

How do you get kids to try new vegetables and fruits?

Trying new foods is important to child development. With childhood and adult obesity at all-time highs, even in Putnam County, it's more important than ever to bring a love of good food to our children. Most children actually like trying new things, as long as there is some relationship to something they already know. Adults share that trait. In fact, adults almost always learn something new by (a) comparing it to something they already know, and then (b) contrasting the differences between known and new.



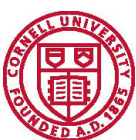
Photo Maeve Anderson, CALS

So if your child seems reluctant to try new vegetables or fruits, make a family game out of it. Use the Taste Test Bingo chart below and cut out the symbols so you and the children can put their decision chips in the boxes below a selection of new foods. You can start out with a selection of vegetables you'd like to use in a salad. Then have each member of the family put a symbol on or under the name of the vegetable.

Veg	Red lettuce	Green lettuce	Red sweet pepper	Green sweet pepper	Yellow sweet pepper	Radish	Little Red Tomato	Big tomato slice
Symbol	Yum	Ok	Yum	Yum	Ick	Ick	Ok	Yum



Another effective way to get children to eat new foods is to offer them a way to grow their own choices. It's easy to provide a bucket or a space in your garden for your children to grow some peas, carrots, string beans or zucchini. Once children have grown something of their own, they will almost certainly eat it!



Try a pizza garden

Open a space in your yard for a garden that will sprout the toppings for a pizza. You can make the garden a circle, like a pizza, and define the “slices” for each crop, including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, zucchini, basil, onions and whatever else you like on your pizza. Have fun, by making a picture of sausage or bacon near the garden – you won’t be growing that, of course.

In this pizza garden children used clay saucers to represent pepperoni: not a vegetable but adds the element of fun!

Use a bucket or a box instead of a big garden space

Kids like working with spaces they can manage. Use a five-gallon bucket or a plastic storage tub. Punch some holes in the bottom for drainage and fill with a potting soil. Plant seeds or seedlings and your children will be able to farm their own “back 40” with ease, rather than trying to negotiate among your prized plantings.



Make sure to give your children ownership

Children learn by making mistakes (adults do, too). So be sure to involve them in all the phases of planting vegetables:

- What would you like to grow?
- Would you like a bucket garden or a box?
- Or would you like a space in the big garden?
- Help your child start a garden journal – pictures or words according to their age
- Help them start their journal by asking them to measure the size of their garden and drawing a picture, showing the measurements next to the picture
- Discuss what plants need to grow: sunlight, water, support, etc.
- Lead your children to decide on a schedule for garden chores
- Provide them with tools and plant ID markers so they can mark what they’ve planted
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Ask for help

If you need help preparing a garden for your children, call Cornell Cooperative Extension at 845-278-6738 and ask for some idea on what to plant, when to plant, how to nurture, how to harvest. Check our website for classes in the spring that will feature answers to those questions – and more – to help you and your family get healthier by growing some of your own food.