetables to harvest, including carrots, spinach, onions and potatoes.
- You could also visit a market or vegetable shop with a good range of produce. Get the children to ask the stall holder where the vegetables come from, what they are called and how they get from the country they are grown in to the market stall.

### Back in your setting

- Set up a mini outdoor vegetable market stall for role play.
- Organise large-scale vegetable printing with groups of children – tape large sheets of paper to the shed, walls or fences.

## All about... fruit

Blackberries, cherries, apples, plums and pears – wherever you live, at the right time of the year you'll be able to find fruits both farmed and growing wild in hedgerows and even urban lanes and alleyways. And then there are the more exotic fruits that are not often grown in this country but will still be familiar to most of the children such as bananas, pineapples, mangoes and even grapes.

- Bring in a selection of fruit and get children interested in talking about them, handling them, cutting them up, sorting them (by size, smell, colour, texture and taste) and tasting them.
- Teach the children that not all berries are edible, and that some are poisonous. Get a fact sheet about poisonous plants and berries (see 'Further resources').

### Out and about

- Go on a wild fruit forage. You will need to investigate likely places first. Early September is a good time for blackberries – but warn children about thorns.
- Visit a 'pick your own' farm. Many offer a range of fruit crops across quite a long season. The children will learn about different kinds of fruits, how to distinguish ripe from unripe, develop their fine motor skills and enjoy the fresh air as they collect their hoard.
- Ask the owners of nearby gardens or orchards with windfalls if you can come with the children to collect the fruit.

### Back in your setting

- Make a fruit salad outside – you don't need to worry about the mess and you can start a compost heap with the peelings and waste.
- Make berry paints by crushing different kinds of berries and using the juice for outdoor painting.

## Growing Schools

'Growing Schools aims to give all children the opportunity to connect with the living environment, whether it is an inner city window box or a vast country estate, a school veg plot or a natural woodland. Interacting with living plants provides very rich, hands-on learning.' Visit Growing Schools at [www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk).



### All about... seeds

Seeds in the form of grain are used all over the world to make staple foods. Common grains include rice, wheat, barley and oats. We also eat seeds in the form of nuts, and some flower seeds such as poppy and sunflower.

- Mill your own grain to make flour – use an old-fashioned hand-turned coffee mill or large pepper grinder. Make bread which can be cooked in an outdoor oven or twisted round long sticks, like marshmallows, and cooked on an open fire.
- Hold a sunflower growing competition, either by getting the children to plant sunflower seeds in your outside area or by sending children home with seeds to plant in their garden or in a pot. Involve the children in watering, measuring and taking photos as their plant grows, then harvest the sunflower seeds to eat or feed to pets.



### Out and about

- Visit a farm in the summer when the grain is ripening in the fields. You could also see if there is a bakery in your area where the children can witness (and smell!) flour turned into bread.
- Go on an autumn woodland visit when you are likely to find hazelnuts or edible sweet chestnuts. Check first if any children are allergic to nuts as reactions can be very severe.

### Back in your setting

- Make bird feeders out of seeds mixed with lard in recycled yogurt pots. Hang them outside to attract birds.
- Sow a patch of wheat or barley in your outdoor space – a car tyre filled with soil makes a perfect raised bed.

### All about... animals and insects

Animals are not just an important source of meat and fish – they also provide a range of other foods such as eggs and dairy products, plus non-food products such as wool and feathers. And of course, bees produce honey.

- Be sensitive to any cultural, ethical or lifestyle differences as there are a number of cultural taboos surrounding the rearing of animals as food or for food products. Parents and staff may need to be given opportunities to share their knowledge, customs and viewpoints in a non-judgemental atmosphere.
- If you have the space and enthusiasm there are lots of resources that can help you keep chickens and even sheep in your setting. Alternatively, you may like to try hatching chicks or ducklings from a local farm.

