SECTION 3

Food Themes and Learning Experiences



Food themes and learning experiences

There are several types of experiences that offer a hands-on approach when learning about and exploring food.

Sensory-based food education

- Sensory-based food experiences engage multiple senses – sight, smell, touch, taste and sound. This allows the exploration of food in a playful, non-coercive context.[22]
- Some studies suggest that when young children engage in vegetable-focused sensory learning experiences, there is an increased willingness to try new vegetables.[22,23]
- Food experiences don't have to focus only on eating. Exploring food with the senses, such as looking, touching, smelling, and tasting, can help children feel more comfortable with different foods and become more aware of their own preferences.[24] These experiences can support children's thinking, senses, and emotional development.
- Sensory-based food education can also include creative experiences via non-food means, for example, cards, food-based picture books, playing charades, singing songs, sensory bins, sprouting, imaginary shops/farmers markets or play kitchens.[25]

Gardening and kitchen garden programs

- Growing and harvesting food before preparing and sharing it gives children an understanding of where food comes from. It also gives them responsibility, which they tend to respond to positively.[5]
- Hands-on planting and harvesting can spark curiosity and a desire to taste the produce and may support a greater willingness to try new vegetables.[23]

See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75

⚠ **When food-based learning experiences occur, the safety and social inclusion of children with food allergies must also be considered.**

Where experiences are pre-planned, ensure that information is communicated to families of children with food allergies, and that these families are given the opportunity to comment or contribute.

See Section 2, page 57

Incorporating cultural diversity

When experiential learning is intentionally designed to include cultural diversity, it can build food literacy skills, increase willingness to try new foods, and build understanding and respect for diverse food traditions and the communities that sustain them.[26,27] Strategies include cooking days linked to children's cultural backgrounds, mapping where food comes from, family recipe sharing, and comparing staple foods across cultures.

Culturally inclusive food education can go beyond celebrating diversity. Including conversations about fairness, inclusion and respect for diverse food practices lays the foundation for critical food literacy.[28]

See Section 2, page 61

Place-based learning and community connectedness

An Australian study found that regular exposure to local food systems through hands-on experiences improved children's awareness of, and preferences for, regionally appropriate food.[27] Connections might be made through local farmers, community gardens, cultural community members, markets or local food educators.

Place-based learning can also include embedding local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into practice. As one example, a service partnered with a local chef specialising in Indigenous ingredients, purchased damper kits, and took part in an online Indigenous cooking session shared with the children. The children went on to demonstrate their own developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and cultures.[29]

Note: Educators are encouraged to think carefully about how food is used in experiences. For some children, especially those who may not always have enough food at home, using food only for play could be upsetting or confusing. Where possible and safe, these experiences should include the option for children to eat the food.

Reflective questions

Educators

- *How are the cultural backgrounds and food traditions of the children in your room reflected in your planned and spontaneous experiences? Are there any families whose traditions haven't yet found their way in?*

Service Leadership team

- *Does anyone on your team have the skills or interest to lead a garden program? What support, training or materials could you offer to encourage this?*

Experience examples

The following experiences build on those mentioned previously. Each is presented across age groups (birth to two, two to three, three plus), with sustainability, cultural diversity and seasonality running as threads throughout, supporting these connections to be woven across the day.



Experiences using natural resources

- Experience 1: Herb garden explorers
- Experience 2: Fruit and vegetable exploration baskets



Experiences connecting food with people and place

- Experience 1: Farm to plate
- Experience 2: Food, culture and belonging



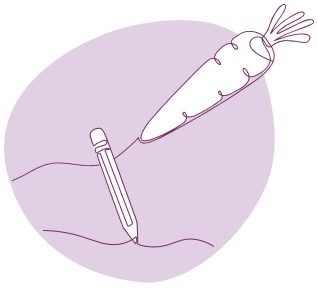
Experiences using play

- Experience 1: Making meaning through kitchen play and everyday food experiences
- Experience 2: Making magic with mud



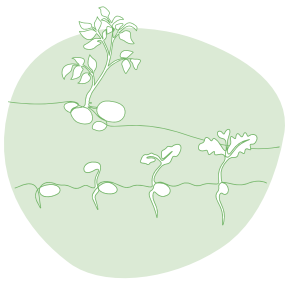
Experiences involving the senses

- Experience 1: Citrus and zest investigation
- Experience 2: Mash, mix and marvel



Experiences involving art

- Experience 1: Exploring colour through food
- Experience 2: My food, my story, my identity



Experiences for services without garden access

- Experience 1: Indoor potato patch
- Experience 2: From scrap to sprout

Experiences using natural resources

Experience 1: Herb garden explorers

Herb gardens invite children to grow and care for fresh herbs. From soil to plate, herbs provide meaningful opportunities to explore environmental care, scientific inquiry, and create a culture of shared responsibility. Herbs offer a rich sensory experience for all age groups from babies through to preschoolers. It is the perfect way to build connection between nature, food exploration and sustainability.

See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. herbs).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

Sensory exploration

- Smell herbs from garden.
- Touch and explore herbs with hands.
- Crush herbs to observe the change in scent.
- Model descriptive language to build vocabulary.

Toddlers (2–3)

Sensory and play exploration

- Add herbs to the playdough table to observe changes to scent and texture.
- Add herbs into waterplay.
- Cut herbs with scissors.
- Assist with the watering of the herb garden using small watering cans and spray bottles to care for plants.

Preschool age (3+)

Growing

- Plant herbs into garden from seeds or seedlings.
- Explore what plants need to grow.
- Observe, draw and document growth of herbs.
- Harvest, wash and prepare herbs and take to the kitchen to be used in meals.
- Engage in cooking experience using freshly harvested herbs.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Grow other fast-growing foods e.g. beans, tomatoes, sprouts.
- Include other sensory friendly plants into the garden.
- Scrap to sprout: growing using scraps e.g. celery stalk, carrot tops and avocado seeds.
- Introduce a composting system to extend understanding of sustainability.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Provide tools, e.g. a shovel or trowel for digging.
- Offer gloves.

Visual supports

- Use visual supports to sequence the steps involved in the experience e.g. dig, plant, water, cover.
- Use a visual schedule to assist children in anticipating when gardening experiences will take place.

Engagement

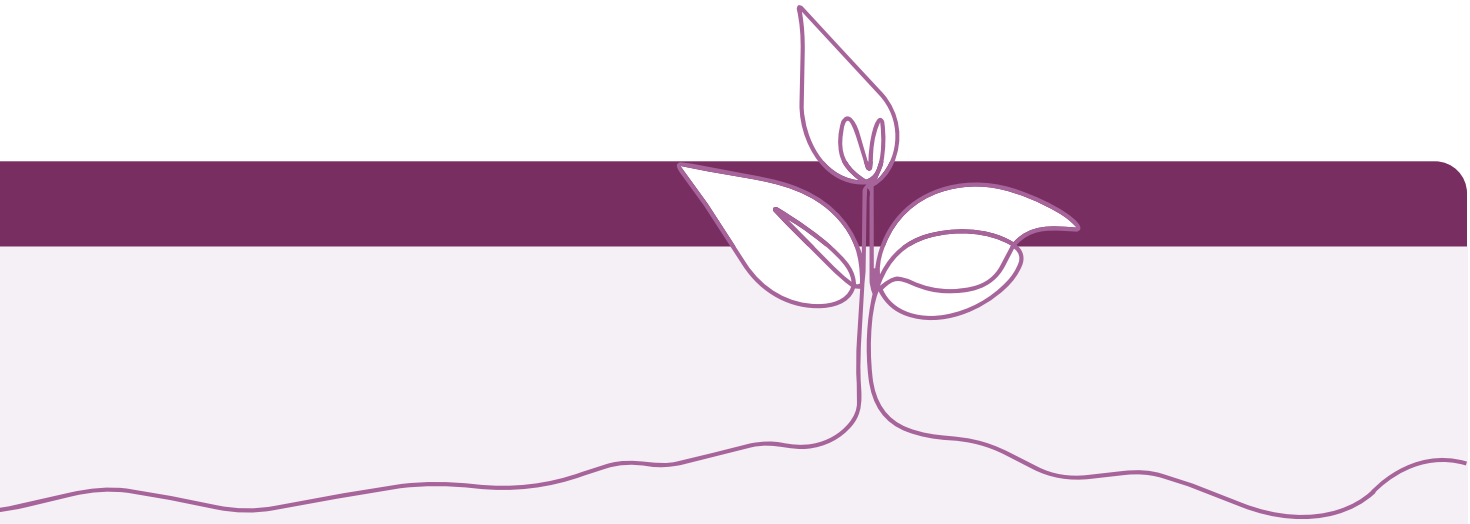
Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Small group or 1:1. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices.

