

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN TIPS & IDEAS

KIDS *in the* KITCHEN



PRACTICAL TIPS & IDEAS FOR
GETTING YOUR KIDS
INVOLVED IN THE KITCHEN...
WITHOUT DISASTER!

Kids in the Kitchen:
Practical Ideas for Getting
Your Kids Involved In the Kitchen
...Without Creating a Disaster!

Compiled by Jim Erskine

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Introduction & Notes

When compiling this cookbook set, we asked over 300 homeschooling families to share with us their very best advice for getting the kids interested and involved in cooking in the kitchen – without creating a disaster in the process!

This little ebook is a compilation of the best responses we received – practical, “real life” suggestions, tips and stories that will help you teach your children food prep skills, prevent potential disasters, and instill great fun and enjoyment into their “kitchen work”. Whatever age YOUR young ones are, you'll glean some great ideas and insights from this collection.

We want to thank the many homeschool families who generously contributed their favorite tips and suggestions for this unique collection. We appreciate your help so much... and are sure your fellow homeschoolers feel the same! Enjoy!

Jim Erskine
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Kids in the Kitchen:

Practical Ideas for Getting Your Kids Involved In the Kitchen ...Without Creating a Disaster!

My main tip for kids helping in the kitchen is to simply involve them in any process possible. When it comes to knives and little ones, we let them use a plastic lettuce knife. It makes them feel important and you can more easily teach them knife safety without having to worry about them cutting their fingers.

Let the kids help, even if it gets a little messy! It's more about the experience than a clean kitchen. Most kids love to help cook! :-)

Whenever there is grating cheese to be done, I bought a garden glove (new) and put it on my child then they can grate w/o cutting little fingers. I also use a plastic pizza cutter to let the cut up meat and sliced cheese, bread, cookie dough.. whatever with

I like to use cooking when I first start teaching fractions. I love to find a recipe that requires a lot of different fractions. If it's a large recipe and can be halved, I do that the first time we make it so we can make a small batch one week and double it the following week. Or, even triple it another week. When my children were smaller, I liked to hide something like a coin or home made coupons when they weren't looking so they could "find" something as they were cleaning.

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I have tons of tips! Matter of fact, I am teaching a cooking class for our homeschool group of 16 students. Quite an undertaking in our modest condo. Here's our Kitchen Safety Rules:

The kitchen can be a fun and safe place to work as long as everyone is careful and follows the same rules. If not, the kitchen can be a very dangerous place with sharp knives, hot ovens, boiling water and hot oil.

Always check with an adult before cooking, talking about what you can do by yourself and when you need an adult's help.

Always walk in the kitchen and work slowly and carefully.

Wear shoes that cover your whole foot and clothes that cover most of you.

Remember however, long, baggy clothes can catch on fire.

Wear an apron.

Keep your hair out of the way, tied back or use a hair net/bandana.

Use equipment only if you know exactly how to use it and you have permission from an adult.

Always use pot holders, towels or oven mitts when using the oven or handling something hot, making sure the pot holders, etc. are not wet.

If a fire starts, smother it with a pan lid or by pouring baking soda or salt on it. Using water on an oil fire will only make it worse.

Keep pan handles turned away from the edge of the stove or table.

Only fill pans half to three-quarters full so you can safely move them.

Always pick up a knife by its handle and never try to catch a falling knife.

Cut away from your hands and body and away from anyone near you, paying close attention to what you're doing and always use a cutting board.

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Put dirty knives on the counter or drain board, never in a sink full of soapy water.

When measuring, put the cup on something flat and stoop down to see if it is level, tapping the cup bottom on the flat surface to settle the ingredients.

Clean as you go to avoid accidents or a messier clean up later!

For steps on food safety and handling, visit www.fightbac.org – It is a great resource to teach children about preventing foodborne diseases and experiments to teach safe food handling.

My kids have been helping in the kitchen since they were toddlers. Let them do anything you think they can handle. They will surprise you! It may take hours for your 5 year old to wash the dishes but if he wants to, let him. It is a great life skill training.

