

CALIFORNIA TASTES AMAZING

Delicious Meals to Cook with Your Child at Home



CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY

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CENTER FOR
ECOLITERACY

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[Cooking is] the single most important thing we could do as a family to improve our health and general well-being.”

—Michael Pollan, *Cooked*

What if school meals were delicious, healthy, popular with students, affordable, and good for the environment? And what if parents could cook some of those same meals at home with their children? That’s happening now in California. We invite you to join in, using the recipes in *California Tastes Amazing*.

Recent research confirms what parents have known for a long time: when families cook and eat together, they enjoy many physical and emotional health benefits. We hope that *California Tastes Amazing* is a step toward connecting the pleasures of healthy home-cooked meals to meals that children can enjoy at school.

If you haven’t looked into school food lately, the excellence of some of these meals might surprise you. The recipes that follow are real school meals, some of the healthiest served in public school districts across the state of California. They originated in the **California Food for California Kids®** initiative, which the Center for Ecoliteracy and the TomKat Foundation launched to promote school meals featuring California-grown ingredients, including fresh vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and flavors that kids recognize and love.

We offer the recipes in family-size portions, designed to be easy and fun for cooking with children at home. When you cook these meals together, you are doing more than just putting dinner on the table. You are reconnecting in ways that can build intimacy, encourage children to share about their school day, and spark conversations about healthy eating and where good food comes from—all while making something delicious.

IT’S EASY TO GET STARTED

Here are some suggestions for using this cookbook.

1. Let children choose which recipes they would like to make. This will give them a sense of ownership and help to ensure that you are cooking food they really want to eat.
2. Read the recipes together before you begin. Talk through any questions or ideas.
3. Before you start cooking, organize all the ingredients and equipment you will need on the kitchen counter. That way you won’t need to hunt for something at a crucial moment.

4. Take a tip from professional chefs and clean up as you go. If you do, you can sit down to dinner together without a pile of dirty dishes waiting for you.
5. Talk about food while you cook together. What does your child enjoy, what are meals like at school, what would be the perfect meal, would you suggest changing any of the recipes? Good conversation is one point of cooking together, and can be as rewarding as the meals you prepare.
6. Does your child like these recipes? If so, let your school know. Several of them meet USDA requirements under the National School Lunch Program and are available in school-size portions at www.ecoliteracy.org/scaled-recipes. If you are in California, suggest that your district inquire about our California Thursdays® program, through which dozens of districts offer meals like these every week. You can find more family-size recipes in the cookbook *Cooking with California Food in K–12 Schools* on the Center for Ecoliteracy website, www.ecoliteracy.org.

SAFETY IN THE KITCHEN

Although children can generally assume more responsibility and “risk” as they get older, it’s a good idea to keep dangerous items like matches or anything with sharp edges out of reach. Supervise work done near a gas stove, and take special care that hands, clothing, and hair don’t come close to open flames. Look for safe, age-appropriate tasks. Very young children can wash vegetables and measure and pour some ingredients; under your supervision, children about 10 years old or older may be able to use an electric mixer and stir food on the stove. When in doubt, err on the side of safety.

CALIFORNIA FOOD FOR CALIFORNIA KIDS

The Center for Ecoliteracy and TomKat Foundation are working with school districts to make school meals fresher, healthier, and locally grown to the greatest extent possible. When we offer children healthy school food grown in their home state, we help them to learn and grow. We help revitalize the state’s economy, support regional food systems, create more jobs, and preserve precious resources of land and water, while celebrating the state’s rich cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

Zenobia Barlow
Executive Director
Center for Ecoliteracy

Kat Taylor
President
TomKat Foundation

CHORIZO PENNE

with greens



CHORIZO PENNE WITH GREENS

Serves: 4–6

Chorizo is a distinctive ingredient in Mexican cooking, imparting a mild spiciness and smoky flavor. Cooking it slowly with ancho chile and tomatoes makes for a rich and zesty take on traditional Italian pasta sauce. Finely chopped kale adds some greens without altering the tomato-chile flavors. Queso fresco and cilantro impart a bright, Latin American taste.

For the pasta:

- 2 dried ancho chiles
- 1 cup hot water
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ pound chorizo
- ½ onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup canned whole tomatoes, coarsely chopped, with their sauce
- 1 cup kale, stemmed and finely chopped
- 8 ounces whole wheat penne pasta, dried
- kosher salt to taste
- freshly ground black pepper to taste

For the garnish:

- 2 ounces queso fresco, crumbled
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves

1. Put 3–4 quarts of salted water on high heat to boil.
2. Place the ancho chiles in 1 cup of hot water and soak until soft, about 20 minutes. When soft, remove the stems and seeds and chop into small pieces. Set aside. Discard the water.
3. In a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the chorizo and lightly brown, breaking the meat into a crumble. Remove to a plate and set aside. In the same pan, add the onion and sauté until soft, about 1 minute. Stir in the garlic and cook 1 more minute. Add the broth, tomatoes, kale, and the reserved chiles. Cover and reduce the heat to low. Simmer for 15 minutes.
4. While the sauce is simmering, cook penne pasta in boiling, salted water according to package instructions. Drain the penne and stir into the simmering sauce. Stir in the chorizo and any drippings on the plate. Taste and season with salt and pepper.

Serve garnished with queso fresco and cilantro.