### Beyond the nursery gate

- Start local. Taking children on visits that involve transport in a coach or minibus is expensive and complicated to organise with very young children.
- Get to know what you have within walking and pram-pushing distance. Is there a market that you might visit with a small group? A nature reserve, community garden, orchard or wild area? An allotment site, grazing land for animals, a river or a port where you can feed ducks or watch fishing (subject to a risk assessment)? Do any of your parents keep chickens or have an interesting garden?
- If you want to be more ambitious (perhaps for your annual picnic outing with parents) check the Growing Schools website (see 'Places to Visit') which has an interactive section that allows you to search for wildlife gardens, farms and other places of interest in your region.



### Out and about

- If you can, arrange a visit to a nearby farm where the children can see chickens, sheep, cows or other animals close up. The hazard from infection resulting from a farm visit is real but the risks are readily controlled by everyday measures such as proper planning, appropriate supervision, and observing simple hygiene practices (see 'Health and safety' right').
- If you are lucky enough to be near the sea or a river, you may be able to see some fishing taking place.

### Back in your setting

- After visiting cows, the children can take turns in shaking double cream in a jar with a secure lid until it turns to butter.
- Plant bee-attracting flowers and herbs – use pots if you have little green space. Bees won't usually sting unless they are saving their own lives, disturbed in their hive or swarming but it is still important to teach children to be careful around bees, and check in case any children have allergies – reactions to bee stings can be very severe in some cases.

## What to take

Different outings need different equipment, but the list below is a starting point:

- Register
- Mobile phone
- List of contacts
- First aid kit
- Sun cream
- Anti-bacterial gel spray
- Emergency medication (EpiPen)
- Toilet wipes
- Drinking water
- Carrier bags
- Polythene gloves
- Doggy clean up kit
- Ice cream tub for sharps (if going to park or urban area)
- Camera
- Note book
- Pen
- A handcart or shopping trolley to carry it all in!



## Learning links

Exploring food and the sources of food, both in your outdoor space and through visits beyond the nursery gate, can inspire new ideas, activities and projects, and support all six early learning goals:

- sowing, growing and harvesting are all exciting, motivate learning, develop self-confidence and encourage team work, helping to support **Personal, Social and Emotional** goals.
- new experiences extend vocabulary and provide inspiration for creative play, helping to support **Communication, Language and Literacy** and **Creative Development** goals.
- exploring new fruit and vegetables, using a range of different tools (when digging, for example), and going on walks, all require a range of large muscle and fine motor skills and helping to support **Physical Development** goals.
- sorting fruit and vegetables, cooking outdoors and sowing seeds encourages pattern recognition, number and calculations skills and the use of mathematical concepts, helping to support **Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy** goals.
- visiting farms, nature reserves, orchards and allotments offers lots of opportunities to observe and find out about living things and events and ask questions about why and how things happen, helping to support **Knowledge and Understanding of the World**.

## Further resources

- Advice sheets *Fruit within reach* and *Planting (including poisonous plants)* are available to download from the member services pages of the Learning through Landscapes website [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk).
- The Growing Schools website includes places to visit, curriculum links, ideas, resources and advice. Visit [www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk).
- The Learning Outside the Classroom website [www.lotc.org.uk](http://www.lotc.org.uk) looks at why it's important to get children learning outside the classroom, and offers detailed advice on visits off site.
- The BBC's website has lots of helpful advice and resources for gardening with children. Visit [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).
- Garden Organic has fact sheets on gardening organically, a free schools membership scheme and an advice line. Visit [www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk).

- The Royal Horticultural Society supports children's gardening projects across the UK and has launched a Campaign for School Gardens. Visit [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk).
- The Gardening and Growing Box from Early Excellence contains gardening equipment, children's books and curriculum advice. Visit [www.earlyexcellence.com](http://www.earlyexcellence.com).
- The Coombes Nursery and Infant School website shows how a curriculum can draw upon the natural world. Visit [www.thecoombes.com](http://www.thecoombes.com).
- Fernhill Farm can be contacted on 01761 221663 or by emailing [info@fernhill-farm.co.uk](mailto:info@fernhill-farm.co.uk).
- Visit FACE (Farming and Countryside Education) at [www.face-online.org.uk](http://www.face-online.org.uk) and CFE (Countryside Foundation for Education) at [www.countrysidefoundation.org.uk](http://www.countrysidefoundation.org.uk).
- To find a city farm or community garden visit [www.farmgarden.org.uk](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk).