We make sure to take pictures during each step of the process to scrapbook at the end. We have one scrapbook for each child for cooking so they will have their favorite recipes as they were cooked when they were growing up. - Submitted by The Schaub, W. Cola, SC

A good way to give a preschooler cooking experience w/out messes or headaches is to realize that he does not need to learn EVERYTHING at once. Just focus on one cooking skill per session. For example, measure out ingredients ahead of time for something simple, like soup. Spread some newspapers on the floor. Place the pot and a big spoon on the papers, and THEN (not before!) call your child to come help. Let him dump and stir. Lift the pot to the burner with profuse thanks, and make a big show of setting the timer, so he'll know when it's ready. Ask him to clean up the papers, because good cooks always clean as they go. After he goes back to playing, you can do the fussy stuff, like adjusting the seasoning & checking your recipe.

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Once they are big enough to keep their fingers out of the beaters, they are big enough to help! Not necessary, but my little ones always like to have their own aprons. For the boys, I used denim shop aprons. When they are toddlers, I will give them a potato round that is flat, and a table knife to "help" me cut it up for supper. It generally takes them as long to cut up that one round as it does for me to do all the rest of the potatoes, but they love to help mommy! Always realize that it will take about twice as long to get the job done with your youngster, but I figured it was a learning experience, and a relationship building experience, and if they weren't "helping" me, then they'd be getting into mischief. It turned out that by the age of 10 or so, each one was as proficient in a kitchen as I, and THAT my friends, is a huge help!

It is hard for me to make dinner with multiple children helping, but I really wanted to make sure that all my kids (both boys and girls) knew how to make meals. So years ago I started having one kitchen helper while the others were supposed to be cleaning in the rest of the house. Each child had a particular day to be my kitchen helper. We often made a "surprise dessert" to share with the family.

The best thing is to have a child work with you every time you cook! This is apprenticeship! Soon they will be able to do it without you, and you may be surprised to have one of those children who will take their cooking skills to the next step, and surpass your cooking, as I have! - Submitted by Angela, Rathdrum, Idaho

Let them learn to fix the things they like to eat. After they learn how to make they will not mind fixing it for the others in the family to eat.

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If you want to have the kids help make things in the kitchen use powdered eggs. They love to put in the eggs and if you use powdered eggs there is no chance that the shell will end up in the cake, cookies, pancakes, etc. - Submitted by Emily Bryar, Tooele Utah

The biggest thing in getting kids involved in the kitchen is not to hold them back. Even toddlers love to help. You can measure each ingredient and hand it to them to dump it into the bowl. (Guide their hands gently to get most of it actually IN the bowl) We've found the "Pampered Chef" products to be some of the best tools for getting kids involved in the kitchen. Their food chopper, egg slicer, etc. make it safe for little ones to help.

Have the smaller children use scissors to cut the lettuce into bite sized pieces when making salad.

Let them watch you and talk to them about what you are doing while you are doing it. Allow them to help even if it is something small. Don't get upset if something spills or breaks...we learn by our mistakes. Just show them (and help them) how to clean it up safely.

For my seven year old I have a step stool in my kitchen and she uses it to wash her dishes. It is her job to put the silverware away (after the older children put the knives away)

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To make the jello come out the bowl without sticking to the sides spray with lightly with cooking spray before putting jello in bowl.

Getting kids involved in cooking is a good way to encourage them to try more foods. With a small child, try mentally breaking a recipe down into steps before you begin. Choose some things the child can do (mixing, pouring, scooping, chopping soft foods with a butter knife, etc.) while you do the more difficult parts. Some kids will sit happily stirring two ingredients for minutes at a time. My grandma used to have my son help her make dinner from the time he was a toddler. She would often make a dish with a coating when we visited. She would put the dry coating in an empty flour bag and drop in the meat. My son would stand on a stool beside her and "shake, shake, shake" the bag while holding it tight. He loved it.

We all wear aprons when we cook. My boys especially liked the aprons we made from used jeans.