RESOURCES

- ☐ Access to a garden or raised garden bed
- ☐ Herb seeds or seedlings
- ☐ Mortar and pestle or other tools to crush herbs
- ☐ Playdough table and tools
- ☐ Waterplay tray and tools
- ☐ Watering cans and spray bottles



CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Learn to care for living plants.
- Explore a plant's life cycle.
- Explore composting through extension.
- Learn to harvest only what is needed.
- Reuse water from waterplay for the garden and discarded drinking water.

Economic

- Growing your own herbs reduces the need to buy them.

Cultural diversity

- Explore herbs that are used in different cultural cuisines.
- Invite families to share how they use herbs in their cooking.

Seasonality

- Explore how the season impacts upon growth and harvesting.
- Research into which crops grow better in which season.
- Identify the need for water and sunlight in order for growth.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Growing Vegetable Soup* Lois Ehlert
- *A Year in Our New Garden* Gerda Muller
- *I Eat Vegetables* Hannah Tofts
- *Apple Farmer Annie* Monica Wellington
- *Planting a Rainbow* Lois Ehlert
- *The Tiny Seed* Eric Carle
- *Jack and the Beanstalk*

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Caring for living things builds confidence and empathy.
- Revisiting and tending to the herb garden builds a sense of belonging.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Watering and harvesting show children their actions matter.
- Growing and sharing food builds understanding of where it comes from.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Smelling, touching and tasting builds comfort with new textures.
- Trying food from garden to plate builds confidence around new foods.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Watching herbs grow builds curiosity and early scientific thinking.
- Comparing and measuring herbs builds early maths understanding.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Describing what they see and smell builds vocabulary.
- Retelling the growing process builds early storytelling and sequencing skills.

Experiences using natural resources

Experience 2: Fruit and vegetable exploration baskets

Fruit and vegetable exploration baskets invite children to explore whole foods through engaging with their senses during hands-on investigation. This experience builds food familiarity through natural curiosity and gentle exposure. Using real fruit and vegetables for this experience promotes rich conversation on sustainability, where food comes from and fosters confident relationships with food.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. fruit, vegetables).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

Present an assortment of whole fruit and vegetables in baskets.

- Hold, touch and explore fruit and vegetables.
- Smelling and noticing differences in scent.
- Develop oral language through naming fruit and vegetables.
- Model descriptive language e.g. colour, texture and smell.
- Engage in cause-and-effect play such as rolling, squeezing and banging.

Toddlers (2–3)

- Sort fruit and vegetables by attributes, e.g. colours, sizes, and shapes.
- Wash fruit and vegetables in trays of water.
- Assist with peeling soft fruits like bananas and mandarins.
- Provide safe cutting experiences using child-safe tools to explore texture.
- Model descriptive language e.g. soft, smooth, hard, bumpy.
- Model the names of fruits and vegetables to support vocabulary and imitation.

Preschool age (3+)

- Sort into categories such as leafy, root, fruit and vegetable.
- Weigh fruit and vegetables using formal and informal units (e.g. balance scales, kitchen scales and hefting).
- Cut fruit and vegetables to make mealtime plates (focus on the exposure with no pressure to eat).
- Investigate peer favourite fruits and vegetables to compare preferences.
- Engage in discussions about sustainable practices, food waste and where food comes from.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Cut open fruit and vegetables to look inside structures e.g. the star of an apple, the seeds from a capsicum.
- Add magnifying glasses so children can take a closer look at fruits and vegetables.
- Explore the concept of floating and sinking with fruits and vegetables.
- Match coloured scarves to fruit and vegetable colours.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Use whole fruits and vegetables first.
- Offer tongs, gloves or scoops.
- Be mindful of strong smelling fruits and vegetables – introduce gradually and with choice.

Visual supports

Use visual supports to sequence the steps involved in the experience e.g. take banana, peel, cut, put on plate.

Engagement

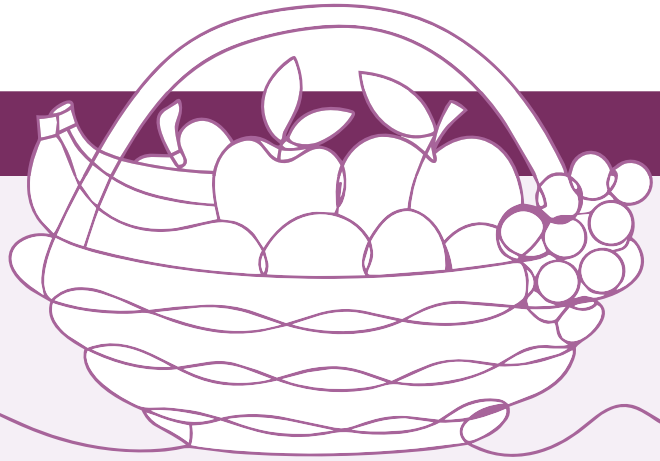
Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Small group or 1:1. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

RESOURCES

- ☐ Baskets
- ☐ Assorted fruit and vegetables
- ☐ Water play set up for washing fruit and vegetables
- ☐ Child safe knives and utensils for cutting
- ☐ Scales: kitchen scales, pan scales
- ☐ Magnifying glasses
- ☐ Coloured scarves



CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Explore where fruit and vegetables come from.
- Investigate seeds and planting scraps.
- Reuse fruit and vegetable area exploration (e.g. if appropriate wash and eat, compost, worm farm).

Cultural diversity

- Include produce from different cultural cuisines.
- Learn food names in home languages.

Seasonality

- Compare summer and winter fruits and vegetables.
- Observe colour changes in fruit and vegetables over time.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Oliver's Vegetable* Vivian French & Alison Bartlett
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* Eric Carle
- *Growing Vegetable Soup* Lois Ehlert
- *A Year in Our New Garden* Gerda Muller
- *Seasons of Arnold's Apple Tree* Gail Gibbons

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Comparing favourite fruits and vegetables builds confidence in personal preferences.
- Choosing what to explore first builds independence.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Investigating where food comes from builds understanding of its journey to the plate.
- Composting food scraps builds responsibility towards the environment.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Touching, smelling and tasting builds comfort with new textures.
- Low-pressure exposure builds comfort trying new food.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Sorting, categorising and weighing builds early maths thinking.
- Looking inside fruit and vegetables builds curiosity and scientific thinking.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Naming and describing fruit and vegetables builds vocabulary.
- Comparing preferences builds conversation skills.

Experiences connecting food with people and place

Experience 1: Farm to plate

Farm to plate explores the journey of how the food we eat reaches our plate. Through sensory play, pretend play, hands-on experiences and real-world connections, children learn the fundamentals of growing, farming, and sustainability in fun and engaging ways.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. wheat, corn, oats).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

- Provide a farm sensory tray with large farm animal toys, soft whole fruit and vegetable toys.
- Explore animal sounds by listening to farm noises and singing familiar songs.
- Look at photos of real farm animals to build recognition and connection.

Toddlers (2–3)

- Provide a farm sensory tray with extended materials such as soil and oats.
- Include felt trees with attachable fruit to build understanding and connection.
- Display photos of farm animals and fresh produce.
- Picture match: matching animals to produce, e.g. cow to milk and chicken to eggs.
- Sort food into bowls from animals and from plants.

Preschool age (3+)

- Extend farm sensory play with additional materials such as trucks to transport produce and market stalls for role play.
- Sort and categorise produce into dairy, meat/animal, fruit, vegetables and grain.
- Participate in a virtual "meet the farmer" experience or visit a local farm on incursion/excursion.
- Grind whole wheat grains using a mill or mortar and pestle to observe changes.
- Explore the process from "grain to bread" (wheat, flour, dough, bread).

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Explore how weather events impact crop growth.
- Examine food packaging to identify and sort food made in Australia and imported foods.
- Transform milk/cream into butter through hands-on shaking.
- Add water play to the sensory tray to model watering the crops or rain on the farm.
- Introduce farm animal puppets for interactive singing and dramatic play.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Individual sensory tray for children who might find shared sensory play overwhelming.
- Be mindful of loud animal sounds for children with sensory sensitivities. Some services may have access to noise-cancelling headphones, so these could be offered if needed.
- Offer gloves, scoops, shovels or spoons to engage in sensory play.

