

Cooking with Kids: A Guide to Kitchen Tasks for Every Age



Looking to get your child or teen started in the kitchen? Our guide dishes age-appropriate tasks for children from tots to teens.

We may be a bit biased, but we believe all kids should grow up cooking. Learning to cook for yourself is hugely important. Home-cooked food is typically healthier and cheaper than takeout. Cooking helps build kids' self-confidence and makes them more self-sufficient. Teaching children to enjoy preparing food and sharing [meals with family](#) will encourage them to carry on the tradition with their own family.

Whether they're teens or tots, kids of any age can start to build their culinary skills. Check out our handy guide to help identify tasks that suit the skills-and attention spans-of tots, and challenge and engage older kids. We'll break down basic kitchen skills by age range and provide tips and inspiration to teach young cooks.

HOW CAN KIDS HELP IN THE KITCHEN?

AGES 3-5	AGES 5-7	AGES 8-12	AGES 13 & UP
Wash fruits and vegetables	Mix dry ingredients	Peel veggies	Make recipes on the stovetop
Tear lettuce salads	Measure and count items	Toast bread	Bake on their own
Mash ingredients	Set the table	Make sandwiches	Use sharp knives
Wrap potatoes in foil to bake	Crack eggs	Wash and put away dishes	Learn to use various kitchen gadgets
Knead dough	Roll cookie dough or meat into balls	Make their school lunch	Have full reign over the microwave
Smash graham crackers for crusts	Chop softer fruits and veggies	Unload groceries	Basic cleaning
	Read aloud recipe steps	Mix up a simple batter on their own	New recipes and/or making dinner

Ages 3-5: Pint-Size Helpers

At this age, children are brimming with energy and curiosity. That's great. They'll be excited to explore ingredients and try out a new task in the kitchen. But it might come as no surprise that they'll need plenty of supervision. Give them basic tasks to keep them busy. They're still fine-tuning their motor skills, so make sure to choose things that don't need to be precise. At this age their best tool is their hands, so focus on tasks that allow them to grab, smash or tear. Here are some ideas to get started:

- Wash fruits and vegetables
- Tear lettuce salads
- Mash ingredients, like overripe bananas for our [Best Ever Banana Bread](#)
- Wrap potatoes in foil to bake
- Knead dough (you'll want to get it started for them, but many kids will love to punch and toss a ball of dough)
- Smash graham crackers for crusts

Ages 5-7: Grade-school Sous Chefs

By now, hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills are more developed. Time to teach them more difficult tasks, like cracking an egg or slicing with a knife. Our team introduces kid-friendly knives, to their own children so they can help prep food. The knives are rigid enough to cut through fruits and vegetables but aren't as dangerous as using a sharp kitchen knife.

Also, at this age children love showing off things they've learned from school. They're just starting to read and write, so now's a great time to introduce them to recipes. Have them read along as you show them easy recipes they can help make. Here are some other ideas for children's kitchen duties:

- Mix dry ingredients
- Measure and count items
- Set the table
- Crack eggs (just watch out for those shells!)
- Roll cookie dough or meat into balls
- Chop softer fruits and veggies
- Read aloud (or sound out) recipe steps

Ages 8-12: Budding Cooks

At this point, preteens are becoming more independent. Embrace it. Lay out ingredients for simple recipes like PB&J, an [easy fruit salad](#) or fancy toast. They won't need as much supervision in the kitchen, but they'll greatly appreciate any positive affirmations. Here are some more things they can do on their own:

- Peel veggies
- Toast bread
- Make sandwiches
- Wash and put away dishes
- Make their school lunch
- Unload groceries
- Mix up a simple batter on their own (try [muffins](#) for a quick, low-mess option)

Ages 13 & Up: Young Chefs

Teens will be ready to take on the challenge of mastering different equipment in the kitchen. But make sure they know proper safety skills before starting. Tips such as which dishes are safe to use in the oven, keeping fingers away from sharp objects and how to handle raw food are important to point out. Here are some skills they'll be able to handle:

- Make recipes on the stove top (try starting simple with [scrambled eggs](#) or [quesadillas](#))
- Bake on their own (many teens like to make cookies with friends)
- Use sharp knives
- Learn to use various kitchen gadgets, including a blender, food processor, garlic press, coffee maker and waffle maker (share safety tips and supervise on their early attempts)
- Have full reign over the microwave
- Many teens will enjoy fun cooking more than whipping up a dinner, so teach them skills such as [making ice cream](#) or making [pie crust with cereal crumbs](#)
- Teach basic cleaning skills, such as how to load, run and empty the dishwasher; sort recycling and take out the trash; sweep and mop the floor
- Master class: If they're up to the challenge, designate one dinner a week as their night to be "lead cook." They'll have the opportunity to build a menu and show off their skills to the family. This will help them build confidence, give them a sense of accomplishment and give you a night off!