

# Cooking with Kids: cultivating the next generation of cooks

## Nonprofit continues mission of bringing healthy food, knowledge to schoolkids

By Miranda Merklein | For The New Mexican

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Cooking with Kids continues to be a huge inspiration for both children and adults in Santa Fe and beyond.

By sponsoring cooking and tasting classes in the public schools, providing lesson plans for participating teachers, and encouraging free choice when it comes to kids tasting new and unusual foods — a technique which has been scientifically proven to work better in diversifying the foods children learn to love — Cooking with Kids popularizes food that is healthy, interesting and fun to prepare.

On Jan. 27 at César Chávez Elementary School, students in Sharon Scarlett's third-grade class participated in a citrus-tasting class, which included tasting grapefruit, oranges, blood oranges and tangerines. Students were asked to draw and write poems about the citrus, and to smell and taste the fruits of their creative inspiration.

As for grapefruit, "I can see its veins," one student remarked. "It smells pink," said another.

By far, the most popular was the blood orange. "It looks like blood" was a common response. "It smells like my old house in Abiquiú when it rained," said one student. Another student replied, "It smells like bath salt."

Amanda Padilla's second-graders held a cooking class that day, as well. The students worked hard making minestrone soup and breadsticks — complex recipes even for some adults. The students triumphed over their instructions with a little help from the adults at hand, and got to eat the rewards.

In addition to conducting classes, Cooking with Kids sponsors the Farmers in the Schools project, in which local farmers work with Santa Fe Public Schools to purchase and serve local produce in school cafeterias. Participating farmers include Richard Belanger from Harmony Farm, David Fresquez from Monte Vista Organic Farms, Matt Romero from Romero Farms and Levi Valdez from Rancho LLAM Farm.

The Super Chefs program, originating in the 2008/2009 school year, is another remarkable attribute of Cooking with Kids. The program, which makes connections between Santa Fe's culinary community and Cooking with Kids students, currently totals 185 tasting and cooking classes in 10 local schools. Chefs volunteer their time in classes and act as role models, reinforcing healthy eating choices and cooking.

"The fact that chefs are being involved in cafeterias and with how school lunch works is really exciting," said Jane Stacey, program director of Cooking with Kids. "Just the idea that a small nonprofit is able to participate with the school district in this way is truly amazing."

"The kids love it, the teachers love it and the chefs love it," said Anna Farrier, Community Liaison for Cooking with Kids. "It has been a huge success."

When a chef shows up to class in his or her chef "whites," the kids get excited, Farrier said. And since chefs are often considered celebrities today, much of what they say and do is eagerly absorbed.

"When a parent tells a child that sautéed onions are really delicious, it might go in one ear and out the other," said Farrier. "But when a chef says the same thing — bingo. It might actually sink in."

There are 15 Super Chefs working with Cooking with Kids in the classroom and in school cafeterias. The list includes Rocky Durham, formerly of Santa Fe School of Cooking; Fernando Olea from Epazote restaurant; and Martín Rios from Restaurant Martín. How would kids not be inspired by such a wide range of culinary talent? Enjoying grapefruit is one thing, but learning to love zucchini and onions is a miracle.

The organization was invited to the White House in June, 2010, to take part in Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign to combat childhood obesity. The national initiative Chefs Move to Schools was intended to inspire chefs across the country to volunteer in schools and cafeterias. Since this was something Cooking with Kids was familiar and had seen much success with, Chefs Marianne Deery, Kim Muller and Fernando Olea were invited to accompany Farrier to Washington, D.C.

"Adding to our excitement was the mention by first lady Obama in her remarks of our own Chef Olea and his work with school kids in Santa Fe," Farrier said. "We should all be proud of the wonderful collaboration (among) Cooking with Kids, Santa Fe Public Schools and Santa Fe's culinary community. This community has been so enthusiastic and supportive, not only with volunteer time and talent, but also with generous donations."

## **MINESTRONE SOUP**

*Courtesy Cooking with Kids*

**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**1/2 medium onion, chopped**  
**2 garlic cloves, chopped**  
**1 celery stalk, chopped**  
**1 carrot, cut into 1/4 inch pieces**  
**1/4 teaspoon dried thyme**  
**1 cup crushed tomatoes**  
**2 cups broth, chicken or vegetable**  
**2 cups water**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**1/8 teaspoon dried oregano**  
**3/4 teaspoon salt**  
**1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 zucchini, quartered lengthwise and thinly sliced**  
**1 can white beans**  
**1 cup frozen Italian green beans**  
**3/4 cup chopped kale**  
**2 tablespoons chopped parsley**  
**2 teaspoons fresh chopped basil or 1/4 teaspoon dried**  
**3/4 cup small whole white pasta, cooked**  
**Shredded Parmesan cheese for topping**

**Preparation:** Wash the vegetables. Heat the olive oil in a large pot.

Add the onion and garlic and sauté for 3 to 5 minutes over medium high heat until softened. Add the celery and carrots. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring often.

Stir in the crushed tomatoes. Add the broth, water, bay leaf, oregano, thyme, salt and pepper. Increase the heat to high and bring to a boil. Stir in the zucchini, canned beans and green beans.

When the soup returns to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and simmer partially covered for about 15 minutes until all the vegetables are tender.

Add the chopped kale and parsley and cook for several minutes, until the greens are wilted. Stir in the chopped basil.

To serve, spoon pasta into the bottom of the bowl. Ladle hot soup over the pasta and top with shredded cheese.

## **BREADSTICKS**

**1 1/4 cups warm water**

**2 teaspoons baking yeast**

**2 tablespoons olive oil**

**1 tablespoon honey**

**1 teaspoon dried rosemary or 1/2 teaspoon cracked black peppercorns**

**1 1/2 teaspoons salt**

**1 cup whole wheat flour**

**2 1/2 cups white flour**

**Additional olive oil and kosher salt**

**Preparation:** Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

In a bowl, combine the water and yeast. Let sit for 2 minutes, until the yeast is dissolved. Add the olive oil, honey, rosemary or peppercorns, salt, and whole wheat flour, stirring well. Add the white flour, 1 cup at a time, stirring until a stiff dough forms. On a clean, lightly floured work surface, knead the dough for 3 to 5 minutes, until smooth.

Divide dough into eight equal pieces. Form each piece into a circle about 3 inches in diameter. Divide each piece into four equal pieces. You will have 32 pieces in all. Roll each piece of dough into a cylinder about 8 inches long and place on baking sheet.

Lightly brush the breadsticks with olive oil and sprinkle with salt as desired. Bake the breadsticks 15 to 18 minutes, turning once during the baking, until lightly browned and almost crisp.

Let the breadsticks cool before serving.