Predictable routines

Prepare children in advance if there is an incursion or excursion.

Engagement

Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Small group or 1:1. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

RESOURCES

- ☐ Large tray for sensory play
- ☐ Assorted toys – farm animals, fruits, vegetables, hay, soil, grain, corn, oats for a sensory tray set up
- ☐ Speaker and recorded animal sounds
- ☐ Photos of farm animals and produce
- ☐ Felt farm animal and produce set
- ☐ Whole wheat grains, mortar and pestle or hand mill
- ☐ Cooking utensils



CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Care for animals and living things.
- Mindful use of food and composting waste after use.
- Environmental impact.

Social

- Understand local food systems.
- Connecting with local farmers through excursions and incursions.

Economic

- Understanding how buying local supports farmers.

Cultural diversity

- Sort produce from diverse origins.
- Explore how different foods might be used in different homes.
- Explore traditional farming across cultures.

Seasonality

- Explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seasonal knowledge.
- Observe plant growth across seasons.
- Set up the sensory trays and small world differently to reflect different seasons.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Oh Dear!* Rod Campbell
- *My Farm* Alison Lester
- *Farmer Duck* Martin Waddell & Helen Oxenbury
- *Mrs Wish-Washy's Farm* Joy Cowley & Elizabeth Fuller
- *Noisy Farm* Rod Campbell
- *Rosie's Walk* Pat Hutchins
- *Peep Inside the Farm* Anna Milbourne
- *Welcome to Bush Tucker Plants* Greg Smith & Leila Warne

SONGS AND NURSERY RHYMES

- Old MacDonald Had a Farm
- 5 Little Ducks
- Mary Had a Little Lamb
- Little Bo Peep
- B-I-N-G-O

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Engaging in farm-related role play explores identities, roles and points of view.
- Taking on different roles in pretend play builds a sense of self and belonging.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Excursions and incursions build real-world connections to community.
- Cooking together and sharing meals builds a sense of community.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Sensory exploration of farm produce builds confidence around new foods.
- Visiting or engaging with a farm setting builds confidence in new experiences.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Sorting, categorising and measuring builds early maths thinking.
- Cooking and observing change builds curiosity and scientific thinking.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Naming and describing farm animals builds vocabulary.
- Retelling the cooking process builds early sequencing skills.

Experiences connecting food with people and place

Experience 2: Food, culture and belonging

This experience explores how food connects people in the community. It teaches children that there is more to food than simply eating. It creates togetherness through sharing traditions, memories, celebrations, and rituals that build a deep-rooted sense of identity.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. spices, wheat-based playdough).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

- Including spices and herbs into sensory play (e.g. mix cinnamon, nutmeg, turmeric, cumin into playdough).
- Sharing photos of mealtimes from home and create a display at child height for children to view and share.
- Invite families to share how mealtimes look in their household and incorporate rituals where possible.
- Organise shared mealtimes with children from older rooms as opportunities for connection.

Toddlers (2–3)

- Invite children to share their favourite meals through photos from home, drawings, and documented responses.
- Create dramatic play restaurants that represent different cuisines e.g. Indian, Italian, Chinese.
- Have a shared picnic with an emphasis on togetherness and sharing and replicate this in a picnic play area to extend learning through play.

Preschool age (3+)

- Explore foods that connect to celebrations e.g. Chinese New Year, Diwali, birthdays etc.
- Map children's cultural backgrounds and explore traditional foods of those regions.
- Create a room cookbook featuring children's favourite recipes from home.
- Extend dramatic play to include children creating menus, taking orders, making signs, and recipe books. Invite the children to decide on the theme, cuisine and foods served, rotating cuisines over time.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Display the photos of family mealtimes during eating times so educators can model language and spark conversation (e.g. "Oliver eats pasta on Sundays.") Create a photo book to include in the book corner.
- Educators use intentional conversation starters during shared mealtimes (e.g. "At my house we eat dinner...")
- Create a shared class recipe (e.g. a fruit salad recipe.) and share with other rooms or families.

RESOURCES

- ☐ Herbs and spices for sensory play
- ☐ Restaurant dramatic play resources

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Use of mild herbs to begin with to gauge children who may have sensitivities to taste and smell.
- If there is a child with strong sensitivities, provide unscented playdough for them.
- Offer tools with the playdough so children who are tactile defensive do not have to physically touch the playdough.
- Have cloths or handwipes close by for children to wipe hands if needed.
- Keep the dramatic play area free from visual clutter and clearly define the space to prevent sensory overwhelm.

Visual support

Create simple play sequences using pictures or photos to assist children understand how to use the space i.e. put food in pot, place on stove, stir and tip into bowl.

Predictable routines

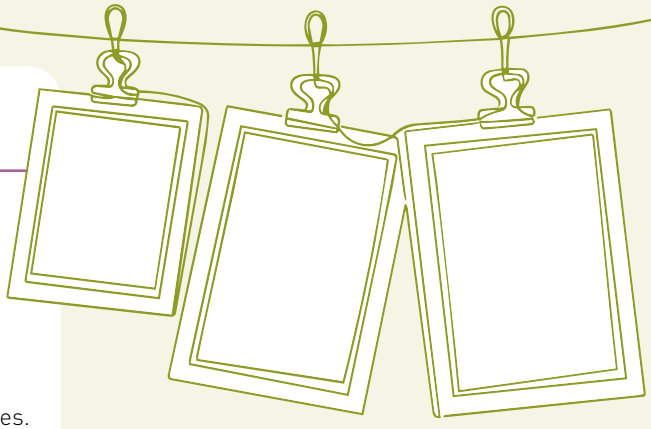
Provide verbal and visual warnings before changing the routine e.g. having a picnic for lunch rather than eating at the table.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

Engagement

Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would the respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.



CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Develop an understanding that different foods grow in different parts of the world.
- Explore how traditional food practices work with the seasons and local environment.

Social

- Explore sustainable practices of different cultures.
- Learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders about traditional food practices.

Cultural diversity

- Connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders to explore food knowledge and traditions.
- Build understanding that families eat different foods.
- Explore traditional dishes and their cultural significance.
- Recognise that families celebrate different occasions and traditions.

Seasonality

- Explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seasonal knowledge.
- Explore how climate affects the foods different cultures eat, and when.
- Understand that different foods are eaten at different times of the year.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Handa's Surprise*
  Eileen Browne
- *No Kimchi for Me*
  Aram Kim
- *A Taste Adventure with Melissa Leong*
  Melissa Leong
- *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*
  Judith Kerr
- *Stay for Dinner*
  Sandhya Parappukkaran & Michaelle Pereira
- *We're Going On a Picnic!*
  Pat Hutchins
- *Let's Eat!*
  Ana Zamorano & Julie Vivas
- *What's Cooking at 10 Garden Street?*
  Felicita Sala
- *Walking with the Seasons in Kakadu*
  Diane Lucas
- *Welcome to Bush Tucker Plant,*
  Greg Smith & Leila Warne

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Sharing family food traditions builds a sense of who they are and where they come from.
- Exploring cultural celebrations connects children to their own traditions.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Learning about different cultural foods builds understanding and respect for diversity.
- Connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander builds connection to culture and place.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Sharing food and traditions together builds a sense of belonging.
- Seeing their own culture reflected and valued builds confidence and comfort.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Sorting and categorising foods builds early maths thinking.
- Using a world map to locate cultural backgrounds builds early geographic understanding.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Sharing stories about food builds oral language skills.
- Creating menus and recipes builds early literacy skills.

Experiences using play

Experience 1: Making meaning through kitchen play and everyday food experiences

Dramatic play areas play an important role in ECEC settings as they reflect children's real-world experiences. Kitchens and home corners provide children with opportunities to make meaning and connections with food within their play. It is where children practice familiar routines, learn about diverse family roles, cultural practices, and social relationships.

Kitchen play areas should look and feel like home with real cooking utensils and home life representations. This provides children with a strong sense of identity and belonging. It gives children a safe space to practise lived experiences to build meaning in authentic ways.

Babies (Birth–2)

Environmental set up

- Large soft fruit and vegetable toys.
- Baskets.
- Lightweight pots and pans.
- Muffin tray.
- Large but real materials such as wooden spoons and whisks.
- Child-safe bowls, plates, and cutlery.
- Metal bowls and other kitchen related tools that make noise.

