

Cooking Station at Nära Nurseries

At Nära Nurseries, our Cooking Station provides children with enriching hands-on experiences that blend fun and learning. Cooking in the early years opens the door to a world of skill development, creativity, independence, and confidence-building. Through this activity, children gain essential life skills while enjoying the process of preparing and exploring food. Cooking is not only an enjoyable activity but also a powerful tool that helps to facilitate the seven areas of learning and development within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Our cooking activities provide a rich context for learning that touches on several developmental areas:

- **Knowledge and Understanding of the World:** Cooking encourages children to learn about different ingredients, observe how substances change when mixed, heated, or cooled, and explore where their food comes from. It also opens up wider discussions about cultures, food origins, and sustainability.
- **Communication and Language Skills:** Educators interact with children during cooking, supporting them as they anticipate or initiate actions. For instance, children are encouraged to communicate about what ingredients are needed, such as, "We need some eggs, let's see if we can find some." This dialogue builds their vocabulary and helps develop both expressive and receptive language skills.



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- **Personal, Social, and Emotional Development:** Cooking is a shared, social activity that fosters collaboration. As children reflect on their cooking experiences together, it builds their social confidence, allowing them to re-enact these moments in group settings.
- **Physical Development:** Cooking provides opportunities to develop fine motor skills. Whether cutting, chopping, or mixing, children are practising hand-eye coordination and other physical manipulations. Importantly, they also learn essential safety skills such as how to use utensils properly.
- **Scientific Thinking:** Early scientific skills are nurtured through observation, experimentation, and questioning. Children make predictions and learn through discovery, such as noticing how ingredients change when mixed or heated. Cooking also encourages them to describe textures, smells, and tastes.
- **Mathematical Development:** Practical mathematical concepts come to life in cooking. Children learn about weights, measurements, and the properties of liquids and solids. Through activities like melting chocolate or measuring flour, they are exposed to real-life examples of mathematical principles.
- **Literacy and Confidence Building:** Following recipes provides a fantastic opportunity for children to practise literacy skills, develop their ability to follow instructions, and build independence. Completing a cooking task gives them a sense of accomplishment, boosting their confidence.



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Skills Developed Through Cooking

The benefits of cooking in the early years are vast. Here are some key skills children develop:

- **Hygiene and Safety:** Children learn about good hygiene practices, such as washing hands and cleaning surfaces before starting to cook.
- **Ingredient Knowledge:** They recall the names of ingredients, learn about where food comes from, and discuss the "farm to fork" cycle.
- **Mathematical Language:** Cooking helps children incorporate mathematical language into their vocabulary as they measure and weigh ingredients.
- **Real-Life Skills:** From cracking an egg to cutting safely, cooking activities teach practical life skills that build confidence and independence.
- **Critical Thinking:** As children mix, manipulate, and combine ingredients, they begin to predict what will happen, developing curiosity and problem-solving abilities.

The Cooking Station Equipment

Our Cooking Station is designed to allow children to take the lead in their learning. It is located within their room, offering the freedom to engage in cooking activities as often as they wish, with all the necessary utensils and equipment on hand. Educators plan weekly cooking activities, but children are encouraged to explore independently, choosing when and what they want to cook.



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The station includes a wide range of child-friendly utensils, including:

- Child-sized Utensils and Tools: Plastic knives, peelers, spatulas, and wooden spoons designed for young hands.
- Mixing Bowls and Measuring Tools: Easy-to-handle equipment that encourages independence.
- Cooking Appliances: Small electric stoves and baking equipment for activities like bread making and healthy snack preparation.
- Culturally Diverse Equipment: Items such as sushi makers, dumpling pressers, and a pestle and mortar, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of our children and the community.

We ensure that the recipes used are reflective of the linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds of the children, making cooking a truly inclusive experience. Exposing children to a variety of cooking techniques from different cultures allows them to broaden their understanding of the world and develop a respect for diversity.

Parental Involvement and Home Learning

We recognize the important role parents play in promoting healthy habits and modelling positive behaviours. To support learning at home, we regularly share recipes and home-learning activity ideas with families. Cooking together at home provides an excellent opportunity to extend the skills children are developing at nursery and create memorable bonding experiences.

By working in partnership with parents, we aim to reinforce these important life skills, helping children to grow into confident, capable, and independent individuals.