We make our own bread and my girls love to help knead the dough. Since it requires 10 minutes of kneading I don't mind the help and they think it is fun. My kids love making pizza with me. I get the dough ready and rolled out, grate the cheese and dice any veggies and then lay it all out on the table and they assemble the pizzas. Added bonus is they will try any vegetable if we put it on a pizza. I let my girls help with any veggies we are having. I do the cutting and they help with the rinsing, snapping ends off beans or putting veggies I cut up into the pot to cook. If I am making a dish that isn't kid friendly for helping then when I am done I call in my "taste testers" aka my girls and they get to taste what we will be having for dinner before it is served. They love to try a bite from the big cooking spoons and give their opinion.

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Start small! Start with simple things like peeling potatoes, or frying eggs. Then as they show maturity, coordination, and carefulness add things like slicing veggies on a cutting board (under supervision) and continue to allow them to do simple things, that gradually grow more complex. This is how my mother taught me, and I can say that because it was gradual - there was no point where I can say "This is when Mom taught me to cook!" It slowly happened over the course of time. When I was in high school I showed my friend how to make homemade bread because even her mother didn't know how to make it. Her dad helped us because he was intrigued and wanted to learn too! Gradual, and including children often - this what what my mother did and what I am doing with my children.

The two things that I have learned about cooking with my kids, dd 10, and ds 7, 3, 2, is that a mess is to be expected and things are not going to turn out as neat as they would if you do it yourself! Relax!! Have Fun!!

If your child loves to cook right from the start, you can get them to cook anything. My 10 year old daughter will cook everything from main meals to desserts, not just easy things like mac and cheese. My 13 year old is still afraid of the oven so she limits her cooking to things with just a few ingredients. The least amount of ingredients is best to start them off cooking. It gets them familiar with utensils and appliances. My 13 year old has a deviled eggs recipe she uses that is very easy and tastes so good. The only cooking is boiling the eggs, the rest is easy for her to do on her own. So my suggestion is start out with a recipe that has very few ingredients that your child likes to eat anyways. You can also let your child watch a cooking show to see if interest sparks. You can pick up a cooking magazine and look at it together, or get a child's cookbook like Paula Deed's My First Cookbook that has lots of bright colors and pictures. Don't push them into cooking before they want to or you will have a recipe for disaster and he or she will lose interest.

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Teach them right from the beginning...clean hands, clean work area, apron...and, what I feel is most important: Always read through the recipe first, then gather the supplies, then start cooking! It is important to taste as you go along. I have noticed that children will eat better if they can taste the food. Cook things that the kids are interested in making...but also..cook things that they may have never tasted. Teach them that a great chef...CLEANS up!! Make it fun! Help them make the menu for the week, shop for the supplies, and organize the pantry. In the cooking class I teach the first thing we do is make an apron...it puts the children in cooking mode!

Our kids help out in the kitchen while we are making the pizza by placing the cheeses in the individual bowls and then in the cleanup of their work space. The younger ones will need help in their cleaning workspace. This is a learning experience for my children when they make their own pizza's by helping them learn how to make the appropriate choices and the correct amount to add to their pizzas.

I involve my children in everything. They help measure ingredients, mix, multiply the fractions to make multiple batches or count the cookies. Even if they just watch and sample, they are learning. We also talk about and practice making recipes with healthier alternatives. I make it a habit to keep things organized and put the dishes we are finished with in the sink and put ingredient containers away as we are done with them. We try to measure all dry ingredients first and then the liquid ingredients so we don't have as many measuring utensils. Another idea as they grow older and more experienced, is to give each child a night to make dinner. It might be simple, like mac and cheese or tacos, but they enjoy that and feel a sense of accomplishment.

Losing ingredients (say, by spilling or dropping) is not usually the big deal many professional cooks and cookbooks make it out to be. Don't forget to have even the 2 yo's help clean up the mess, though.

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Baked goods are a good place to start when cooking with kids because they can do quite a bit before anything needs to be put on the stove or in the oven and, with the exception of eggs (which you can replace with soy flour or ground flax seed in oven baked breads-follow directions on package), few of the ingredients typically carry germs that can make a child very sick.

Make it a one on one event. Maybe assign different days to different kids to be Mom's helper. Keep a sink of warm soapy water ready to deposit used items. Start with letting them rinse or dry the dishes they used. This involves them all along and helps them understand the entire cooking process, not just the "fun" part of creating. Give them their own piece of dough to mash, roll and generally play with and destroy.