Educator role

- Model familiar fruit and vegetable names.
- Model action words like stir, drink and pour.
- Model mealtime routines and rituals.

Toddlers (2–3)

Environmental set up

- Low stove, sink or kitchen set up.
- Low table for serving food and sitting around.
- Real, but lightweight pots and frying pans.
- Oven trays and muffin tins.
- Tea towels, aprons, oven mittens and sponges.
- Dolls to cook and feed.
- Real and recycled food packaging from dry pantry products, e.g. cereal boxes etc. Avoid the use of milk bottles and egg cartons to reduce the risk of children handling contaminated products.
- Chopping boards.
- Kettle or teapot.
- Paper and pencils.
- Herb shakers.

Educator role

- Extend and scaffold language during play.
- Model role-play dialogue and everyday interactions.

Preschool age (3+)

Environmental set up

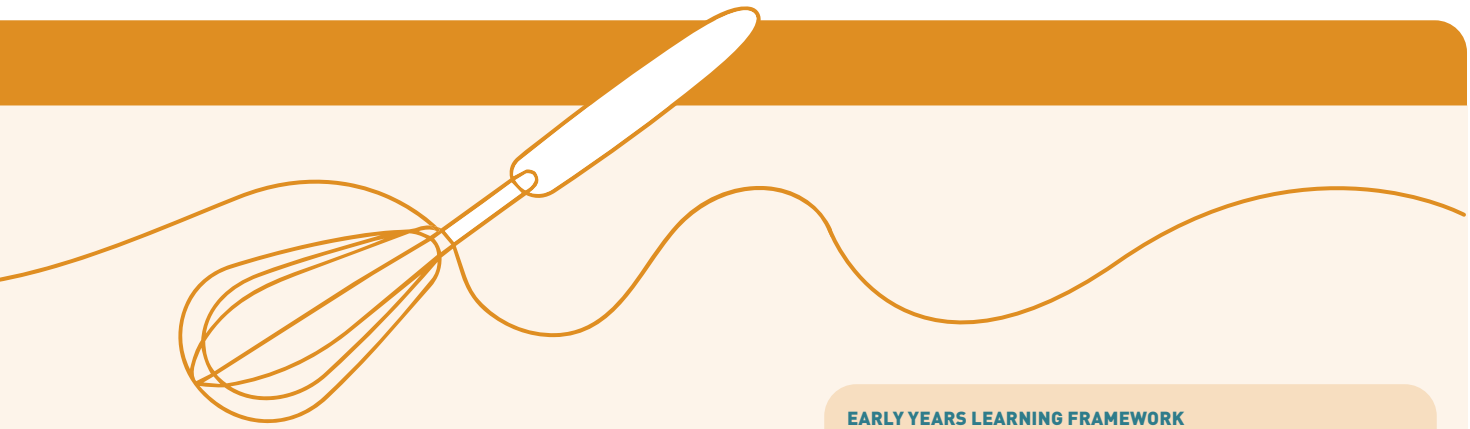
- Defined kitchen space with functional areas e.g. preparation space, sink, oven, fridge, dining table.
- Metal pots and pans.
- Oven trays and muffin tins.
- Measuring cups and spoons.
- Wooden chopping boards.
- Kitchen scales and timers.
- Toaster, kettle and microwave.
- Recipe and cookbooks.
- Real and recycled food packaging e.g. egg cartons, milk cartons, cereal boxes etc.
- Bin, recycling bin, compost bin.
- Sponges, spray bottles, tea towels.
- Paper and pencils.
- Herb shakers.
- Pretend mobile device.

Educator role

- Embed literacy opportunities in play such as writing lists recipes, and menus, or entering them onto a mobile device.
- Facilitate turn-taking, role play and perspective taking.
- Support numeracy concepts such as measuring, timing and sequencing.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Extend the dramatic play area to restaurants, supermarkets, farmers' markets, bakery and other food-related play opportunities that reflect what the children are likely to experience as part of their culture and community.
- Rotate food types around to broaden understanding of food groups and cuisines.
- Invite children to suggest additions or changes they would like incorporated into the area.



NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Keep the dramatic play area free from visual clutter and clearly define the space to prevent sensory overwhelm.
- Dramatic play areas can be loud. Provide noise cancelling headphone for children who may be sensitive to auditory stimulation.

Visual supports

- Create simple play sequences to assist children understand how to use the space i.e. put food in pot, place on stove, stir and tip into bowl.
- Educator to model how to play and use the space.

Communication

- Model the same consistent language and play experience daily to assist in development of play skills.
- Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Use of compost and recycling bins in dramatic play.
- Use of real utensils and cooking items.
- Use of recycled food packaging.

Cultural diversity

- Include culturally diverse eating tools, alongside photographs, books and examples of how different cultures use them.
- Include food representations from different culture.

Seasonality

- Include food based-on the current season.
- Seasonal shopping lists and menus.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Practicing familiar routines and roles builds a sense of self and belonging.
- Imitating familiar experiences builds confidence to engage with the world.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Playing together builds a sense of community.
- Exploring cultural differences in play builds understanding of diverse traditions.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Rehearsing everyday routines through play builds confidence and comfort.
- Caring for self and others in play builds independence and empathy.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Choosing what to include in the play space builds ownership and curiosity.
- Extending play through new roles or scenarios builds problem-solving and flexible thinking.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Dramatic play builds turn-taking and communication skills.
- Writing lists, menus and signs builds early literacy skills.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *I'm a Hungry Dinosaur* Janeen Brain & Ann James
- *Hattie Helps Out* Jane Godwin, Davina Bell & Fraya Blackwood
- *The Very Hungry Bear* Nick Bland
- *The Little Red Hen* Ronne Randall

Experiences using play

Experience 2: Making magic with mud

Mud kitchens and sand play offer wonderful, rich opportunities for open-ended play. Children naturally experiment, create, problem solve and collaborate to mirror real world experiences. A well-designed and set-up mud kitchen is a wonderful addition to an ECEC environment, as it creates sustained play with endless authentic learning opportunities. Through playing with mud, children explore mathematical thinking, scientific concepts, and language development.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. herbs).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

Environmental set up

- Large trays for sand and mud.
- Loose parts such as wood slices, pinecones, large seed pods.
- Supervised access to water in small buckets or damp sand.
- Assorted spoons, cups, and bowls.

Educator role

- Model key vocabulary and action words.
- Model actions such as mixing, stirring and pouring.
- Support sensory preferences.
- Encourage early social interaction.

Toddlers (2–3)

Environmental set up

- A mud kitchen or low table.
- Old pots, pans, muffin trays, and cake tins.
- Assorted spoons, ladles and whisks.
- Measuring cups and spoons.
- Cups and bowls.
- Leaves, herbs, sticks and flowers for mixing and making.
- Access to water.

Educator role

- Model pretend play.
- Extend play by adding additional steps to the sequence.
- Encourage problem solving and cause-and-effect experimenting.
- Incorporate everyday math language, e.g. full, empty, more, less.

Preschool age (3+)

Environmental set up

- A well-defined mud kitchen area.
- Space for a mud kitchen cafe using small tables or milk crates for serving.
- Old pots, pans, muffin trays, and cake tins.
- Scales.
- Measuring cups and spoons.
- Assorted spoons, ladles and whisks.
- Cups and bowls.
- Leaves, herbs, sticks and flowers for mixing and making.
- Supervised access to water.
- Recipe cards and books.
- Ask the children what else they would like in the space.
- Dress ups e.g. aprons, hats, sunglasses.
- Invite children to suggestion additional materials for the space.

Educator role

- Ask open ended questions to provoke thought e.g. "What happens if we add more water?" "How can we make it stick together?"
- Encourage hypothesising, predicting and problem solving.
- Embed mathematical and science-based concepts naturally into play.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Add a natural payment system for the mud cafe e.g. paying with stones and leaves.
- Introduce clay into the area.
- Make mud paint.
- Compare different soil and sand types.
- Compost natural materials once used.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Provide an individual sensory tray for children who might find shared sensory play overwhelming.
- Offer tools with the sand and mud so children who are tactile defensive do not have to physically touch the mud.
- Offer children gloves to wear.
- Have cloths or towels close by for children to wipe their hands.

Visual supports

Include simple play sequences to visually represent the steps involved i.e. pour, mix, scoop, serve.

