



Playing with Food

| BY SHARON KATZ COOPER |



We have to eat everyday, but sometimes we get stuck in a food rut. Macaroni and cheese again, anyone? Do you have trouble getting vegetables into your child? Sometimes making food more fun can motivate and excite children and perhaps even get them try new foods!

Check out the book, *Play with Your Food*, by Saxton Freymann. Mr. Freymann has made an entire career out of playing with food, using his photographs of fascinating sculptures made entirely from foods that he has carved, peeled and twisted. This book will show you and your children how to make artichoke-leaf aphids, bok choy buffalos, okra grasshoppers, green-pepper camels, and pear mice – among other animals. But the projects described in the book, and those below, are only a beginning. Once you get started, your imagination is the only limit to what you can create with the everyday foods in your kitchen!

Try these simple food sculptures to get started. Once you have made one or two, challenge your child to come up with her own animals. Then together, brainstorm what fruits, vegetables and other foods might be used to create your ideas. Remember to use caution with sharp knives, depending on the age and skill level of your children.

Banana Octopus

What you need

- A bright yellow banana
- A couple of dry black beans
- Peanut butter, honey, or other adhesive-like food

What to do

1. Carefully begin to peel back the top portion of the banana a couple of inches in four sections.
2. Once you have these peel sections started, divide them each into two narrower ones, so you have a total of eight. You can usually do this with your hands, just gently ripping.
3. Peel all eight sections about two-thirds of

the way down your banana.

4. Turn the banana upside down and attach two black beans for eyes.
5. Set the banana on a plate, arranging the peeled sections so they are spread out.
6. Voila – an octopus!

Moody Lemons

What you need

- A couple of ripe lemons
- A few dried black-eyed peas
- A sharp knife
- Liquid glue

What to do

1. Ask your child what mood he is in. Or what mood he would like to portray on a lemon!
2. Carefully carve a mouth on the end of the lemon that was attached to the stem. This end usually has a little bump that can serve as a natural nose. Make your mouth sad or happy or angry or wide-open, depending on what kind of mood you'd like to show.
3. Above the nose and mouth, attach two black-eyed peas as eyes. You can use glue to attach them – since you probably won't eat the outside of your lemon.
4. You're done. What would your lemon say?

Cantaloupe Turtle

What you need

- A ripe cantaloupe
- A long, narrow red or green pepper
- A sharp knife
- A few dried black-eyed peas

What to do

1. Slice your cantaloupe in half, so you have a dome shaped object.
2. Scoop out the seeds, and if desired, all the flesh inside to eat later!
3. Cut out a semi-circle shape from one end

of the melon, to be used as a hole for the head. Set the melon flat side down on a plate or cutting board.

4. Attach two black-eyed peas to one end of your pepper to serve as eyes. If you want to eat it later, use honey or peanut butter as your adhesive.
5. Slide your pepper part of the way into the semi-circle opening in your turtle shell, with the eyes on the end peeking out.
6. There you have your turtle!

This Helps Develop...

Working with your child to peel, carve, and decorate your fruits and vegetables can help develop fine motor skills – the use of small muscle movements in the hands that occur in coordination with the eyes. Children build fine motor skills when parents encourage them to select and gather their own objects with their hands, examine them carefully and manipulate them.

Social emotional development involves a child's feelings of self worth, confidence, and pride as well as their ability to get along with others in a group setting. Children love to create. As they create their fruit carvings, they will develop a sense of achievement and joy. Actively using their imaginations to come up with new animals and how to make them will also enhance your child's communication skills. ♦

This monthly family activity series, "Hands-on-Kids!" is brought to you by a partnership between the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia (CMNOVA) and FAMILY Magazine. For more activities you can do with your children to spark their love of learning, visit the CMNOVA web site, www.cmnova.org. On their web site you will also find information about the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia and how you can become involved. CMNOVA is committed to building a place where our children can freely explore and develop a lifelong love of learning. Sharon Katz Cooper is a museum educator and freelance writer in Fairfax. She is a volunteer with CMNOVA.