First, don't be afraid to let your little ones make a mess. Now I don't mean let them tear up the kitchen, but do let them enjoy the kitchen. After all, we don't keep things perfectly tidy when cooking right? That said, have the older ones teach the younger ones. My oldest who is 15 can handle herself in the kitchen just fine & her 7 year old sister admires that. So when it came time to learn to peel potatoes my eldest was glad to help teach her & my 7 year old was very receptive. Now, my 4 year old learns from the 7 year old. Preparing food together is also a very good time to talk about all sorts of things. Thankfulness for the food God has blessed us with, honoring Daddy by providing a meal after a hard day's work, & why it's important for little girls to learn how to cook. My daughters are excited about helping Mama most of the time, of course other times they would rather play but when I give them a task & take pictures to "show off" to Daddy & other family they are quicker to help because they feel proud to contribute & take lots of smiling pictures elbow deep in a bowl!

Our children are involved in our menu planning. Because different people dislike different things, we try to make sure everyone's favorites and dislikes are included. This way, the kids realize that you need to give and take while menu planning and in life.

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MAKE CLEAN-UP A BREEZE: My children and I like to get out ALL of the ingredients for the recipe we will be making prior to getting started. (This helps ensure that we actually do HAVE everything that's needed.) Then, after we add each item to the mixing bowl, that ingredient is put away; essentially cleaning up as we go! EASY PEASY!! :-)) - Submitted by Misti Laws, Jackson, MO

We use children size utensils. Always have them measure everything. Each child picks a job to clean up the kitchen. We try to get cleaned up before our food is cooked. That way we get to enjoy.

Baking: I am very grateful toward my extremely patient mother who allowed me to experiment quite a bit in the kitchen from a young age, so I try to allow my kids to help out quite a bit in the kitchen. Around about 18 months my children will pull up a chair and help me dump measured ingredients into bowls and mix ingredients. All 3 kids have learned/are learning to count as we take turns stirring, each counting to 10 or 20 (in English, Spanish, Chinese, and German) as we stir. At this age they can also roll out dough somewhat and use cookie cutters. (This requires LOTS of patience on Mommy's part, but it is well worth it.) They can knead dough with assistance. They can roll cookie dough into balls and dip them into sprinkles or sugar. They can place cupcake liners into muffin tins. They can decorate cupcakes and muffins using sprinkles and colored sugar. They can sprinkle oats or nuts on top of unbaked muffins. They can begin to help unwrap candies and put them on cookies. **Cooking:** My babies will frequently sit in a high chair next to me while I make dinner. They watch what I'm doing and what their siblings are doing. By the time they're two, I allow them to stand in a chair near me and hand me ingredients. As they grow more responsible, they get to help prepare ingredients. My kids love breaking pasta noodles into boiling water, pulling the skins off garlic cloves, and dicing anything in my Progressive onion chopper. Each month when I get my Cooking Light Magazine, I let me two oldest boys (currently ages 8 & 4) flip through and decide on 3 items for us to prepare (a main dish, a side dish, and a dessert). They help with everything when we prepare that meal.
- Submitted by Shannon Gunter, Live Oak, FL

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A good way to let you 'little ones help make thing is if it can be mixed in a ziplock bag-- you can seal it and let them squish it up or put nuts in bags and let them smash them into little pieces. You may have to mix the dough better or smash the nuts into smaller pieces but they get so excited when they get to help!

We use a broom and dust pan with a long handle to make it easy for the little kids to sweep up.

Clean up is easiest if it is done as we go. Small hands need smaller tools. Cut a sponge to size and look for smaller utensils.

We are all real teapots in our home, so learning to make good, strong, hot tea was our first step in the kitchen. My 9 year old daughter sets the table and shadows me at this stage. I feel she's a bit young to work with a gas stove, etc. My 8 year old son loves watching me bake and is a very enthusiastic taste-tester! The kids also make their own toast with toppings of their choice. So wielding the butter knife is as close as they get to cooking at this stage!!!