Engagement

- Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would they respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experience, observing is appropriate.
- Include their special interest in the play to encourage participation i.e. if they like trains, include trains in the space.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

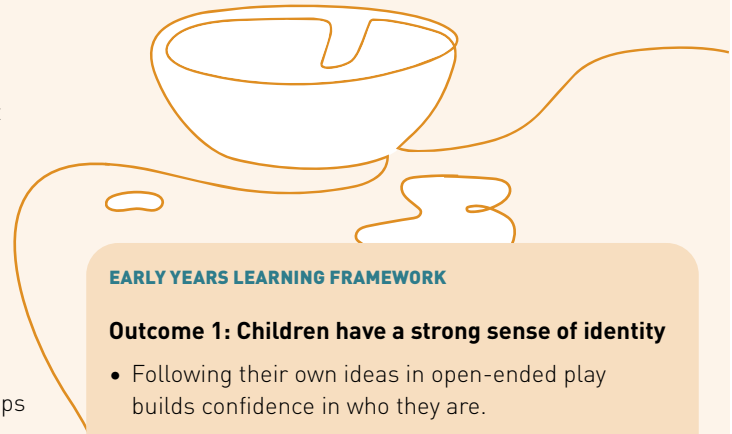
- Use natural resources and materials.
- Learn about the role soil plays in the environment.
- Compost natural materials after use.
- Show care for nature and the outdoor environment.

Cultural diversity

- Include diverse cooking utensils.
- Use recipe cards from a range of cuisines.
- Investigate different cooking practices.
- Connect with the land in culturally respectful ways.

Seasonality

- Provide different materials based on the season, e.g. fallen leaves in autumn, flowers in spring.
- Explore how weather affects the play, e.g. sand dries quickly in summer.



EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Following their own ideas in open-ended play builds confidence in who they are.
- Choosing what to mix, create and do builds a sense of autonomy.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Exploring natural elements like sand, water and leaves builds a connection to nature.
- Sharing tools, space and ideas builds collaboration with peers.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Scooping, pouring, squeezing and mixing natural materials builds fine motor skills.
- Tactile sensory play with water and sand builds emotional regulation and support wellbeing.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Experimenting with how properties change by adding water and sand builds problems-solving and scientific thinking.
- Hypothesising and exploring cause and effect builds curiosity and reasoning skills.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Role-play and play dialogue build conversation skills.
- Imitating actions or words of others builds vocabulary understanding.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Wombat Stew*
  Marcia Vaughan
- *Crabbing with Dad*
  Paul Seden
- *Welcome to Bush Tucker Plants*
  Greg Smith & Leila Warne

Experiences involving the senses

Experience 1: Citrus and zest investigation

Citrus fruits offer a powerful multisensory exploration opportunity. Through smelling, touching, observing and tasting (where appropriate) children are immersed in hands-on investigating. Peeling, juicing and zesting help children build a sensory awareness through inquiry and curiosity.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. citrus fruits).**

See Section 2, page 57

Note: These experiences are about exposure and sensory exploration and are pressure-free. This means there is no pressure for children to consume the foods if they do not wish to.

Safety note: This experience should not be undertaken outside due to the risk of phytophotodermatitis. This condition can be caused when citrus juice on skin reacts with UV light and causes the skin to burn.[30]

Babies (Birth–2)

- Offer whole citrus fruits for exploration, e.g. lemons, oranges, mandarins, and limes.
- Roll fruit in whole form across a mat, table or sensory tray.
- Encourage babies to feel the texture of the peel.
- Smell peeled or cut citrus fruits (only if interested)
- Add cut citrus fruits into water play.

Toddlers (2–3)

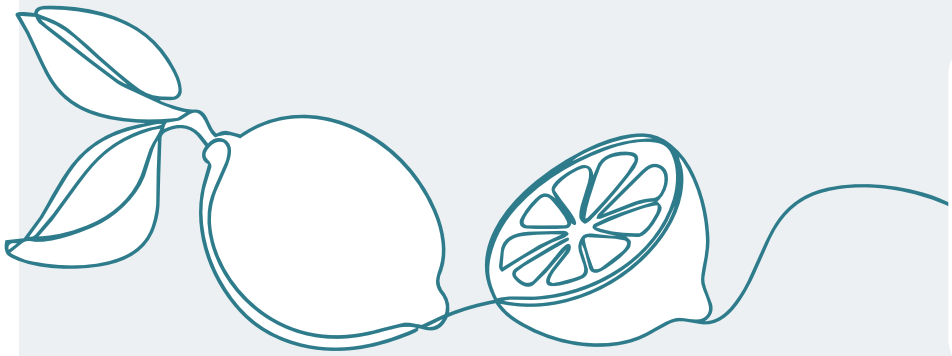
- Add cut citrus fruits into water play.
- Use handheld manual juicers to make juice.
- Freeze juice to make icy poles.
- Tip and pour juice into cups or jugs.
- Cut citrus fruits in half for children to hand squeeze.
- Peel easy-to-peel citrus fruits such as a mandarin.
- Sort citrus fruits into colours and types.
- Create observational drawing and painting of fruit.
- Explore segments of fruit.

Preschool age (3+)

- Use handheld manual juicers to make juice.
- Investigate which citrus fruit produces the most juice.
- Freeze juice to make icy poles and to observe changes in state.
- Grate and zest citrus peel to use in cooking e.g. orange and poppy seed muffins.
- Add grated zest to playdough and water play.
- Explore and count segments of fruit.
- Use magnifying glasses to observe peel and inside of fruit.
- Weigh assorted citrus fruits on pan scales.
- Provide child-safe knives for children to explore the fruit and make a citrus fruit salad.
- Create observational drawing and painting of fruit.
- Add a slice of lemon in cool water for consumption.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Plant citrus seeds in cups, place in a sunny position with water and document growth over time.
- Conduct floating and sinking investigation. Does citrus float or sink?
- Dry or dehydrate citrus peels and slices to create scent jars.



RESOURCES

- ☐ Assorted citrus fruit
- ☐ Handheld manual juicers
- ☐ Magnifying glasses
- ☐ Scales
- ☐ Child safe knives and cooking utensils

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Some neurodivergent learners may be averse to citrus fruit. They have multiple strong sensory elements i.e. smell, texture and taste.
- Never make a child smell directly if they are uncomfortable.
- Provide scents in jars rather than smelling directly from the fruit for children sensitive to smells.
- Provide whole fruit for exploration rather than cut fruit.
- Provide gloves for children to wear.
- Ensure cloth or towel available to wipe hands.

Visual support

Include simple play sequences to visually represent the steps involved i.e. cut, juice, pour.

Engagement

- Provide choice rather than giving direct instructions i.e. would you like to juice or pour?
- Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would they respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Compost peel.
- Learn about citrus trees.
- Use the whole fruit peel, juice and flesh.

Cultural diversity

- Explore how citrus grows in different countries.
- Incorporate culturally diverse citrus recipes.
- Learn the names of fruit in different languages.

Seasonality

- Understand when citrus fruit is in season and what climate citrus grows in.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Noticing and naming their own reactions to citrus builds self-awareness.
- Noticing how peers respond builds understanding of others.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Group investigations build shared discoveries and collaboration.
- Comparing how citrus grows in different countries builds understanding of the wider world.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Squeezing, juicing and picking seeds builds fine motor skills.
- Handling kitchen tools builds increasing competence and confidence.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Investigating of citrus using their senses builds curiosity and wonder.
- Squeezing and juicing fruits builds understanding of cause and effect.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Describing sensory experiences of citrus builds vocabulary.
- Observational drawings build idea expression and meaning-making.
- Imitating actions or words of others builds vocabulary understanding.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy*
  KeriAnne Jelinek
- *When Grandma Gives You a Lemon Tree*
  Jamie Deeniham
- *Eating the Alphabet*
  Lois Ehlert
- *Oliver's Fruit Salad*
  Vivian French & Alison Bartlett

Experiences involving the senses

Experience 2: Mash, mix and marvel

Vegetables provide a wonderful opportunity for children to explore bright, vibrant colours while engaging their senses through mixing, mashing, tasting and creating. As vegetables soften through steaming, roasting or boiling, they become safe and inviting for little hands to squish, spread and investigate, while also offering opportunities to explore colour, texture, smell and taste.

