

# Grow a Rainbow

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet for both kids and adults. While most fruits and veggies are naturally low in calories and fats, they deliver a wide array of vital nutrients, including vitamins A, C, and K, folate, potassium, iron, and dietary fiber, as well as important phytonutrients such as lycopene and lutein. Eating a diet that is high in vegetables and fruits of all kinds can help you maintain a healthy weight and blood pressure, and may reduce the risk of developing problems such as heart disease and type-2 diabetes. And perhaps best of all, fruits and vegetables add delicious taste and texture to your plate. Children who are introduced to lots of a different kinds of produce at a young age are likely to make these healthful foods part of their diet into adulthood, reaping lifelong benefits.

All kinds of vegetables and fruits offer nutritional benefits. Dark leafy greens like kale and spinach are rich in vitamins C and K, folate, and fiber. Bright red and orange carrots, peppers, watermelon, and sweet potatoes provide carotenoids and other antioxidants. Broccoli and cabbage contribute sulforaphane that may help ward off disease, along with potassium and vitamins C and K. Less colorful onions may not deliver as big a dose of vitamins, but offer other compounds that may lower the risk of cancer. Strawberries are brimming with vitamin C, and like other berries, are full of healthful antioxidants.

The best advice for good nutrition? Eat a rainbow! Include lots of different kinds of fruits and vegetables in a wide variety of colors in your diet. A diet that includes regular servings of colorful produce delivers lots of the vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber – along with tasty eating.

But how to convince kids to even take a taste in the first place? Many are not adventurous eaters, especially when it comes to trying an unfamiliar fruit or, especially, veggie. How to get kids to give colorful fruits and vegetables a taste? One thing is for sure. Threats and bribery won't produce vegetable lovers. Positive methods are much more likely to produce kids who are willing to try – and enjoy – vegetables on their plates. One of the most effective strategies – let kids grow their own! Nothing is more rewarding than sampling a fruit or veggie they've grown and harvested themselves. A home or school garden is a great way to grow veggie lovers.

## Growing a Rainbow

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. While these are the colors you see in a rainbow arcing across the sky after a rain, when it comes to “growing a rainbow” we're talking metaphorically. We'll take a pass on trying to distinguish whether an eggplant is considered indigo or violet! And while the rainbow's spectrum doesn't include white, there are a number of nutritious white veggies, like cauliflower. So while your garden “rainbow” may not match the one in the sky, keeping a rainbow in mind as you plant what to plant can help you make sure you're getting the most nutrition from your gardening efforts and space.

## Rainbow Garden Beds

One way to “grow a rainbow” is to divide your vegetable garden into beds planted by color. Letting kids research different vegetables (or varieties) to find out what color they are and when and how they should be planted can be a great way to introduce the concept of colorful eating and get kids to feel invested in growing and later tasting the harvest.

Have kids make colored plant labels and add appropriately-hued accessories to the beds to help them keep track of the bed's color theme. It's always a good idea to mix some flowers in with your vegetables, both for beauty and to attract and nurture pollinators and other beneficial insects, so add some annual flowers, again keeping with the bed's color theme.

**Here are some color categories to help you get started.**

**Red:** red lettuce; beets; red carrots varieties; radishes; tomatoes; red peppers; watermelon

**Orange:** carrots; orange tomatoes; orange peppers; butternut squash; pumpkins

**Yellow:** yellow peppers; yellow tomatoes; summer squash; sweet corn; yellow carrots

**Green:** lettuce; spinach; kale; collards; chard; peas; beans; broccoli; cabbage; Brussels sprouts; Chinese cabbage; bok choy; Asian greens; cucumber; zucchini; parsley; basil, dill, and many other herbs

**Blue/Indigo/Violet:** eggplant; purple cabbage; purple carrots; purple cauliflower; purple potatoes; radicchio; red onions (purplish despite their name); purple basil; purple peppers

**White:** cauliflower; onions; scallions; parsnips; Daikon radish; white tomato varieties

**Try these additional ideas at home and in the classroom and cafeteria to transform kids into veggie and fruit lovers:**

1. Offer lots of different kinds of fruits and veggies to try, and offer them multiple times. It often takes several rounds of sampling for kids to become accustomed to new tastes, so don't give up if the first time isn't a hit.
2. Make veggies and fruits fun. Serve cut up raw or lightly steamed veggies with a tasty dip. Make fun kebabs with chunks of fruits and veggies on skewers. Keep some washed and cut-up produce in the frig and let kids serve themselves when they're hungry for a snack.
3. Serve veggies at the start of the meal when kids are hungriest. Start the meal with a salad or a cup of veggie-rich soup to get the good stuff in first.
4. Add veggies and fruits to all kinds of dishes. Whirl greens into smoothies or mix grated carrots into pancake batter; roast chunks of apples along with winter squash; add some chopped broccoli or spinach to mac and cheese; tuck some sliced fresh strawberries into a PB & J sandwich. Be creative!
5. Model good eating habits. If kids see parents and teachers enjoying vegetables, they'll be more apt to want to taste them as well. Make lots of veggies and fruits part of your good diet.