## Health and safety

The benefits children gain from visits far outweigh the risks. However, it is important that you plan carefully and undertake appropriate risk assessments (to enable rather than disable) before each visit.

You can find more detailed guidance on the Learning Outside the Classroom website [www.lotc.org.uk](http://www.lotc.org.uk). There is also specific guidance on organising visits to farms on the Growing Schools website.



## Case study

**Fernhill Farm** in Somerset is run by Andrew, Jen and their two young sons, Kyle (four) and Seth (three). Both are active on the farm everyday. The farm has four working dogs; saddleback pigs; around 800 sheep and lambs; 35 Aberdeen Angus cows, and chickens. Andrew and Jen welcome visits from early years groups, schools and families. As well as meeting the animals, activities include:

- growing vegetables, planting seeds and composting in the kitchen garden
- lambing and all things to do with sheep and wool
- pond dipping
- willow harvesting and weaving
- bug and plant searches.

Priddy Pre-school makes regular visits to the farm. Rachel Gadd, supervisor, says: 'Our visits have always been enjoyable for staff and children. The relaxed surroundings foster a relaxed approach, which in turn promotes happy and interested children.'

Fernhill Farm is in Somerset. For details see 'Further resources'. For your nearest registered farm see the Growing Schools website [www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk).

## Sample suppliers

- For all you need to know about keeping chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs or bees visit [www.omlet.co.uk](http://www.omlet.co.uk). There are special sections for schools and information on curriculum links and risk assessments.
- Suttons has a fundraising catalogue that allows you to keep 20% of the sale of seeds and plants. Visit [www.suttons.co.uk](http://www.suttons.co.uk) and/or call 0870 220 2104 (fundraiser line).
- For mail order bird food, composting systems, native wildflowers and wildlife gardening visit [www.wigglywigglers.co.uk](http://www.wigglywigglers.co.uk).
- For books, ideas and a range of equipment for outdoor play

including growing things visit [www.mindstretchers.co.uk](http://www.mindstretchers.co.uk).

## Books and other publications

- *The Little Book of Growing Things: Little Books with Big Ideas* (Little Books Series) edited by Sally Featherstone (Featherstone Education Ltd, 2003) ISBN-13: 978-1904187684. Visit [www.featherstone.uk.com](http://www.featherstone.uk.com).
- *Grow it, Eat it – Simple gardening projects and delicious recipes* by Dorling Kindersley (Dorling Kindersley, 2008) ISBN-13: 978-1405328104.
- *Gardening with young children* by Beatrys Lockie (Hawthorne Press, 2007) ISBN-13:978-1903458389.

## Preparing for visits

**Staff** Outings need to be undertaken with great care so consider a whole team training day. Plan the training day at least half a term ahead. To help staff feel motivated and confident encourage everyone to be involved when sharing ideas and concerns, revising policies and completing risk assessments.

**Children** Young children are very capable if given the opportunity to take responsibility in a mature way. As they get older they will be able to follow simple instructions if given time to listen and learn. Let them share with you their thoughts

on how to keep safe. Strategies can be developed and rehearsed through stories, role play and discussion.

**Parents** Prior to the training day involve the parents – collectively they will know the area in great detail and will be able to tell you of parks, green spaces, wooded areas and where to find sites of interest. They might belong to an allotment association, know of an orchard or a great blackberry picking spot. Getting parents involved in the process and giving them ownership of the visits often means they are more likely to volunteer and help support the adult-child ratios when taking children out.



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