From bright orange pumpkin to deep purple beetroot, children can delight in squishing, spreading and mixing a variety of vegetables and, if they choose, tasting them as they discover new colours, textures and flavours.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. vegetables).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

- Provide individual portions of cooked vegetables for exploration through squishing and mixing (pumpkin, sweet potato, beetroot, potato).
- Explore texture and colour by squishing, squeezing and mashing vegetables between fingers.
- Supervised tasting and mouthing can be supported from each child's individual bowl or tray.
- Encourage children to smell the vegetables, commenting on the aroma.
- Educator to model descriptive language such as warm, soft and orange.

Toddlers (2–3)

- Provide individual bowls of steamed or mashed vegetables for mixing, scooping and spreading.
- Encourage children to use their hands, spoons or potato mashers to combine and mix vegetables together.
- Draw children's attention to the transformation of colours and textures as vegetables are mixed together.
- Educator to model language such as smooth, lumpy, thick, soft, warm and cool.
- Allow for supervised tasting if the child shows interest.

Preschool age (3+)

- Wash, peel and prepare the vegetables for cooking.
- Observe how the vegetables change from their whole form to cooked.
- Mash the vegetables to form a simple dish e.g. mashed potato.
- Children can choose to add herbs from the garden or other seasonings.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Sort and classify vegetables by colour, texture and size.
- Explore different ways of cooking and preparing vegetables, and how these processes can change the colour, scent and taste.
- Compare vegetables before and after the cooking process.
- Experiment with different utensils and how different utensils can change the texture.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Offer gloves or a range of utensils, such as scoops and spoons, to support engagement.
- Children should not be expected to touch or taste the vegetables.
- Ensure cloths and towels are available for children to wash and wipe their hands during the experience.

Visual support

Use visual supports to sequence the steps involved in the experience, e.g. wash, peel, cook, mash and mix.

Engagement

- Consider what participation may look like for each individual child and whether they may engage best independently, in a small group or with 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to participate, recognising that observing is also a valid form of engagement.
- Provide children with choice around which vegetables and utensils they wish to use.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.



RESOURCES

- ☐ A variety of cooked vegetables, such as pumpkin, sweet potato, potato and beetroot.
- ☐ Individual bowls or trays for each child
- ☐ Spoons
- ☐ Potato mashers
- ☐ Small scoops or serving utensils
- ☐ Child-safe knives and peelers
- ☐ Chopping boards
- ☐ Small bowls for mixing
- ☐ Cloths or towels for cleaning hands and surfaces
- ☐ Gloves

CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Compost scraps
- Explore different ways of using all parts of the vegetable to reduce food waste.

Economic

- Schedule close to mealtimes, or in place of a meal, to reduce extra food preparation.

Cultural diversity

- Explore how vegetables are prepared, cooked and enjoyed in different cultures and family traditions.

Seasonality

- Use vegetables that are in season to explore the colours, flavours and textures available at different times of the year.
- Discuss where vegetables come from and notice how the vegetables available may change throughout the seasons.
- Explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seasonal knowledge.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Deciding how to mash and mix builds autonomy.
- Completing a task independently builds pride and confidence.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Sharing tools like mashers and spoons builds turn-taking and cooperation.
- Working with real food builds understanding of where it comes from.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Exploring different textures builds comfort with a range of food experiences.
- Controlling tools to mash, mix and spread builds hand-eye coordination.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Figuring out how much pressure to apply with a masher or spoon builds problem-solving and persistence.
- Observing food change from solid to smooth or lumpy puree builds curiosity and scientific thinking.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Describing what they feel, see and taste builds vocabulary.
- Facial expressions, gestures and sounds let babies and toddlers communicate their reactions before they have words.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Oliver's Vegetables* Vivian French
- *Growing Vegetable Soup* Lois Ehlert
- *A Year in Our New Garden* Gerda Muller
- *I Eat Vegetables* Hannah Tofts
- *Eating the Alphabet* Lois Ehlert
- *Handa's Surprise* Eileen Browne
- *Rah, Rah, Radishes!* April Pulley Sayre

Experiences involving art

Experience 1: Exploring colour through food

Food can be the perfect gateway to explore the Arts. Natural ingredients offer vibrant colours, symmetry and shapes, and scents and textures that inspire young artists. These experiences focus on edible paint exploration while supporting creative expression, experimentation, sustainability and cultural connection. Children engage in sensory-rich exploration that integrates art, science and food in meaningful ways.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. yoghurt, fruits, vegetables, cornflour, spices).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

Yoghurt painting

- Babies can sit in highchairs or low tables and chairs.
- Secure paper to highchair trays or table.
- In shallow trays or bowls, place a tablespoon of yogurt.
- Add natural colouring such as beetroot juice, spinach puree, mashed blueberries, mashed avocado.
- Model mixing the colouring into the yoghurt.
- Encourage gentle exploration with fingers.
- Model mark making on the paper.
- Mouthing and eating during this experience is encouraged if the child shows interest.
- Model vocabulary such as soft, smooth, cold, pink, green.

Toddlers (2–3)

Fruit and vegetable painting

- Gather food offcuts from meal preparation, e.g. celery ends, carrot tops, capsicum bottoms, corn cobs, etc.
- Prepare cornflour paint in shallow trays by adding cornflour, water and edible food colouring.
- Invite children to dip offcut food into paint and print patterns and shapes.
- Model descriptive language throughout the process (stamp, press, pattern, mix).

Preschool age (3+)

Spice painting

- Provide spices such as turmeric, paprika, cocoa, cinnamon, curry powder etc.
- Invite children to mix the spices with small amounts of water to create a paint paste.
- Encourage experimentation with mark making techniques on paper. Explore the different scents, colours and textures.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Invite children to create their own recipes for spice paint.
- Experiment with mixing spaces to create new colours.
- Compare natural pigments with store-bought paints.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Offer 1 or 2 colours at a time to reduce visual overwhelm.
- Provide options to engage independently with separate paper and trays.
- Offer tools such as paintbrushes, rollers and stamps for tactile sensitive children.
- Ensure cloth or towel available to wipe hands.
- Offer scent free paint options for children sensitive to smells or select a milder spice.

Visual supports

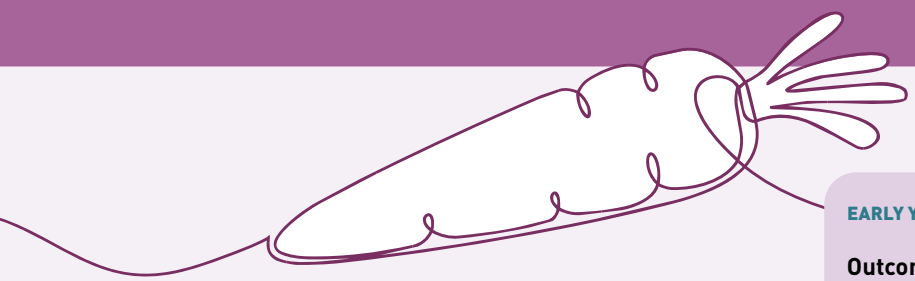
Provide a visual sequence to represent the steps involved i.e. scoop, mix, paint.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

Engagement

Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would they respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.



RESOURCES

- ☐ Yoghurt
- ☐ Beetroot juice, spinach puree, mashed blueberries, mashed avocado (for colour)
- ☐ Food offcuts such as celery ends, carrot tops, capsicum bottoms, corn cobs
- ☐ Cornflour
- ☐ Spices such as turmeric, paprika, cocoa, cinnamon, curry powder
- ☐ Mixing bowls, spoons, paint brushes, trays, paper

CONNECTION TO THEME



Sustainability

Environmental

- Reuse fruit and vegetable offcuts.
- Compost offcuts after use.
- Encourage safe tasting exploration.
- Explore plant-based pigments and dyes.

Economic

- Make paint from food scraps and spices to reduce the need for store-bought art materials.



Cultural diversity

- Explore spices from diverse cultures.
- Investigate traditional uses of natural dyes.
- Discuss how colour and food are represented in celebrations and art.