ASIAN SLAW

with ginger and mint



ASIAN SLAW WITH GINGER AND MINT

Serves: 6–8

This salad combines fresh flavors, bright colors, and a satisfying crunch. It's great on its own or as a topping for chicken, fish, or a sandwich.

For the salad:

- 1 cup thinly sliced scallions, white and green parts
- 1 cup fresh mint leaves, loosely packed, roughly chopped
- 1 cup fresh cilantro, loosely packed, roughly chopped
- 5 cups shredded mixed cabbage
- 1 cup grated carrot (about 2 carrots)
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds, for garnish (optional)

For the dressing:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lime juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh cilantro, loosely packed, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger (1 3-inch piece)
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon salt

1. In a large bowl, combine all the salad ingredients, except the toasted sesame seeds. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

2. In a small bowl, combine all the dressing ingredients and whisk together.

3. Add dressing to coat the salad and toss. You may prefer not to use all the dressing; you can save any remaining dressing in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Serve garnished with toasted sesame seeds.

ITALIAN CHICKEN

with oregano and lemon



ITALIAN CHICKEN WITH OREGANO AND LEMON

Serves: 6–8

This is a version of a classic Italian chicken dish incorporating oregano, one of Italy's favorite herbs. It is an easy-to-make dish and one that kids enjoy. Adjust the seasonings to make it more or less garlicky. Marinating the chicken overnight will intensify the flavors.

- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt, plus a pinch
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for coating the baking dish
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 8 chicken thighs or drumsticks, with skin
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano or 1 tablespoon fresh oregano
- 1 lemon, sliced, for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. In a small bowl, use a fork to mash the garlic with a pinch of salt to make a paste. Mix in a tablespoon of the oil and a tablespoon of the lemon juice, plus ½ teaspoon of the salt and ¼ teaspoon of the pepper. Set aside.
3. Pat chicken dry with a paper towel. Coat the chicken with the paste mixture.
4. Coat the inside of a baking dish with olive oil. Place chicken in the dish, skin side up. Bake uncovered until chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165°F, about 30–45 minutes.
5. While chicken is baking, simmer 1 tablespoon butter, chicken broth, 1 teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, and 2 tablespoons lemon juice until it is reduced by half. Add the 1 tablespoon butter, lemon zest, remaining ¼ teaspoon pepper, and oregano and serve with chicken over rice.

Garnish with lemon slices.

JAMBALAYA

with chicken and smoked sausage



JAMBALAYA WITH CHICKEN AND SMOKED SAUSAGE

Serves: 6–8

This hearty Cajun-style dish features wholesome ingredients such as tomatoes, green peppers, and brown rice. All the ingredients are combined in one casserole dish and baked together, making for an easy and healthy weeknight meal that will be a hit with the whole family. Special thanks to Roslynn DeCuir-Gilder, Cafeteria Manager at Skyline High School in Oakland Unified School District, for sharing her delicious recipe.

- 3 ½ cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 ½ cups brown rice
- 1 14.5 ounce can diced tomatoes, with juice
- 2 cups diced green bell peppers (2–3 peppers)
- 1 cup diced celery (3–4 ribs)
- 1 pound chicken, raw or cooked, diced
- ¾–1 pound smoked turkey sausage, cooked, sliced on the bias
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme or 1 tablespoon fresh thyme
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup thinly sliced scallions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. In a medium saucepan, bring the chicken broth to a boil.
3. Place rice on the bottom of an ovenproof casserole dish. Combine all remaining ingredients, except scallions, and pour on top of the rice. Add the chicken broth to the casserole, keeping rice on the bottom, and cover tightly with a lid or aluminum foil.
4. Bake for 50 minutes or until rice is cooked. If liquid is absorbed and rice is still not tender, add more broth.
5. Remove foil, add scallions, and gently stir with a rubber spatula to combine.

SUGGESTION: Substitute 1 cup cooked kidney beans or lentils for half of the chicken or sausage for more fiber and texture.

SLOPPY JOE

with tomato and garlic



SLOPPY JOE WITH TOMATO AND GARLIC

Serves: 4–6

This recipe is easy to adapt and can be a delicious way to include vegetables in a meaty dish. Simply add some finely chopped or grated carrots, mushrooms, or greens to the browned meat before seasoning with tomato sauce and a dash or two of Worcestershire sauce. The vegetables add nutrients, and seamlessly blend in to the robust flavors of the sauce.

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 pound ground beef or turkey
- ½ onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves or ¼ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- ⅛ teaspoon sugar (optional)
- ½ cup diced carrots (optional)
- ¾ cup sliced mushrooms (optional)
- 1 cup chopped spinach, kale, or chard (optional)

1. In a medium sauté pan or skillet over medium-high heat, heat the olive oil. Add the meat and lightly brown. Stir in the onion, garlic, salt, and pepper, cooking 3–5 minutes until onion starts to become translucent. At this point, you can add optional carrots or mushrooms, if desired.

2. Add the tomato paste and cook 2 minutes. Stir in the tomato sauce, then add the Worcestershire sauce and thyme leaves.

3. If adding greens, add spinach, kale, or chard here. Reduce the heat to low and cover. Cook until the flavors are combined, about 15 minutes. Add a little sugar if the tomato flavor seems too strong. Taste and add more salt and pepper, as desired.

4. Serve hot on a toasted whole wheat bun.

This Sloppy Joe filling also makes a delicious pasta sauce.

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FOR CALIFORNIA KIDS®**