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This is something that has really been on my heart lately, so we are really trying to practice including the whole family in meal prep and clean up. We have a pizza night once a week. Everyone gets a turn kneading the dough before I shape it into the pan and everyone pokes their little fingers in to prevent bubbles. My six year old can shred cheese, my four year old twins can spread sauce with wooden spoon or cut veggies with a butter knife. My two year old can put spinach leaves all around the pizza (those he doesn't eat anyway). Before we know it it's ready for the oven and takes only 15-20 minutes to bake. In the meantime, we put food away, wash the prep dishes and set the table (maybe throw together a salad). We eat and there is minimal clean up before we can spend the rest of the evening together. A few other tips we're trying to implement ourselves:

1. Taking at least some of the children each time you shop for groceries (older ones can even help with the menu planning) They need to understand everything that goes into the "gathering" and provision of food for the family.
2. No one eats who did not participate in some way to prepare for the meal. If it takes an hour instead of 30 minutes, it was not an hour wasted and it will pay off for the children as well as the adults!
3. No one is excused for other activities until all kitchen clean up is completed, so that no one is stuck alone doing "chores." I personally prefer this to taking turns because it creates more togetherness and alludes to the old adage: many hands make light work. I respond to any complaints with, "yeah, I know it's not our favorite thing, so lets hurry up and get it done well, so we can do something fun together!" I hope to make my children feel an integral part of our families ability to function well.

One of the favorite things that my children did, when they were small, was to make cut out cookies for Christmas. I would make the dough, roll it out, and they would cut them out with cookie cutters and decorate with colored sugars and nonpareils and helped with cleaning the kitchen. There was flour everywhere which I enjoyed seeing. When they became older, they rolled out the dough, decorated, put them in and out of the oven, and put them on the cooling racks. Now they clean the kitchen. Not so much flour everywhere now.

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Once a week we sit and plan the week's menu. Everyone suggests a main meal and a lunch. Then we assign a child to make at least 1 meal that week. Older teens can cook more often, and younger children must assist mom with their meal. My children assist writing up the grocery list. I keep the notepad and pen at hand and they add anything that is nearly/ finished to the list. Before our weekly shopping, they make the final list. They help with shopping and unpacking the groceries. Once a week we make a communal-type meal like a pizza where everyone helps. Some make the pizza base (a simple scone recipe without baking powder) while others cut up ham, onions, mushrooms, or de-pip and cut olives or grate cheese and then we all create 2 large pizzas. Loads of fun and everyone is involved. Similar family-cook-together meals is a Chinese stir fry: We all chop and slice meats, cabbage, veggies and mix sauces and then everyone stir-fries their food in a wok or on a flat grill plate on the fire. Another fun family meal is a Middle Eastern meal with pita breads, fillings and sliced cooked meat. It is fun to make together and enjoy together. A tip to help young children cook from recipes is to laminate them or insert the recipe in a plastic page protector and use a dry-wipe pen to illustrate the words. The child 'reads' the pictures and can make the meal on their own. Later, you can wipe off the pen pictures.

Take time to include your children in the kitchen from the very beginning. When my children were not walking I put them near me and talked to them the whole time I was cooking. As they got bigger, I kept a box of odds of recyclable containers and lids etc. and ends in a box where they could reach them and play with them as I cooked. As they grew more I included them in my work by playing in the soapy dish water, stirring a bowl or cake batter, licking beaters, and simple measuring. Later as they understood more I helped them to read the spoons and cups and follow the recipe with me. Then soon they knew the recipe and could know what was coming next. More and more I stepped back out of the way and assisted them, cleaned up after them, did the menial jobs and let them enjoy the interesting and adventurous jobs. Lastly I am teaching them to use the stove and how to be safe and watch the heat etc. It is hard work to allow them in and let messes happen, but there is also so much joy for them in helping out. Make the sacrifice and soon they will be making meals for you!

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Just have fun. Yes, it will probably take longer than if you were to do it yourself, and the mess will be greater, but the memories you will create for your kids is priceless.

- Submitted by Theresa Walker, Mount Olive, NC

My kids help often and what's been helpful to me is to give them each separate jobs within the recipes like my daughter helps with the first two steps my son with the next few than my other daughter etc so they aren't all under foot at the same time pushing each other to get space at the counter. Also I get the older ones to help the younger ones with measuring so the younger ones can pour it all together.