Seasonality

- Discuss how seasonal fruits and vegetables influence colour availability.
- Explore which fruits and vegetables (and colours) are in season.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Taste-safe exploration supports infants and toddlers who naturally explore the world through their mouths.
- Reflecting ideas and preferences through marks and patterns builds self-expression.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Exploring cultural foods builds respect for diverse backgrounds.
- Composting food scraps builds environmental responsibility.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Manipulating textures builds sensory awareness with movement.
- Handling raw vegetables builds confidence and familiarity with food.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Investigating natural patterns builds curiosity and early maths thinking.
- Interacting with unconventional art materials builds curiosity and persistence.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Vegetable prints build understanding of early symbol systems.
- Communicating preferences non-verbally builds early communication skills.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Planting a Rainbow* Lois Ehlert
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* Eric Carle
- *Eat Your Superpowers!* Toni Buzzeo
- *I Can Eat a Rainbow* Olena Rose
- *Jamberry* Bruce Degen
- *More Blueberries!* Susan Musgrave
- *Edible Colours* Jennifer Vogel Bass

Experiences involving art

Experience 2: My food, my story, my identity

This art-based food experience explores foods that are important to the child and foods that are important to their families. It connects food, identity, and cultural diversity to provide a medium for creative expression.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. wheat-based salt dough).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

- Invite families to send in photos of their child's favourite foods.
- Create a class book using children's faces and photos of their favourite foods e.g. "Oliver's favourite food is strawberries", "Mia loves sushi".
- Encourage mark making using edible paint to contribute to their page
- Include textured material to match the food where possible (e.g. soft felt for bread, bumpy paper for pineapple).
- Encourage children to create their own artwork using colours that represent their favourite food.
- Read the completed book during mealtimes to spark interest and conversations.

Toddlers (2–3)

- Invite families to send in a photo of their child's favourite meal along with a simple recipe.
- Support children to reconstruct their meal using clay or salt dough.
- Display the photo, recipe and finished clay creation together.
- Encourage children to share who cooks the meal at home and when they eat it.

Preschool age (3+)

- Invite children to draw a self-portrait on A3 paper, card or canvas.
- Around the self-portrait, children draw or collage their favourite foods.
- Educators document, scribe, or voice record children explaining what food they have included and why it is important to them.
- Attach scribed input or generate QR codes linking to audio recordings.
- Display finished portraits around the kitchen dramatic play area.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Create a centre cookbook titled 'Our Food Stories'.
- Compare similarities and differences between children's food experiences.
- Extend into dramatic play by including children's favourite foods in menus.

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Some neurodivergent children have strong sensitivities and trauma around food. Allow for imaginative choices when sharing their favourite food. This can be rephrased as "a food I like to look at" or "a food from my home".
- Offer tools such as cups, paint brushes and spoons to support children who are tactile defensive.
- Provide gloves.

Visual support

Provide a visual sequence to represent the steps involved i.e. roll, pinch, make circle.

Motor skills

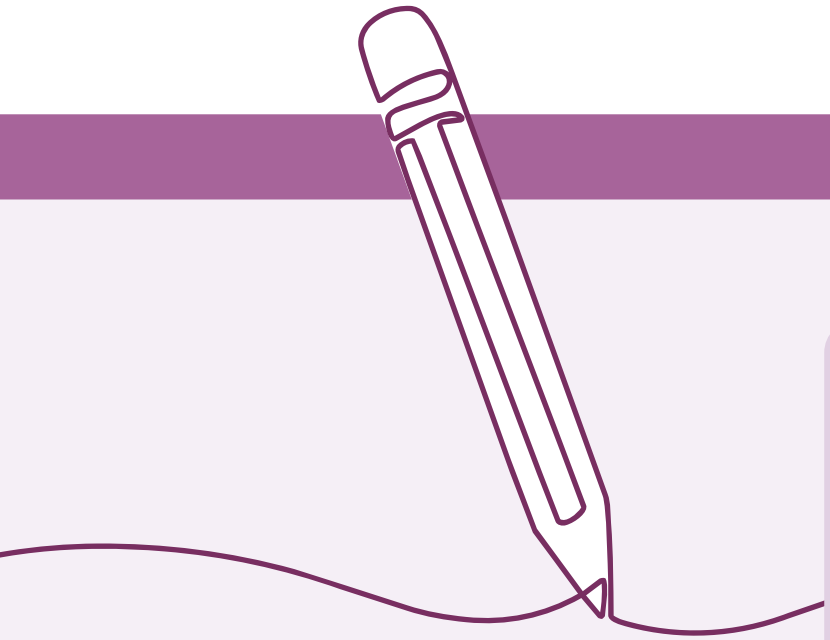
- Provide a range of options, such as a pre-drawn face template, so all children can participate in a way that suits them.
- Invite children to collage or use loose parts to complete portrait. These can then be photographed.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

Engagement

Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would they respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.



RESOURCES

- ☐ Photos and recipes from home
- ☐ Edible paint *See Section 3, page 83*
- ☐ Textured material and paper
- ☐ Digital device for recording child voice (optional)

CONNECTION TO THEME



Sustainability

Environmental

- Use of recycled materials for collage and artworks.
- Discuss where food comes from.
- Explore plant-based versus packaged foods.



Cultural diversity

- Explore foods and traditions from diverse cultures.
- Discuss why our favourite foods are important to us.
- Invite families to share cultural food traditions and celebration meals.
- Support a strong sense of identity and belonging.
- Learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food knowledge and traditions, alongside families' own cultural food stories.



Seasonality

- Compare seasonal foods eaten at home.
- Explore local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seasonal knowledge.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Seeing their own family and favourite meals featured affirms who they are and where they come from.
- Sharing family recipes and food traditions affirms a child's cultural heritage.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Books made from home recipes build a bridge between home and the service .
- Sharing food traditions with families and educators builds connection and community.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Sharing family photos and home food builds confidence and a sense of belonging.
- Using clay or salt-dough to reconstruct meals builds self-expression.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Mixing paint shades to match their food builds experimentation.
- Representing favourite food through drawing, collage and paint builds creativity.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Recipes and photos from home build early literacy through real-world texts.
- Recording their voice via QR codes builds understanding of digital tools for expression.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *No Kimchi for Me*
  Aram Kim
- *A Taste Adventure with Melissa Leong*
  Melissa Leong
- *Stay for Dinner*
  Sandhya Parappukkaran & Michaelle Pereira
- *We're Going On a Picnic!*
  Pat Hutchins
- *Let's Eat!*
  Ana Zamorano & Julie Vivas
- *What's Cooking at 10 Garden Street?*
  Felicita Sala

Experiences for services without garden access

Experience 1: Indoor potato patch

This experience connects the concept from soil to plate. However, it does not need a garden. You do not need a garden to grow and harvest potatoes. It can be done inside or undercover using a large dark plastic tub or bucket. Children can engage in this hands-on, sensory-rich and sustainable experience whilst learning the fundamentals of plant growth.

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. potato).**

See Section 2, page 57

Note: Remember to check your local food safety regulations in your jurisdiction before planning this experience.

See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75

Babies (Birth–2)

- Explore potatoes and seed potatoes.
- Encourage supervised sensory exploration.
- Observe and draw attention to the potato "eyes" growing over time.
- Include potatoes and seed potatoes in a sensory basket with leaves, soil, watering cans, and trowels.
- Model simple language such as "grow", "roots", "soil", and "water".

Toddlers (2–3)

- Plant seed potatoes in a large dark pot filled with soil.
- Count how many seed potatoes are planted.
- Water regularly and observe daily changes.
- Document growth through oral discussion, drawing and photographs:
  - 2–3 weeks (shoots will appear).
  - 6–8 weeks (flowers may become visible).
  - 10–14 weeks (harvest).
- Encourage children to dig gently to uncover potatoes.
- Count potatoes, sort them by size and shape.
- Collaboratively decide how the potatoes will be used:
  - cooking experience.
  - shared with families.
  - "giving" back to the kitchen to use in meals.

Preschool age (3+)

Extending upon the toddler's experience:

- Discuss what plants need to grow (water, soil, sunlight, time).
- Assign daily roles to water, measure and document changes.
- Measure shoots as they begin to appear and document.
- Create observational drawing as changes occur.
- Brainstorm ideas with the children on what to do with potatoes once harvested.
- Discuss and research potato-based recipes.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Create a visual timeline of growth stages.
- Cook a shared meal using harvested potatoes.
- Investigate different varieties of potatoes.
- Compare growth conditions (light vs darker spaces).
- Introduce composting systems using plant waste.

RESOURCES

- ☐ Potatoes and seed potatoes
- ☐ Large dark pot or tub
- ☐ Soil
- ☐ Gardening gloves, trowels, watering can



NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

- Offer tools such as trowels, scoops or tongs to support children who are tactile defensive.
- Provide gloves.
- Ensure cloth or towel available to wipe hands.

