

Cooking With Your Kids  
Ruth Gilbert  
Youth Services Librarian, KTL

I'm a huge admirer of Julia Child for many reasons, but one of them is her advice never to apologize for a dish you've cooked for someone. Even if your cake caved in or the cat fell in the stew. (I also admire her humor.) This advice is particularly useful when cooking with children, as we've been doing here at the Kirkland Town Library during our Small Chefs program. Children ages 3-5 gather, some in their own aprons and toques, to make themselves simple snacks with minimal help from their grown-ups. Cooking for preschoolers may seem out of place at a library, but their snack prep reinforces many of the same skills they'll need at school one day: following instructions, learning new vocabulary, honing fine motor skills, and building self-confidence. They chop their own fruit using kid-friendly knives, measure out ingredients, try new foods, and they never apologize for the end product.

Cooking with your kids, whether they're in preschool or high school, is a great way to have fun together and maybe even get out of making dinner one night! You can start with young children as soon as they're able to help you scoop ingredients. Cooking with bigger kids teaches them useful kitchen skills and reinforces reading skills. And if the end result is something edible, that's a bonus for everyone! The hardest part can be letting go and allowing our children to do things messily and imperfectly. But as Julia Child tells us, we'll learn from our mistakes.

If you need a starting point, check out these kid-friendly cookbooks!

"Salad People and More Real Recipes" by Mollie Katzen is perfect for preschoolers. The recipes are simple and use healthy ingredients that you probably already have at home. The best part is that each step of a recipe is illustrated with a simple drawing so young children can follow along. You'll find kid-friendly recipes for things like sunrise lemonade, cool cucumber soup, and polka-dot rice. Many of them don't involve any actual cooking at all.

"The Forest Feast for Kids: Colorful Vegetarian Recipes that are Simple to Make" by Erin Gleeson is great for kids who are ready for the next step in cooking. Each recipe is on a two-page spread with a full-color photo of the finished product on the right and photos and measurements of the ingredients on the left. There are salads, main dishes, and desserts, and menu ideas for a cheese party, color party, fruity ice cream sandwich bar, and picnic party. Yum!

If your kids love food and enjoy a gross-out factor, try "Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes." You'll find some delicious and weird recipes from his classic books, like Fresh Mudburgers from "James and the Giant Peach," Hair Toffee to Make Hair Grow on Bald Men from "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," and Wormy Spaghetti from "The Twits." Yum?

"Cook It! The Dr. Seuss Cookbook for Kid Chefs" by Daniel Gercke is kid and parent-friendly, with recipes organized by skill level. Your family will finally learn how to make a Roast Beast and authentic Green Eggs and Ham, along with many other silly Seussian foods.

"The Official Harry Potter Cookbook" by Joanna Farrow requires the most adult supervision of the titles suggested here, but the recipes look so scrumptious and fun that everyone will want to get a space in the kitchen to help make them. There are chapters on snacks, meals, desserts, and drinks, with a key that tells you if recipes are vegetarian, vegan, or

gluten-free. The number of lightning bolts next to a recipe tells you how difficult it is. Cook up some Golden Peanut Snitches, Transfiguration Pancakes, and Hedwig Meringues to enjoy the next time you cozy up with a Harry Potter book.

And if you need a little quiet reading time after all that family cooking, I highly recommend Julia Child's "My Life in France" for more food and life advice.