Starting at about sixth grade have your child help you cook the entire dinner twice each week. Start with simple meals like tacos or chili and then more complicated things like lasagna. Gradually turn all of the cooking on those nights over to the child and serve only in an advisory position. Before you know it the child will be able to cook your entire repertoire of dishes and you will be off chef duty two night a week per child. I have found that they really enjoy this and I find that if I let them choose which meals to make after they are cooking on their own, it keeps their interest.

To make buttered breadcrumbs, process torn bread slices with a pat or two of butter.

Have them pick out recipes in the cookbook to help you make - they'll feel a part of the process and can take pride in helping.

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My pickiest child is more willing to try the foods that she helps prepare. She helps with shredding, cutting, and stirring the ground meat or ingredients. I also let her take the credit that she made it. She always feels so proud after making it. At the table I ask the family to grade the dish on a scale of 1 to 10. I round up the numbers and that determines if we serve it again.

When the boys are helping me in the kitchen, I like have them get into the idea of cleaning as they go along, so the kitchen isn't such a huge mess at the end. The other thing I do, on a big baking day or especially during corn-freezing time, is lay down a sheet large enough to cover our whole work area. This really saves from messes on our kitchen carpet. At the end of our cooking time, we simply fold it up, take it outside to shake off loose stuff and toss it in the washer.

Take your time to teach them what you want them to know. - Then ALLOW them to help you, don't be in such a hurry that they don't even get to help! - Choose a day that a child has to cook for the family or at least be responsible to HELP cooking for the family. Then force yourself to have them do it, they are usually very keen to help!

I like to fill up the sink with hot soapy water before baking. It makes it so much easier to start the clean up process - it's almost like the dishes get done by themselves. ;)

My kids love cracking the eggs (since there are so many, it's easy to let everyone have a turn!) and then holding the mixer to beat the eggs while I spin the bowl and gradually add the flour-

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The only tip I have is to just let them be. Stand back with a watchful eye and let them cook. Don't take over if they are not getting it perfect, just guide and let them do it!

My children are six and under. The six and four year olds can cut chunks of apples, pears, summer squash and other softer fruits and veggies with a serrated butter knife and a cutting board. They love to help out in this way.

When chopping onions put whole onion in the freezer for at least 10 minutes (and up to an hour) this will really help get rid of the burning eyes and tears syndrome.

When using a mixing bowl grease it first (with oil or a Pam spray) It makes emptying the bowl much easier and cuts down on stains and odors in plastic bowls.

I use an ice cream scoop with a release to make pancakes and muffins to make the transfer of the mix to the pan easier and less messy.

When my three children help out in the kitchen, we do it according to age appropriate activities. Matthew, 11, can help chop, dice, slice or otherwise prepare some of the meats and vegetables. Aeryn, 9, can help with sauces, soups, grilled cheese sandwiches and the like. Reilly, 5, helps by getting ingredients from the pantry, refrigerator or freezer. All three help with the clean up by ridding up the table, washing and rinsing dishes, putting them away, and making sure anything used to cook is turned off and ready to be cleaned by me.

- Submitted by J Anthony McDonald, Henderson, TN

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Allow them to experiment, but give limitations. Eg: you may use 1 cup of flour only
Make easy non- bake recipe ideas available Show them the basics and then let them try it themselves. My children each take turns to cook/ help mom. they learn a dish until they are able to make it on their own and then they cook it for the family. They normally start with their favourite meal.

My oldest is 8 and math can sometimes be an exhaustive challenge. So I use cooking to make it more interesting. We focus on measurements (why are they important, does it matter if I change them and why, etc), cooking times (helps w/addition and word problems), but most of all...our end "product" is edible.

I have three sons ages 10, 9 and 6. They take turns during the week learning to cook by grating cheese, using the can opener, reading the directions on a recipe, measuring out the ingredients and pouring them into the bowl, stirring the ingredients together, browning hamburger meat, rolling out dough, cracking eggs, etc. I let them do as much as they can on their own while I supervise. While one is in the kitchen helping cook, the other two set the table. After we eat, they all clear the table. Either the 10 or 9 year old puts the leftovers away while the other one washes the dishes. The younger one sweeps the floor. They love to help in the kitchen and with the other household chores (laundry, mopping, dusting, vacuuming) because it makes them feel grown-up and they know it's preparing them to take care of themselves one day.