Visual supports

- Make a visual growth chart outlining the process so children know what to expect i.e. plant seeds, water, grow, harvest, eat.
- Allocate a consistent day to check the potatoes and outline this on a daily visual schedule.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

CONNECTION TO THEME



Sustainability

Environmental

- Explore where food comes from.
- Compost plant waste.
- Reduce reliance on packaged produce.
- Grow potatoes from sprouted kitchen scraps.

Social

- Share harvested potatoes with families and the service community.

Economic

- Grow food indoors using household containers to make food growing accessible without land or cost.



Cultural diversity

- Share family potato recipes.
- Explore potato dishes from different cultures.
- Discuss how staple foods vary across communities.



Seasonality

- Explore why potatoes are typically planted in cooler months.
- Discuss how temperature affects plant growth.
- Compare seasonal growing cycles.

Engagement

- Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would they respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.
- Assign alternative roles if the child does not like getting messy i.e. photographer or waterer.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Caring for the potato patch builds a sense of responsibility.
- Waiting weeks for the potatoes to grow builds patience and commitment.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Working together in the garden builds cooperation and connection.
- Growing food from soil to plate builds understanding of where food comes from.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Sensory exploration with soil and water supports calm engagement.
- Seeing the harvest after weeks of care builds a sense of achievement.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Comparing shoot heights and counting potatoes builds early maths thinking.
- Wondering and researching how plants grow builds curiosity.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Group discussion and wondering builds listening and questioning skills.
- Using camera to observe changes builds understanding of digital tools.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *The Potato People* Pamela Allen
- *Where Does My Food Come From?* Annabel Karmel
- *Supertato* Sue Hendra
- *Anywhere Farm* Phyllis Root
- *Tops and Bottoms* Janet Stevens
- *Rah, Rah, Radishes* April Pulley Sayre

Experiences for services without garden access

Experience 2: From scrap to sprout

This experience explores how food can regrow from leftovers, offcuts or scraps, such as carrot tops, capsicum cores, spring onion roots and celery bases. Children discover that you do not need a typical garden or soil to grow food. It builds a natural curiosity and challenges prior knowledge, sparking engagement. This experience embeds sustainable practices, plant life cycles and investigative skills.

See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75

⚠ **These experiences contain potential food allergens (e.g. vegetable scraps).**

See Section 2, page 57

Babies (Birth–2)

- Provide vegetable scraps in a tray or sensory basket for exploration.
- Focus on the textures, smells and visual differences.
- Model descriptive language such as crunchy, smooth, wet, leafy.
- Support children to place scraps in shallow water trays.
- Assist in refilling the water trays each day and observe any changes.

Toddlers (2–3)

- Children to place scraps in shallow trays.
- Use cups, jugs or watering cans to fill up the trays.
- Observe changes in the scraps and measure shoot growth.
- Document changes through drawing, oral retell or photo journals.
- Match the scrap to a full-size image of the vegetable it comes from.

Preschool age (3+)

- Create rosters to water, observe, and document changes to foster responsibility.
- Measure the shoot lengths and make predictions on how quickly and how long they grow.
- Place scraps in a variety of locations (light, shade, warmer areas) and compare results.
- Transplant well sprouted scraps into soil and continue to care for and make observations.
- Hold discussions around food waste, composting and sustainability choices.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

- Create a growth comparison chart.
- Cook with regrown scraps (e.g. spring onions).
- Compare regrown vegetables to store bought ones.
- Observe composting alongside regrowing to compare outcomes.

RESOURCES

- ☐ Offcuts or scraps, such as carrot tops, capsicum cores, spring onion roots and celery bases.
- ☐ Tray for growing
- ☐ Photographs for vegetables

NEUROAFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Sensory support

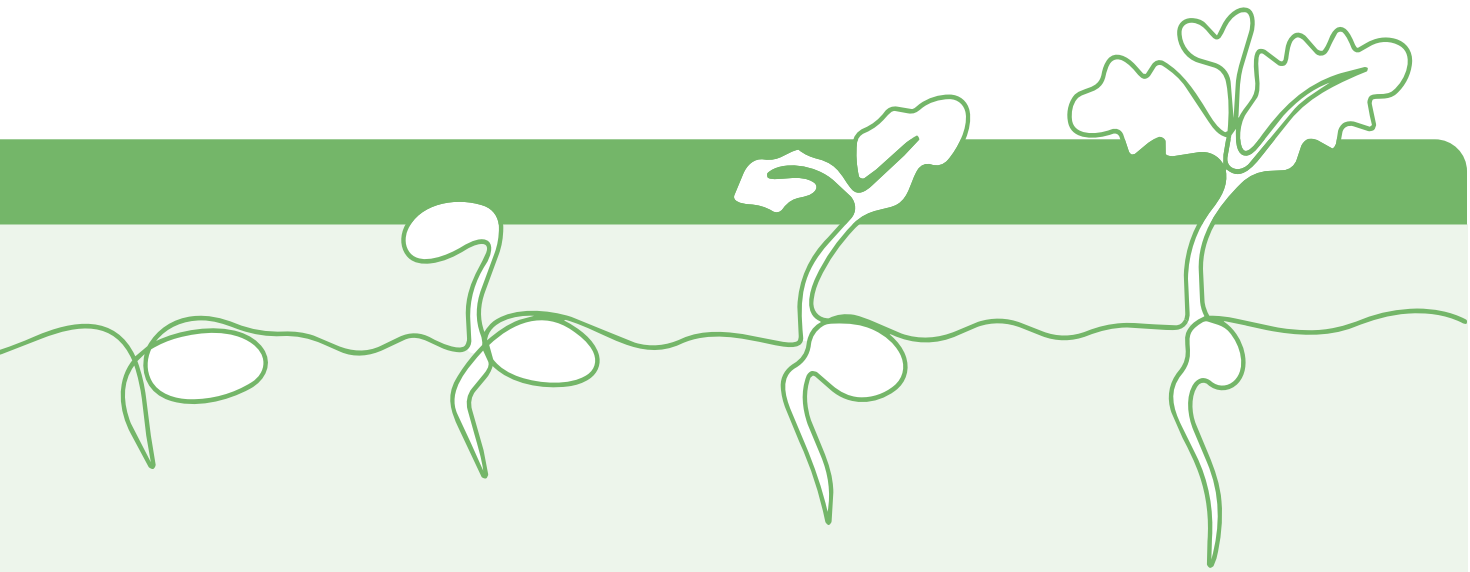
- Offer tools such as cups and spoons to support children who are tactile defensive.
- Provide an individual tray for children who might find shared sensory play overwhelming.
- Provide gloves.
- Ensure cloth or towel available to wipe hands.

Communication

Recognise and respect all forms of communication, including spoken language, gestures, facial expressions, visual supports and AAC devices.

Engagement

Assess what participation looks like for the individual. Would they respond better to small groups or 1:1 support. Ensure there is no pressure to engage in planned experiences, observing is appropriate.



CONNECTION TO THEME

Sustainability

Environmental

- Explore ways to reduce food waste.
- Understand reuse and regeneration.
- Compare composting vs regrowing.

Social

- Share family or community practices for reducing food waste.

Economic

- Explore how food from scraps reduces the need to buy new produce.

Cultural diversity

- Explore how different cultures reduce food waste.
- Share family practices for reusing leftovers in culturally specific ways.

Seasonality

- Discuss how temperature and daylight affect growth.
- Explore how different seasons affect which vegetables regrow.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- *Plants Feed Me* Lizzy Rockwell
- *Anywhere Farm* Phyllis Root
- *The Carrot Seed* Crocket Johnson
- *Eat the Alphabet* Demetrius Keller
- *Growing Vegetable Soup* Lois Ehlert
- *Planting a Rainbow* Lois Ehlert

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Engaging in daily care routines builds autonomy and agency.
- Monitoring change and coping when scraps fail to grow builds resilience.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Watching roots and stems regenerate in water or soil builds understanding of plant life cycles.
- Take turns on the watering roster builds a sense of shared responsibility.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Observing scraps regenerate builds confidence and familiarity with food.
- Representing observations through art builds fine motor skills.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Measuring and recording growth builds early maths.
- Comparing scrap growth in different locations builds understanding of cause and effect.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Retelling changes through drawing, discussion and photo journals builds expressive language.
- Describing observations builds descriptive vocabulary.