I always lay down wax paper for the kids to work on for easy cleanup.

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Little ones love "fetching" ingredients, it gets them acquainted with the kitchen and places of things. It also helps them learn the value of reading and rereading their recipe before they start without it sounding like a chore!

We have a special sideboard where we stack our everyday dishes. We use a basket for the silverware. The plates and bowls and our favorite cups/glasses we use nightly. By having them stacked here the kids can reach them and help prepare for dinner by setting the table and putting out the silverware.

It is always helpful to get the more tedious parts of the cooking process prepared ahead of time. Little ones lose interest while mom spends ten minutes looking for the right measuring cup! School age children can do the measuring, younger children like to dump and stir. As dishes get used, have a sink of hot, soapy water ready so things wash up easily. Cooking is usually considered a "grown-up" job so children enjoy participating.

I like to let young kids pick any ingredient they want to put in. Just throw open the cupboards and let them grab stuff. I then choose how much of the ingredient to put in, so that if it's really bad for the dish I only put in a tiny bit, and it doesn't matter.

My kids have always loved helping out in the kitchen. I never made them do too much in the clean up department when they were under 10 yrs old to keep them interested. I have let them help me open cans, jars, dump in ingredients for slow cooker recipes & casseroles, roll out dough, stamp or cut out cookies, color homemade icing, flip pancakes, drop spoonfuls of batter into muffin cups, and top pizzas from an early age. The variety keeps them interested and I love having them with me and taking pride in what they create.

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN TIPS & IDEAS

We keep clean dishwater going as we cook and do dishes as we cook so that we can enjoy eating what we have made without looking at all the mess to do afterward. This way we have less clean up and more time to enjoy the satisfaction of what we have created.

I taught my little son age 4 to help load the dishwasher by practicing with clean dishes. He learned proper placement of flatware, cups, glasses, and plates. Then he learned how to tuck in pans and other odd-shaped utensils to maximize space without blocking water flow. It became of large puzzle! Later, when the work actually needed to be done, he was prepared to load the dishes and participate in kitchen clean up.

The absolute best idea for teaching my daughter, Anna, to cook happened in the most accidental way. Because I like watching cooking shows, one day we just decided to have our own "cooking show" in our own kitchen. This worked out so well because I was instructing the audience (and her) at the same time. If she started to leave out a step or forgot to mention a safety tip, I would just look at the "camera" and say, "Remember audience..." We've shared some great times together with our cooking shows!

– Tina Foster Fort Deposit, AL

As often as possible from as early as possible let your children dig their hands into the kitchen work! From assembling ingredients to mixing and making messes the kitchen is a wonderful place for learning and bonding. Children have a sense of purpose and value when they help with the nourishment of the family. Everyone working together with lots of tasting and talking (and cleaning up as you go helps too!) is a recipe for a happy kitchen experience.

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We know lots of kids whose moms don't do a lot of baking from scratch. Every Thanksgiving, we have "pie day" at our house. I invite a bunch of young girls over, and we make several different kinds of pie (their families order in advance!): apple, pumpkin, pecan, and cranberry, with homemade pie crust. They have a great time making a huge mess, and they love the fruits of their labor. My favorite part is encouraging them not to stick too closely to the recipes -- I like it when they experiment a little and take ownership of the process. (It's also rewarding to see the happy faces on the moms when the girls are being picked up -- at least one part of their Thanksgiving meal is already DONE!)

Before we begin any cooking/baking fun, I have my two 7 year olds wash their hands TWO times. This way I am sure that the normal quick splash and dash routine of "washing" actually gets their hands clean before we begin.

I have put my 14 year old in planning menus for the week. She loves it and even has our 11 year old help out. This helps me out plus helps her realize that she needs to plan in advance.

Always let them help, even if it will take twice as long. Once you show them what to do they always want to help. The time frame doesn't matter because they will open up to you in this non-threatening atmosphere and your food gets prepared faster than if you are doing it alone.

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My toddlers and preschoolers love to have their own cutting board and a table knife to cut up veggies alongside me when I'm preparing a salad. With my 7 children I've learned to let them get in the kitchen and experiment with recipes, and they are very enthusiastic about doing it again another time. I struggle with my own desire to get it done quickly and with less mess, but when I let them participate, the whole family is so much happier and it is such a learning experience for them.

My five-year-old daughter loves to make cream of tomato soup. Since all that needs to be done is mix some spices and milk over low heat, it's a perfect thing for her to make while I make the grilled cheese!

When the boys were little they counted forks, spoons, knives as they were putting away silverware. I also place all the dishes in lower cabinets so they can be responsible for emptying the dishwasher.

I have had to learn to be ok with the fact that my kids are not going to want to help in the kitchen, even if it is a "fun" job. The thing that has helped the most is to make working in the kitchen a routine. It isn't easy at first, but after a while of sticking to it, they get used to the idea and actually start to enjoy it. Kids are just like us- we really don't want to work, but we do feel good when we have accomplished something. You have to just start. Give them jobs to do. Be consistent and fair with the jobs as much as possible. After a while, when they realize what they are able to do and that they can make a difference and contribute to something, then the fun can start.

- Submitted by Yolie Miller, Grand Ridge, FL

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN TIPS & IDEAS

When baking, we have a bunch of small plastic bowls that I put about 1/2 teaspoon of the different ingredients into for our young daughter to *mix* herself, taste, feel the different textures, etc. I also let her pour the ingredients into the mixing bowl to learn that the cookies or whatever the finished product actually is made up of lots of things, and we can use the same ingredients in many recipes to get different results. And sometimes we don't follow the recipe just to see what will happen. Sometimes it turns out, and sometimes it is terrible. We can make mistakes and talk about the outcome and realize that we need to follow directions in all areas of our lives.

I started having my children help in the kitchen when they were very small. My oldest daughter was always very responsible, and she began to help with various things in the kitchen when she was two. I let her help unload the dishwasher. I allowed her to remove anything plastic from the machine and put it away in the proper drawer or cupboard. This usually amounted to storage containers, measuring cups and spoons, spatulas etc. This also fosters classification skills which are the foundation for math and reading later on. We also began baking. I would measure the dry ingredients and hand it to her, and she would dump it in the bowl. We talked about the measurements, and soon she could tell the difference between a cup and a half a cup, etc. We also talked about how much easier it is to clean up as we go. We would fill the sink with warm soapy water, and I would allow her to rinse the utensils as we finished using them and then help me put them in the dishwasher. I did this with all the children, and I let them play in the water a bit with the containers. This helps with spatial relationships. I let them wipe the counters, once again discussing how much easier it is to clean up right away. As they got older and had rotating table clearing and dish days, they knew that it was best not to put this off, and they also knew that wiping the counters was part of the job. I think that one of the biggest impediments to children helping in the kitchen is parental perfectionism. The adage "if I want it done right, I do it myself" is a great enemy to children becoming proficient. Yes, we cleaned up messes that I wouldn't have made myself, but, that too, is educational. I am shocked at how many teenagers don't know how to clean up after themselves in the kitchen. They don't have the first clue as to what product or method to use. I wasn't afraid of little messes, nor of a little extra work. It has paid great dividends. My oldest daughter took over all the baking when she was 10. My second daughter has become a great scratch cook. My son is known for his fabulous Spaghetti made from scratch. He has a real creative bent, and has invented some appealing recipes. I became seriously ill a few years back and was able to trust that meals would be made, and the kitchen clean. My oldest daughter comes home from a stressful day at work and will

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often times bake something. She calls it her therapy, she has also developed a ministry of baking for curmudgeonly older men, and telling them about Jesus.

Love's A Cookin

Sift together 2/3 cup Sweetness, with 2 cups consideration, and 1 cup kindness.

Blend in equal amounts of the spices of life, and mix well with generous amounts of love.

Bake until savory... approximately a life time.

- Submitted by Kristina Webb Camdenton, Missouri

THE END